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FROM A BOY TO A LEADER

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Graduate School of Leadership & Change
Antioch University

In anticipation of partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

Alejandro Zayas

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November 2023

FROM A BOY TO A LEADER

This dissertation, by Alejandro Zayas, has been approved by the committee members signed below who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of Graduate School of Leadership & Change Antioch University in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

FROM A BOY TO A LEADER

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The following autoethnographic dissertation examines my personal experiences of trauma, abuse, and violence. Drawing on journals, memories, and artifacts from my life, I use self-reflection to illustrate the impacts of trauma on my childhood and adulthood. My traumatic experiences of sexual abuse, childhood violence, and emotional abuse are situated within broader sociocultural contexts of masculinity, Hispanic culture, and social norms. This study illuminates possibilities for healing and transformation for myself and others with shared traumatic backgrounds. It calls for trauma-informed education, masculinity, and resiliency. Evocatively sharing my traumatic life events provides an accessible window into often silenced experiences, bearing witness to injustice while offering empathy, connection, and hope. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (<https://aura.antioch.edu/>) and OhioLINK ETD Center (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>).

Keywords: leadership, masculinity, trauma, motivation, autoethnography, self-authorship theory, childhood violence, sexual abuse, trauma informed leadership, Latino culture

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beloved daughter, Alexis. Our journey has been a difficult one. I have made mistakes and wish things could have gone differently. You taught me resilience because I never stopped trying even during the darkest of times. To all those who have suffered childhood trauma, abuse, and violence. The lack of a father figure leads to so much pain. Step by step, I hope this is a step in the direction of resilience.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	ix
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of Study	1
Statement Problem	2
Significance of the Study	2
Positionality	3
Understanding Autoethnography as a Method	5
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	8
Introduction.....	8
Masculinity	8
Masculinity Positionality	10
Cultural Analysis for Latinos.....	11
Machismo.....	13
Lack of Masculinity Equals Toxic Masculinity	14
Journey with Leadership Theory and Framework into Narrative.....	15
Conclusion	17
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	18
Autoethnography.....	18
Narrative Theory	19
Why Autoethnography?	21
Argument Against Autoethnography	23
Data Sources	24

CHAPTER IV: MY STORY	26
Positionality	26
Early Childhood Trauma.....	27
Molestation	29
Beatings.....	30
Parents.....	31
Fatherhood	33
Cycle of Toxicity	36
CHAPTER V: LESSONS AND THEORIES USED IN MY PERSONAL AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	40
Overview of Sessions.....	40
Military Leadership Lessons.....	41
Mental Toughness	42
Front-Sight Focus.....	44
Extreme Ownership	46
Leadership-Related Theories and Framework	48
Transformational Leadership	49
Authentic Leadership	50
Trauma Informed Leadership	51
Self Authorship Theory.....	53
Professional Progress	54
Conclusion	55
CHAPTER VI: NOW WHAT?.....	56

Introduction.....	56
Summary of Findings.....	56
Suggestions for Future Research	58
HEA - Heal Enhancement Assessment.....	59
Conclusion	62
References.....	64

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Cycle of Toxicity 37

Figure 6.2 HEAL Graph 61

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A 2011/2012 national survey found that, like me, 35 million have experienced one or more types of childhood trauma (Child & Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2012). Those children will grow up and might go through issues similar to mine. The problem with trauma is not just in the moment of the event but the damage that is done that takes years to overcome. A study showed a direct correlation between abuse as a child and later becoming perpetrators of violence with their partner (Millett et al., 2013). However, not just violence in domestic relationships, this trauma also influences how individuals are and who they become in all areas of their lives. As an individual who lived through such traumatic experiences, I know firsthand the effects they could have on one's professional life and how they lead in the workplace.

Good leadership can move mountains because it can inspire those who have never had anyone believe in them. Destructive leadership can also destroy people. Being a leader means being responsible when a group does well or terribly. Both must be acknowledged and accepted as a leader. My views on leadership are from a painful past.

Purpose of Study

This autoethnography study looks at the implications of people who have been traumatized taking up leadership roles effectively. Leaders can often be seen as a motivator, inspiring others to do better. How can those who have suffered so much earlier in their lives or careers motivate others? That was the predicament I found myself in before I became a leader. My journey led me through philosophy and incorporating leadership theories into my recovery.

A realization that came to me during therapy and could be considered a story arch of my journey is masculinity. At a young age, I did not have a father figure to guide me to become a

man, so I had to interpret what masculinity meant. My father lived with us and provided for us the best he could, but anyone could show up; it takes something different and unique to be a father. To be the first impression in young minds. Those young minds could eventually become leaders, and the cycle starts repeatedly.

Statement Problem

This study provides a subjective view of my traumatic childhood and trouble-filled adulthood as a business leader. For this autoethnography, I need to explore my experiences and the vulnerability required to relive those experiences. The story that follows begins with my home life and family. Because trauma is, by definition, chronic, the story's ending varies a little each day that I write about it. Business leaders can come from various walks of life. If each person has an individual journey, there is a strong assumption that they must overcome an obstacle to achieve that position. It is generally accepted that CEO positions are among any organization's most high-profile and prestigious positions. The interview process for CEO positions is typically quite rigorous and competitive and may involve multiple rounds of interviews and assessments (Cappelli, 2019). CEO candidates may be asked to participate in multiple interviews with different organization members, including board members, executives, and other stakeholders. They may also be asked to complete various assessments or simulations to evaluate their ability to handle complex business challenges and make strategic decisions (Sadun et al., 2022).

Significance of the Study

The personal lives of individuals are primarily private, kept shielded because they are not suitable for a professional environment or public consumption. For those leaders or individuals who experience significant trauma, physical, psychological, or both, I feel I should open my

shield to allow details of my story to be known, so others can learn to find peace. As I open up about my past, I am doing this not for sympathy, but to help others. To show leaders who have not overcome the trauma that there are ways to move past it. This study provides my account of traumatic experiences to give leaders real-life evidence that one can overcome the past to become better leaders and help others. The more detail and story I can tell, the more traumatized leaders or someone trying to lead themselves will see some commonality. From that commonality, I hope they find a path. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), growth occurs due to the individual struggling with reality after a trauma, not as a direct result. Sharing my story gives voice to the unspoken, often disregarded experience of trauma within society.

Positionality

I do not want to say that my family never loved me. I think they loved me in their way. Some might say I had a pleasant childhood in comparison to some. I hope not to upset those who have suffered worse trauma than me. Children who experience trauma within their families may feel a sense of betrayal, confusion, fear, and uncertainty about their safety and well-being. They may also struggle with guilt, shame, and self-blame and may have difficulty trusting others or forming healthy relationships (The Jed Foundation, 2022). All I am doing is presenting my experiences, nothing more.

I was at what later could be described as a spiritual crossroads. My life was in shambles. My personal life was doing an inverse compared to my professional life. I was a single parent, and my relationship with my family and every girlfriend I have ever had was an utter failure. In the past, I would say it was someone else's fault. I was perfect; the other person fractured the relationship. Being from a traumatic family childhood can be an incredibly isolating and challenging experience. Growing up in a household where abuse, neglect, or addiction are

present can create lasting emotional scars and impact an individual's relationships, self-esteem, and overall well-being (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). After countless relationships, professional and personal, there was only one commonality in all of those events, me. I was the common factor with all of them. Regardless of who was in the right, it does not matter because I was not in a place to accept or even understand mentally where I was at.

All these situations make sense due to my childhood. Being from a traumatic family childhood can have a significant and long-lasting impact on an individual's mental, emotional, and physical health and social and relational functioning. Individuals who have experienced trauma in childhood may struggle with a wide range of challenges (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). The only positive part of my life was that a tech organization promoted me to become a global manager for their technical teams. I would be responsible for others for the first time in my life. I was technically responsible for my daughter, but she lived with her mother most of the time. I did not know how to care for myself; how will I care for others? This question haunted me for a long time. As a single parent, I was already a leader, but not a good one. My responsibility was to my child, but I was not an effective leader in that aspect either.

I decided to commit to therapy because I felt I had no other option. My family always told me never to hit rock bottom because it is a long way back up. I reached that state of mind in my 30s. After years of failed relationships, I looked everywhere except one place. I needed to look internally. After a while, you can continue to blame others for your circumstances until you take ownership of it. When people go to mental therapy, they take an essential step towards improving their mental and emotional well-being. Cognitive therapy can help individuals to understand and cope with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and to develop new skills and

strategies for managing the challenges they may be facing (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.).

The VP of Technology sat me down and told me I would be promoted and responsible for a leading team of young data scientists. Most are fresh out of college, and this is their first job. I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. A sinking feeling similar to what I had when my daughter was born. A sense of fear of responsibility paralyzed me. It was ironic and sad that I was upset that both occurrences caused me so much grief. Being a father is one of the proudest moments for a person, but for me, it was sinking, the same as being a leader. The VP and I had had conversations before and knew that I was held in a positive light within the company, but there was never a mention that I could be a manager or a leader. My background and experience is in technology, which is an isolating trade. Coding is not a team-bonding experience.

The day after I met with my new team, I met with my new therapist. I would be the first to admit that my leadership role was not given to me because of my leadership skills but because of my vast knowledge of technology. I can imagine many people in this situation who will be responsible for others without experience or education in leading. It is a fighting situation. What if I fail? Would my team members be fired? Would they be held responsible? When an employee is let go by an organization, the employee is not the only person who is affected. If the employee has a family and is the sole provider, it can disrupt an entire household. It is a responsibility I was not ready for. As erratic as this all sounds, that was my mentality and point of view at the time.

Understanding Autoethnography as a Method

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural

experience (ethno; Ellis, 2004). Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative. However, it transcends mere self-narration to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2016). Autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. It follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling.

Autoethnography stories must be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader socio-cultural context (Chang, 2016). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define auto-ethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). The process of how one would research a person or an event now must be done on a reflective level. Kashi Raj Pandey discusses this in his research on journaling.

Honoring the past in our own words with our uncensored reflections, we document our memories before they are lost. The process often evokes conversations with the self, another person, or even an imagined person (Pandey, 2013, p. 1). Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research often used in the social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology. The method is beneficial for exploring complex, emotional, or personal experiences that may be difficult to capture through traditional research methods (Ellis, 2011).

Insung Jung wrote an article using autoethnography. Jung’s subjects were five faculty members in a liberal arts college in Tokyo, Japan (Jung, 2021). Jung had his subjects write reflective journals during a ten-week academic term commenting on how interactions went and inner feelings. Uses of these narratives, autoethnographically, help observe ways the self and the society constitute themselves (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Narratives paint the picture in a way facts without context cannot. That is why storytelling is so powerful. “These tales record the agonies,

pains, successes, and tragedies of the human experience. Narratives record the deeply felt emotions of love, dignity, pride, honor, and respect” (Denzin, 1997, p. xiv).

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Good times create weak men, weak men create hard times.

—Hopf (2016)

Introduction

Before attending therapy sessions, I based my leadership style on what I observed from my family. Unfortunately, most of the traits and parenting behaviors I witnessed were toxic. During one of my therapy sessions, I was asked what I had learned from my father. However, I couldn't recall any lessons or significant moments shared with him since he was always busy working as a farm worker and struggling with alcoholism. As a result, I had to learn life lessons from other sources, such as television and observing admirable male figures who were unfamiliar to me. Consequently, my initial conversation with my father paved the way for future sessions discussing masculinity.

Masculinity

According to Raewyn Connell (1993), masculinity is the “adulthood of a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power” (p. 125). When one enters adulthood, they enter into more responsibilities. At the age of adulthood, they begin to come into their own power. This power is to have the authority and control of their own life. To have the power to dictate choices as they see fit. Reaching adulthood signifies a transition towards taking on societal roles that involve power, whether in the family, workplace, or community

The University of Richmond (2023) defines *masculinity* as qualities and attributes regarded as characteristics of men. I would also like to point out that masculinity has nothing to do with sexual orientation or gender. All individuals possess traits that are masculine and feminine. At a biological level, both males and females carry masculine and feminine traits and

hormones (Hess et al., 1997). Many studies have addressed the concept of female characters embracing characteristics of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hentges & Case, 2013; Oppenheimer et al., 2003; Rohner, 2018; Seibert, 2018).

Masculinity refers to the socially constructed norms, values, behaviors, and beliefs associated with the male gender. These norms and behaviors are often seen as essential or natural to men and boys and can include strength, independence, assertiveness, and competitiveness (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). Traditional masculinity has emphasized physical strength, emotional stoicism, and a sense of dominance over others; there is growing recognition of the need for more flexible and positive forms of masculinity that allow men to express a broader range of emotions and behaviors (Kimmel, 2001).

There are several different theories and perspectives on masculinity, including:

- Hegemonic masculinity: This theory emphasizes the idea that there is a dominant form of masculinity that is seen as the ideal in a given culture or society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is often associated with power, dominance, and control over others, and can create pressure on men to conform to traditional masculine norms and behaviors (Connell, 1987).
- Masculine identity development: This theory focuses on the process by which men develop their sense of masculine identity, and how this identity is influenced by a range of social and cultural factors (Pollack, 1998). Masculine identity development can be influenced by factors such as family upbringing, peer relationships, media representations of masculinity, and cultural messages about gender (Levant & Richmond, 2007).
- Positive masculinity: This perspective emphasizes the need for more positive and flexible forms of masculinity that allow men to express a wider range of emotions and behaviors.

Positive masculinity can include traits such as emotional openness, empathy, and a commitment to social justice (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010).

Overall, masculinity is complex and multifaceted, reflecting various social, cultural, and historical factors. While traditional forms of masculinity have often been associated with adverse outcomes such as aggression, violence, and poor mental health, there is growing recognition of the need for more positive and flexible forms of masculinity that allow men to express a broader range of emotions and behaviors (Connell, 1987; Levant & Richmond, 2007; Mankowski, 2016).

Masculinity Positionality

Masculinity is the collection of attributes typically associated with men, such as strength, ambition, dominance, and ruggedness. It is often considered an innate aspect of male identity and is shaped by cultural and social norms. However, what it means to be masculine varies significantly across cultures and can change over time (Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021).

I feel masculinity is based on virtues and lived experiences that a person goes through throughout their lives, trials, and tribulations (Inhorn, 2011). If an apple does not mature without time, how can a person mature without time? Not necessarily time due to how long the person has lived, but what the person has experienced. An individual who has lived to become 40 years old and has not moved out of their family home and has never been rejected or experienced much outside of a controlled environment will not have the same maturity or experience as a 20-year-old who has had multiple jobs and ups and downs in their life and career. Experiences shape us.

Masculinity can heal though. Shakespeare's male characters grapple with power and violence, but also show emotional depth, vulnerability, and the ability to inspire growth in others. The poetry of Walt Whitman often portrayed masculinity and male intimacy as tender and

nurturing. His poems celebrate men caring for other men, such as soldiers bonding through the trauma of war. He wrote of male-male affection being a positive, healing force.

A Navy SEAL needs to overcome Hell Week (n.d.), for example, to even be considered to participate in the training of a SEAL. Hell Week consists of 5 1/2 days of cold, brutally difficult operational training on fewer than four hours of sleep. Hell Week tests physical endurance, mental toughness, pain and cold tolerance, teamwork, attitude, and the ability to work under high physical and mental stress and sleep deprivation. On average, only 25% of SEAL candidates make it through Hell Week, the most brutal training in the U.S. military. Hispanic girls become women in the Hispanic culture through what is called Quinceanera. When a Spartan youth turned 18, he completed his training. To be able to graduate and be recognized as a man in his community, the boy had to undergo a grotesque rite of passage called the cryptic. The young man would be sent to the countryside with only a knife and his training. He was to kill as many state-owned enslaved people, called helots, without being detected and return to his school in one piece (Ducat et al., 2006).

Cultural Analysis for Latinos

Latino culture is a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon encompassing various nationalities, ethnicities, languages, and cultural practices. A cultural analysis of Latinos would need to consider the many factors that shape Latino identity and experience, including history, geography, migration, race, ethnicity, gender, and social class (Campesino, 2009; Garcia & Van Sosest, 2019). Cultural analysis for Latinos explores the various aspects of Hispanic culture, including language, literature, art, music, religion, and social customs. It is critical to understand that Latino culture is not monolithic—it is diverse and encompasses various nationalities, regions, and cultural backgrounds (Garcia, 2019; Gonzales, 2011; Smith, 1966).

One of the crucial aspects of cultural analysis for Latinos is examining how different factors, such as geography, history, and social context, have influenced Hispanic culture. For example, the Spanish conquest significantly impacted Latin America's culture and customs (Quijano, 2000). The African Diaspora in Latin America also played a significant role in shaping the culture and traditions of Afro-Latinos. Moreover, the intersection of ethnicity, race, and gender in the Latino community further complicates the cultural analysis. Therefore, cultural analysis for Latinos is an interdisciplinary field incorporating various theoretical perspectives, including post-colonial, feminist, and critical race theory, to understand Latino culture better (Gudykunst, 1998).

Growing up Latino, I have firsthand knowledge of the Latino culture. It can be considered a very conservative, family-oriented culture based on traditions (Kemp & Rasbridge, 2004). Traditions that may seem archaic or rules that would look similar on reruns of the 1960 television shows. In the current culture of 2023, where gender roles are taboo, my upbringing did not have any of those conversations. It was a culture built on generations. Most sociologists and anthropologists consider the nuclear family as the primary form of social organization (Giddens, 2018). The nuclear family ideology is not the norm in our current society in the United States (Nickerson, 2023). In my and many Latino households, the father is the provider and protector—the masculine portion of the system. Mom is the homemaker and the sensitive feminine version to balance masculinity (French & Chavez, 2010). The “traditional” family is widely regarded to be a nuclear family (Kemp & Rasbridge, 2004). The husband–wife unit is assumed to be economically autonomous and responsible for raising children with little help, with an extreme sexual division of labor in which men are solely responsible for “breadwinning” and women “homemaking” (Sear, 2021). The nuclear family structure first arose among the wealthy class in

northwestern Europe and has endured, as some argue, as the dominant ideal from the Victorian in the West until the 1960s (Eilkind, 1992).

Machismo

Machismo is a concept often associated with traditional forms of masculinity, particularly in Latin American cultures. It is generally characterized by emphasizing male dominance, aggression, and control over others (Cabral, 2019). In the popular imagination, machismo has become the social signifier of all male chauvinism. Using a Spanish word has cast an entire hemisphere as the epitome of male patriarchal privilege (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). The distinction between machismo and masculinity, in general, is Latin culture. Each culture has its traits, and in an inclusive civilization, most traditions are respected and or accepted (Chattopadhyay & De Vries, 2013). Machismo has received a negative context as of late. The field of masculinity studies is no exception in exploring Latinos' views of adulthood, primarily through machismo (Bilmes, 1992; Strong et al., 1994; Tombs, 2002). As proposed by Chicana feminist writers (Baca Zinn, 1982; Hurtado, 2003), Latinos, like other men, are complex individuals embracing much more than their gender; each Latino belongs to other social formations embodied in his Social Identities (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016).

Machismo is a term that refers to a set of attitudes and behaviors traditionally associated with male dominance, control, and aggression (Torres et al., 2002). The study of machismo is a complex and multidisciplinary field involving research in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and gender studies (Nunez, 2016). Only minimal research has examined Latinos; they have yet to enter this intellectual dialogue (Noguera et al., 2012). As a whole, the field of masculinity studies has lagged behind feminist theorizing. Latino men occupy a contradictory position within a system of privilege, one that offers them advantages but concurrently disadvantages those

belonging to devalued social categories, that is, men who come from working-class backgrounds, who are immigrants, who speak Spanish, who often look racially nonwhite, who have a Latino background, and who may be gay—all statuses that contribute to experiencing racism, ethnocentrism, classism, and heterosexism. Although men are privileged by patriarchal structures, all men do not share the privileges equally (Connell, 1995).

Lack of Masculinity Equals Toxic Masculinity

Growing evidence suggests that a lack of masculinity, or a perceived lack of masculinity, can lead to toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity refers to attitudes and behaviors that harm both men and women, including aggression, dominance, and emotional suppression (Levant & Richmond, 2007; Wong et al., 2017).

It is essential to clarify what “lack of masculinity” means. This term is often used for men who do not conform to traditional masculine norms, such as being physically strong, emotionally reserved, and sexually dominant. When men feel that they do not meet these norms, they may experience a sense of insecurity or inadequacy, which can lead to defensive or aggressive behavior. This is known as “reactive masculinity,” which can contribute to developing toxic masculinity (Wong et al., 2017).

The concept of toxic masculinity emerged from men's movements in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to explain a narrowly defined social construction of manhood that focused on competition between men (Douglas, 2019). O'Malley (2016) defines *toxic masculinity* as “a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status, and aggression” (para. 5). Clemens (2017) clarifies that the importance of the definition of toxic masculinity is that it focuses on the men’s violent behavior, not masculinity itself, but the gendered behavior that occurs when “what it means to be a man goes wrong” (para. 3).

Although masculinity is diverse and complex, images of masculinity in media are oversimplified and focus on aspects of toxic masculinity (Elliott, 2018). “Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times.” The quote, from a post-apocalyptic novel by the author G. Michael Hopf, sums up a stunningly pervasive cyclical vision of history. Eventually, Rome fell to the Germanic tribes of barbarians who were strong barbarian tribes; they invaded and conquered Rome. In this cycle, the barbaric future would eventually overthrow the intellectually advanced society. This cycle has been seen in the past when another force conquered civilization. Who is to say another civilization does not do the same today? There is a need for masculinity within society. Yes, violence and masculinity are not just male traits, but human traits (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996). Men are not the only ones who commit violent encounters and are aggressive. So why is toxic masculinity labeled as too much masculinity? I would have to say that it is quite the opposite; the lack of masculinity makes a person toxic.

Journey with Leadership Theory and Framework into Narrative

Leadership can have a silver lining for some that have suffered trauma. I am not inferring that someone gets leadership experience from trauma. I am stating that leadership skills could be learned, and a sense of empathy toward trauma could be learned. The traumatized person is informed because they might be dealing with similar symptoms or experiences. This is the basis of trauma-informed leadership, which I will discuss in the next section. The inverse is relevant as well. CEOs from families with higher socioeconomic resources and those with less childhood trauma prefer safer investment and leverage policies (Henderson & Hutton, 2018). Malmendier et al. (2011) show that CEOs exposed to the Great Depression pursue safer corporate policies.

Similarly, Bernile et al. (2015) show that the degree of childhood exposure to natural disasters, a form of trauma, affects CEO risk-taking.

There is a correlation between childhood trauma on risk-taking. Bernile et al. (2015) show that moderate traumatic experiences encourage CEOs to take risks, while extreme events induce strong conservatism. The study identifies trauma caused by exposure to natural disasters occurring near the place of CEO's residence during adolescence. Holocaust and political persecution were seen to be associated with conservatism. The effect of the childhood trauma indicator is weaker but potentially consistent with the findings of Bernile et al. (2015). They show moderate traumatic experiences encourage CEOs to take risks, while extreme events induce strong conservatism. Henderson and Hutton (2018) sampled CEOs and had some interesting findings regarding CEOs suffering trauma. The study considered an event traumatic if it took place before the age of 18 and included events such as a parent or significant caretaker loss (to death, divorce, or abandonment), temporary loss (imprisonment or military service), family move, severe parent, sibling or child illness, and other hardships such as relocation to a concentration camp during Holocaust and other types of political prosecution that resulted in extreme hardship (Henderson & Hutton, 2018).

The average CEO was born around 1947. A relatively large portion of the sample (13.3%) comprises foreign CEOs born outside the United States; 5.8% are minority or non-Caucasian, 4.4% of CEOs are female, and 14.1% experienced some self-reported childhood trauma. The most common source of childhood trauma is parent loss (7.6%), followed by family move (6.3%). There is also evidence of parent-child occupational linkages in that parents frequently raise CEOs in related occupations. There is limited research on the impact of PTSD on leadership (Schneider, 2012), especially changes in leadership style associated with trauma

exposure. Leaders may develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes that strengthen their leadership through these harrowing experiences (Kramer & Allen, 2018). *Leaders Posttraumatic Growth* is defined as “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1) and is seen in five domains: “greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; warmer, more intimate relationships with others; a greater sense of personal strength; recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life; and spiritual development” (p. 6).

Conclusion

In conclusion, masculinity is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been explored by a range of scholars across various disciplines. While traditional masculinity norms and ideologies can contribute to the development of toxic behavior, including aggression, dominance, and emotional suppression, it is crucial to recognize that not all men who adhere to traditional masculinity norms engage in toxic behavior (Levant & Richmond, 2007). Additionally, a range of individual and contextual factors influence the relationship between masculinity and behavior, and the impact of masculinity on individuals and society varies across cultures and historical contexts (Levant & Richmond, 2007).

Moving forward, scholars and practitioners need to continue exploring the concept of masculinity to better understand its influence on individuals and society. By examining the various dimensions of masculinity, such as hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, and alternative forms of masculinity, we can better understand how gender norms and ideologies shape individual behavior and social dynamics.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography

At the root of everyone's life is a story. The way a person lives their life and what actions they take. Examples of this type of work can be considered non-fictional and historical literature. Biographies are considered one of the oldest forms of literary expression. This fact is based on autoethnography. We look at a biography written about the author's experience or bias. Malcolm X, Jesus Christ, and Winston Churchill all have biographies and life stories written by someone else. Of course, I am not saying that these are examples of autoethnography studies. However, it can be an interesting argument. It would be easier to interpret a person's decisions with their input. In the Bible, we learn tales of Jesus Christ, all written in gospel form or from a third-person point of view. The reader learns about how the Virgin Mother Mary birthed Jesus and how Jesus was crucified later as an adult (English et al., 2012). What we need to know is what happened in between those crucial moments. What emotions was he feeling during certain events? Did shame come into play in his emotions? All of these intricacies make autoethnography so fascinating.

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno; Ellis, 2004). Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative. However, it transcends mere self-narration to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2016). Autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. It follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling. Autoethnography stories must be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader

sociocultural context (Chang, 2016). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742).

The process of how one would research a person or an event now must be done on a reflective level. Kashi Raj Pandey discusses this in his research on journaling. Honoring the past in our own words with our uncensored reflections, we document our memories before they are lost. The process often evokes conversations with the self, another person, or even an imagined other person (Pandey, 2013, p. 1). Insung Jung wrote an article using autoethnography. Jung’s subjects were five faculty members in a liberal arts college in Tokyo, Japan (Jung, 2021). Jung had his subjects write reflective journals during a ten-week academic term commenting on how interactions went and inner feelings. Uses of these narratives, autoethnographically, help observe ways the self and the society constitute themselves (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Narratives paint the picture in a way facts without context cannot. That is why storytelling is so powerful. “These tales record the agonies, pains, successes, and tragedies of the human experience. Narratives record the deeply felt emotions of love, dignity, pride, honor, and respect” (Denzin, 1997, p. xiv).

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory is a broad field of study that explores how stories, or narratives, shape our understanding of the world around us. At its core, narrative theory is interested in how people construct and communicate meaning through stories and how these stories shape our experiences, identities, and relationships (Hall, 2011). Narrative theory draws on various

disciplines, including literary studies, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Some of the key concepts and themes within narrative theory include (McAdams, 2013):

- Narrative structure: Narrative theory is interested in the structure of stories, including elements such as plot, character, setting, and point of view. By understanding these structural elements, researchers can gain insight into the ways in which stories create meaning and shape our understanding of the world.
- Narrative identity: Narrative theory is also interested in the ways in which stories shape our identities. Through the process of storytelling, individuals create a narrative of their own lives, which helps to define who they are and what they value.
- Social and cultural context: Narrative theory emphasizes the importance of social and cultural context in shaping stories and their meanings. The same story may have different meanings or interpretations depending on the cultural or historical context in which it is told.
- Power and politics: Narrative theory also explores the ways in which stories are used to reinforce or challenge power dynamics and political ideologies. Stories can be used to promote social change, challenge dominant narratives, or reinforce existing power structures.

Overall, narrative theory is a broad and interdisciplinary field that explores how stories shape our understanding of the world. By analyzing stories' structure, content, and context, researchers can understand how narratives create meaning, shape identity, and influence our social and cultural experiences (McAdams, 2013).

Christopher N. Poulos (2021) feels autoethnography is an autobiographical academic writing that draws on lived experiences and insights into society and culture (p. 13). Poulos looks

to have a deep admiration for the practice. Grounded in active self-reflexivity refers to carefully considering how researchers' past experiences, points of view, and roles impact these same researchers' interactions with and interpretations of the research scene (Poulos, 2021, p. 14). This will be discussed further later in the chapter. Poulos feels that data gathering and research are similar to how a story writer rights their dialogue and sequencing. This seems similar to memoirs and biographies. Narrative theory represents communication in a sequence of events with some casual development. With autoethnography, the subject matter being dissected is from the subject's memory. Each memory might be remembered differently than it happened in reality, so I will have to reflect on making sure I am accurate and objective.

Why Autoethnography?

Autoethnography emerged from sociology in response to the need to reconcile the voice and experience of the ethnographer in the field with field experiences (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography allows me to review my past. As a study, my thoughts and opinions give my experience credibility for others to notice, not for sympathy but for education. Ethnography showed how sociological processes played out in real-world settings (Ellis, 2004). However, the representation of fieldwork did not consider how readers would react or the emotional impact of the sociological context on the researcher in the field.

Autoethnography is a research method that allows researchers to explore their personal experiences and emotions within a cultural context. There are several reasons why one might choose to do a study using autoethnography (Ellis, 2014). Autoethnography emerged from sociology in response to the need to reconcile the voice and experience of the ethnographer in the field with field experiences (Adams et al., 2015). Ethnography showed how sociological processes played out in real-world settings (Ellis, 2004). However, the representation of

fieldwork did not consider how readers would react or the emotional impact of the sociological context on the researcher in the field.

Autoethnography is a research method that allows researchers to explore their personal experiences and emotions within a cultural context. There are several reasons why one might choose to do a study using autoethnography (Ellis, 2014):

- To gain a deeper understanding of a cultural phenomenon: Autoethnography can provide a unique perspective on social and cultural issues, as it allows researchers to explore their personal experiences within a cultural context. This can help to shed light on complex or emotionally charged issues that may be difficult to capture through traditional research methods.
- To challenge dominant narratives: Autoethnography can be a powerful tool for challenging dominant narratives and giving voice to marginalized perspectives. By sharing their personal experiences, researchers can help to shift the discourse around a particular issue and promote social change.
- To promote reflexivity: Autoethnography emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, or reflecting on the researcher's own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. This can help to ensure that the research is as objective and unbiased as possible.
- To engage in creative expression: Autoethnography often involves creative forms of expression, such as storytelling, poetry, or visual art. These forms of expression can be therapeutic for the researcher and can also help to engage a wider audience with the research.

As I said before, everyone has a story. Mine has many examples of trauma, violence, and anger in it. However, I overcame all these negative situations and healed all these wounds. I

could not think of a better way of telling my story, so others can study and learn a method to cope with their struggles. Of course, my story will not be the same as everyone else's, but the key is overcoming adversity. Discussing a lot of my trauma will bring up plenty of emotions as a writer. However, it will be great practice to ensure I can reach most people when I speak and write about all my experiences without alienating their feelings. People will sometimes read about my choices and disagree with them. The good thing about autoethnography is that I can explain my experiences and reasoning. People still might not accept it, but one is the expert of their own experiences, not others.

The process of how one would research a person or an event now must be done on a reflective level. Kashi Raj Pandey discusses this in his research on journaling. Honoring the past in our own words with our uncensored reflections, we document our memories before they are lost. The process often evokes conversations with the self, another person, or even an imagined person (Pandey, 2013, p. 1). Insung Jung wrote an article using autoethnography. Jung's subjects were five faculty members in a liberal arts college in Tokyo, Japan (Jung, 2021). Jung had his subjects write reflective journals during a ten-week academic term commenting on how interactions went and inner feelings.

Argument Against Autoethnography

There has been backlash from social science researchers, claiming that autoethnography moves away from a scientific approach in favor of a more aesthetic, literary approach (Adams & Ellis, 2012; Ellis, 2009). Conversely, narrative methodology, notably autobiography, may view autoethnography as too analytical and systematic (Adams & Ellis, 2012; Ellis, 2009).

If I had been told 10 years ago that I would put my trauma and past on paper for public consumption, I would have shivered in guilt and shame, but that was the decision I made during

my last year at Antioch. It did not come lightly, however. For a very long time, I thought I would do interviews with multiple leaders and individuals to see how they handled resiliency; however, through the process of learning new methodologies, that changed rather quickly. Of course, there was a side to me asking why I was jumping away from a traditional narrative study into autopathography. Would not a more formal study provide more of a reach in academia and practitioners? The question comes in if my experiences would not be taken seriously. Would I be considered just a diva for thinking that my past is fascinating enough to read or for me to study? One common issue with autoethnography is that many scholars consider it very egotistic (Roth, 2008). It was a long process of weighing the pros and cons of autoethnography, but I am willing to take the risk to ensure my perspective and opinions are used for my experiences.

Data Sources

Data sources are the foundation of any research project, as they provide the information and evidence necessary to answer research questions and generate insights. The choice of data sources will depend on the research question, the methodology, and the theoretical framework of the study. Some common data sources in social science research include surveys, interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Chang, 2016).

Data sources can provide valuable insights into how people behave and interact in real-world situations. Documents, such as archival materials or policy documents, can provide historical or contextual information related to a particular research question. Artifacts, such as art, music, or other cultural productions, can provide unique insights into cultural practices and traditions (Chang, 2016).

This autoethnography relied on the following data sources: my memories of the experiences. The journals I composed during that period, the events that occurred as I wrote my

dissertation, and the text correspondence between myself and my family members and therapist. Finding all my journals for the last 35 years was a simple process. They were easily accessible from a storage container I have had through the years. My mother encouraged me to write often at a young age. I would write tales of faraway lands and what was happening. The journals covered my life from 1989 up to about 1999. I then transferred to more electronic journaling, accessible from the storage drive I had for my laptop. The time frame of electronic journaling was from 2000 until now. The text messages were more recent. The text messages with family and therapist started around 2016–2020. These texts range from arguments with family to conversations with my therapist via text. I needed much support for a year, and my therapist was willing to provide that. Those conversations would involve relationship issues, family issues, or work issues. Each time I was able to review what intervention or advice my therapist could provide at the given time. The text exchanges were beneficial.

An observation that came to light while re-reading much of the material was that I tended to write stories during stress and trauma. Writing was my coping mechanism as a child, but I never realized it until now. This allowed me to gauge how stressed or troubled I was during a given period. I was able to review letters I would write to friends and loved ones. Writing was a lot easier to communicate because I was a shy child. Reflexive thought and inner dialogue stand in for personal meaning-making and interpretation throughout the story. These particular experiences began during my childhood and concluded with the writing of this dissertation. Dates are used when possible to provide objective markers and substantiate the accuracy of memories. This study aimed to provide a new but related truth about trauma, recovery, and leadership.

CHAPTER IV: MY STORY

Positionality

Between 10% and 73% of Mexican women reported experiencing an episode of domestic violence in their lives (Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública [INSP], 2003). The National Institute of Women stated that 38.4% of Mexican women have experienced psychological violence, and 7.8% have experienced sexual violence (INMUJERES, 2003). With these high statistics, it is simple to see how this can affect culture. It was difficult to find statistics on males suffering from violence, probably due to the Mexican culture. In the Mexican culture, as in many other patriarchal societies (Baca-Zinn & Eitzen, 2005), many of the perpetrator's characteristics reflect the cultural influence of machismo. Machismo will be discussed later in this section.

My lens on my childhood has always been in flux. Some days I felt it was cruel; others, it allowed me to be a better leader because I had a lot to overcome. Trauma can affect one's beliefs about the future via loss of hope, limited expectations about life, fear that life will end abruptly or early, or anticipation that everyday life events will not occur (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). I did not have many expectations regarding my life during that time. Before my therapy, I did not see an issue with my childhood. I did not see an issue with the abuse and molestation. Of course, perception is reality. I considered it a normal childhood. I considered it so normal that I talked about it openly to friends and would be confused by the look on other people's faces.

Memories can be remembered differently than what reality might be. Every time you remember an event from the past, your brain networks change in ways that can alter the later recall (Loftus, 1979). This is considered memory reconstruction. Memories are not static representations of past events but are reconstructed each time they are retrieved. Various factors

can influence memories, including emotions, expectations, and contextual cues (Loftus, 1979). Memory distortions are also a factor changing. Research has found that memories can be distorted in several ways, including through suggestion, misinformation, and imagination (Schacter, 1999).

As I said earlier, perception becomes a reality, and no one is a master of their memories more than the person remembering them because it affects their emotions specifically. Initial reactions to trauma can include exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, numbness, dissociation, and confusion (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Early Childhood Trauma

Early childhood trauma refers to experiences of trauma or adversity that occur during the first few years of a child's life, typically between birth and age five. Traumatic experiences during this critical period can have profound and long-lasting effects on a child's physical, emotional, and psychological development (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Early childhood trauma generally refers to the traumatic experiences that occur to children aged 0–6 (NCTSN, 2017).

Early childhood trauma can include physical or emotional abuse, neglect, domestic violence, separation from a primary caregiver, parental substance abuse, or exposure to natural disasters or other traumatic events. These experiences can have a range of adverse effects on a child's development (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014):

- **Impaired brain development:** Early childhood trauma can disrupt the development of the brain, particularly the areas that are responsible for emotional regulation, memory, and executive function.

- Behavioral and emotional problems: Children who experience early childhood trauma may be at increased risk for a range of behavioral and emotional problems, including anxiety, depression, aggression, and difficulties with social interaction.
- Health problems: Early childhood trauma can also have negative effects on physical health, increasing the risk of chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.
- Attachment issues: Traumatic experiences during early childhood can disrupt the development of secure attachment relationships with primary caregivers, which can have negative effects on social and emotional development.

The following are theorists who have studied these adverse affects in depth:

John Bowlby is a British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst best known for his work on attachment theory. Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) proposed that early experiences with primary caregivers shape a child's ability to form healthy attachments and relationships later in life. Bowlby argued that disruptions in attachment during early childhood, such as separation from a caregiver or neglect, can have lasting effects on a child's social and emotional development (Bowlby, 1969).

Bessel van der Kolk is a Dutch psychiatrist and leading expert in trauma and its effects on the brain and body. He is the founder and medical director of the Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute in Boston, Massachusetts, and a professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine. Van der Kolk's research has focused on how trauma can change the brain's stress response system (van der Kolk, 2015).

Bruce Perry's (2006) work has focused on the effects of trauma on brain development and the importance of trauma-informed care. He has emphasized the need for caregivers and

professionals to understand how trauma can impact a child's behavior and functioning and to provide supportive and healing interventions (Perry, 2006).

When events are collapsed across categories, almost 40% of adults in the general population report having experienced at least one event by age 13; the prevalence of assaultive violence in childhood is even more striking. Almost 20% of males and over 25% of females report having directly experienced or witnessed violence by age 13; females were significantly more likely to experience assaultive violence than males (Koenen et al., 2011).

Molestation

Memories of childhood sexual assault can slip from awareness like ordinary memories (McNally et al., 2012). A study looked at 1,067 adolescents of both genders to complete a survey about child abuse. The prevalence of child sexual abuse that involved physical contact was 18% (Pineda-Lucatero et al., 2009). The number of children affected was surprising. Questions regarding the culture do come up, but that is out of the scope of this paper.

My molestation happened when I was young, and I do not fully remember it, but it sometimes flashes; I see pieces. I look at my diaries, which come up numerous times in various stages of my life. One specific one that stood out was an entry that began to explain things further. No child is psychologically prepared to confront sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse after-effects may be immediate or gradual. Among the first to appear is fear of harm and death, anxiety, and depression. The more critical gradual effects are feelings of rage, shame, depression, low self-esteem, and suicide (LeBlanc et al., 1996; Moyer et al., 1997; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996; Singer et al., 1995; Tebbutt et al., 1997).

I was spending a summer in El Salvador. I could not find the exact dates in my journals, but I remember them vividly. I was about 10 years old then, so it must have been June 1990. I

was staying with my father's family. I never had a relationship with my extended family, which was nice. At first, I did not want to go; I felt awkward that I could not speak Spanish as well as they did, so I was insecure talking to them.

During the vacation, my cousin scheduled me for a dental cleaning because she was training to become a dentist. After the session, we went back to her apartment. While there, she touched me inappropriately. I was shocked and confused as to what I should be feeling. At the time, I did not know how to process it. I did not process it until my brother and I spoke about it almost 30 years later. This was not the only time a situation like this happened. The issue is that my memory of what and who happened is not 100% clear.

Beatings

Corporal punishment refers to using physical force as a discipline or punishment. This can include spanking, hitting, slapping, or other forms of physical discipline. Corporal punishment has been controversial for many years, with proponents arguing that it is an effective means of discipline and opponents arguing that it is abusive and can have adverse long-term effects (Gershoff, 2002). Research has consistently found that corporal punishment is associated with a range of negative outcomes for children, including increased aggression, lower cognitive ability, increased risk of mental health problems, and lower academic achievement (Gershoff, 2002).

Corporal punishment was a regularity in my household. The severity of the incidents would vary from a slap from a belt to a barrage of hits with different items. Slippers, and one specific time, a bat was involved. Of course, the hit was not at full force, but it was a disconcerting time in my life. One journal memory was when my father disciplined me for coming home late from school. I was 11 years old. This was during April 1992. I walked into the

house late, and my father was on the sofa waiting for me. The belt was already in his hand. At this point, I was already used to the abuse. After a while, my mind would wander, and I would not even feel the hits. I cannot remember what I was thinking, but my father noticed I was not reacting. So he began hitting me even harder, and it went so hard that he began hitting my thighs. I blocked out all the pain, but looking back on it, I'm sure my father was trying to make sure I felt it to know I did something wrong. With the repeated hits, I had bruising all down both my thighs. They were purple for about two weeks after.

Parents

I am a son of a Mexican mother and a Salvadorian father. Both cultures are a loud and proud heritage. Both cultures are also old-fashioned. My mother was a farmworker who came to the United States at 12. She was forced to give up her education in Mexico. This forced decision caused her to have substantial internal conflict about her future. She would ask herself if she would succeed in life without an education. These thoughts about not having an education would haunt her for over 15 years. She would make it a point to communicate her disappointment and sacrifice to us. Stirring up this guilt in her children was a form of codependency. She was a young mother at 15 years old when she also got married. Given their age, it is a safe assumption that she was not mature enough to take on these responsibilities.

My father was forced out of El Salvador by his own family. This was due to his run-ins with the law and his unwillingness to pursue a future—he did not want to pursue an education or a career. He was an abusive person, both physically and emotionally, to too many people, both men and women. The moment that caused him to be asked by the family to leave the country was that there was a drunk driving accident that killed a pedestrian. He was an alcoholic from a very young age until his mid-fifties, when he stopped drinking. The man was always

extraordinarily anti-social and incredibly old-fashioned. One example of those behaviors was that he would clean our rooms with a white glove, and if there were an issue, he would inflict corporal punishment on us. The punishment would vary from being hit with a belt or whatever was convenient for him. The lessons from my mother have formed and shaped me. For better or worse, I have many examples to reflect on as a memory or a regret. Everyone has an example of how one should act in life. I picked the behaviors I thought were best to mimic, but I also was left with the pain of the bad ones. I left out trying to be codependent and passive-aggressive to others. This was a problem for my family since I tried to break the cycle of unhealthy behavior.

I come from a very passive-aggressive family. A situation that comes to mind illustrating this point happened when I was younger. My mother is very narcissistic, so she only can express love with control when you are open to being controlled. She went out of her way to disrupt my nephew's wedding because she disapproved of whom he was marrying. When my nephew was going to say, "I do," she burst into the room to get everyone's attention. It was very telling that my mother would go to great lengths to show others how she felt without being direct and communicating issues healthily. The behavior also showed me how my mother copes with disappointment. Since I had a codependent relationship with my mother, I sympathized with my nephew's situation. Guilt has always been instilled in me. This comes from my family's Catholic beliefs and way of seeking attention and validation. This can be a simple comment, "You do not love me because you do not talk to me," or planning things and intentionally leaving people out. When I was eight, my parents were intoxicated at a family gathering. My cousin was recently married, and we celebrated at a park. During the meal, my parents announced that I was a "mistake" because they did want more kids after my middle brother. My father blamed the doctor because he said he was told my mother did not have to be on birth control anymore since

they had been on birth control for so long. After that story was recounted loudly for everyone to hear, my mother felt insecure and embarrassed. So, she announced that when she found out she was pregnant, she wanted a girl and was disappointed that I was not a girl. I fell into a depression, from what I remember.

I was a sickly baby and child for most of my early years. I was always in the hospital for asthma-related issues and allergies. My asthma was very severe. There were nights when my parents thought I was going to die. My allergies were so bad as a baby that I was always red, and my face and body had welts on them due to the reactions of the allergies and medication attempts on me. It got to the point that there were no baby or early childhood pictures of me because of the allergic reactions. The earliest photographs I have seen are from maybe the age of seven. Guilt and shame were passed down to me, the mistake, the disappointment. Guilt is a constant struggle that has caused me great pain and loss. Excessive guilt has cost me friends and relationships because I never really knew how to deal with the guilt or even cope with the feelings of guilt. The theme of guilt is also present in my leadership. I fear failing my team. Guilt sometimes drives me to ensure my colleagues have everything they need to succeed, so we can all be redeemed. My authenticity and authentic leadership sometimes come from a place of pain for myself. Some of my earliest memories of being babysat have blurred memories. While in therapy, my therapist was able to hypnotize me during a session, so I could revisit much of my childhood. This memory came and hit me like a lightning bolt.

Fatherhood

I started a very toxic relationship with a woman about five years older than me. We became romantically involved, eventually leading to her being my daughter's mother. I was now a father at the age of 19. My life exploded. I did not know what to do or how to be a father. How

can I be a father if I never learned how it was to be an adult? I never received lessons in life, how to be a man, how to maintain a relationship, how to keep a job, and how to provide for a family. I knew from my parents' example that I was supposed to work hard, but the toxicity of my parents' relationship confused me. Was I supposed to be okay with so many bad habits detrimental to my family? Is it okay to be in a relationship without being happy? Was I supposed to inflict corporal punishment on my daughter? All these thoughts crept up when Jacquelyn was pregnant, but I repressed them when I saw my daughter born. Everything went away. I found happiness.

I eventually became what I told myself I would never be, my father. I lost my family. Finally, my relationship ended, and I was left with trying to be a father to my daughter. I was in my early twenties and had no idea what that meant or how to do that. I did not know how to cope with failure, so my life spiraled. The examples I saw as a child and a young man were wrong. I saw acts of violence, alcohol, womanizing, and greed. I was not violent, but I was a lot of the other examples I was shown that a man should do and be. I had to give up school and was forced to leave the Bay Area due to the high cost of living. Like my father years ago, when he left El Salvador, I moved away from all I knew. I moved to Arizona to start my life again. There were a few months of reflection that allowed me to see everything from a different light. At this moment, I felt like I had lost everything and hit rock bottom. What did I lose, though? I still have my daughter. I was going to court, so legally, I was fighting for every minute possible, so I could be with her. I did lose my girlfriend, but it was a toxic relationship, and, in the end, we were hurting Alexis more than helping her be together. I had to decide to accept the loss.

After losing everything, my father told me I had better luck at work than in my family life. These words hurt, but it was accurate at the time. I focused all my efforts on being what I

thought at the time, a good employee. After all, my occupation provided for my daughter and me, so I had to ensure she was taken care of. This leads me on a path of coping with much loss.

My mental health and physical health took a backseat. I put everything aside to keep working. I began transforming into my father. My father worked long hours and drank for most of them as a farm worker in the fields. He did it to be away from his family, in any case. I did the same. I used it as an excuse to take on more projects. The more I had on my plate, the more I could not think about what I was missing out on, my daughter. When I reached the leadership level, I came to that position not through my leadership skills but through my knowledge. I do not think for a second that my employer thought of me as a good leader; quite the contrary, I would be considered a poor leader and led with guilt and shaming my team. I used office politics to get my team to operate at a high level, just like my parents did before me. I used negative emotions and shame to motivate my team. This, of course, does not constitute a healthy relationship with their leader.

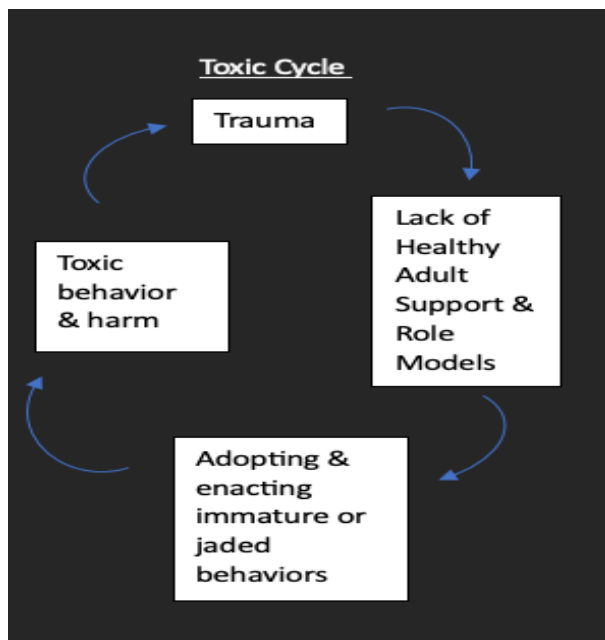
I was at what later could be described as a spiritual crossroads. My life was in shambles. I was a single parent, and my relationship with my family and romantic partner failed. In fact, up to this point, I have not been able to sustain a healthy relationship with anyone. The only positive part of my life was that a tech organization hired me to become a global manager. I would be responsible for others for the first time in my life. I was responsible for my daughter, but she lived with her mother most of the time. I did not know how to care for myself; how would I care for others? This question haunted me for a long time. As a single parent, I was already a leader, but not a good one. My responsibility was to my child.

I could have been better at that too. This crossroads forced me to make a decision and seek leadership. I decided to commit to therapy because I felt I had no other option. My family

always told me never to hit rock bottom because it is a long way back up. I reached that state of mind in my 30s. After years of failed relationships, I looked everywhere except one place. I needed to look internally. After a while, you can continue to blame others for your circumstances until you take ownership of it. The day after I met with my new team, I met with my new therapist.

Cycle of Toxicity

From my personal experience, it is safe to say that the toxicity and the trauma I endured was in cycles. Cycle of toxicity refers to the self-propagating and self-concealing nature of dysfunction within family systems marked by abuse, trauma, insecure bonding, and maladaptive behaviors spanning generations. Review of the literature on complex trauma found cycles of abuse, insecure attachment, and intergenerational dysfunctional patterns within families (Cook et al., 2017). Of course, trauma from family to family and person to person might look different. I do not want to make a generation cycle of trauma. I am simply going to show my cycle and what I went through.

Figure 4.1*Cycle of Toxicity*

Trauma initiated in one generation, especially childhood trauma, has widespread biological, psychological, and social ripple effects that can lead to recurring dysfunction across generations. Traumatized parents often struggle with regulation, relationships, and parenting in ways that impede child development and re-inflict trauma. Insecure attachment, emotional deficits, and maladaptive behaviors learned as coping strategies get passed down cyclically. Trauma alters health, neural wiring, and stress response in ways that predispose offspring. Within families or communities, trauma responses become normalized if they occur regularly, making change more difficult (Muse, 2021).

When children lack stable, nurturing role models and mentors, it impedes the development of secure attachment and essential life skills. **Without supportive adult guidance,**

children struggle to build adequate self-esteem, emotion regulation, healthy relationships, constructive coping strategies, and a sense of purpose. This makes them more vulnerable to mental health issues, peer pressure, substance abuse, and other risks as they come of age. If they go on to become parents themselves, these deficits will likely impair their parenting capacities. Their children then inherit attachment problems, unmet needs, and maladaptive learned behaviors. Dysfunction persists cyclically across generations due to this absence of corrective guidance and support in childhood. Adult role models providing consistent love, care, protection, structure, and wisdom can be transformative (McKelvey et al., 2017).

When children grow up in dysfunctional environments, they often mimic unhealthy coping strategies and maladaptive behaviors modeled by parents or family members. Without mature role models, youth may adopt age-inappropriate behaviors, stunted emotional development, cynical worldviews, and other immature attitudes as a means of navigating adversity. These can include substance abuse, aggression, risky sexual behaviors, codependency, poor communication, and more. If these immature or jaded coping mechanisms become engrained as the child comes of age, they can carry over into their adult relationships and parenting. This passes down the dysfunctional patterns to their own children. The next generation then follows these learned behaviors, continuing the cycle. Without intervention, the dysfunctional coping strategies become normalized within the family system (Kim & Cicchetti, 2010).

Experiencing abuse, neglect, violence, or other harm during childhood is deeply traumatizing and initiates cascades of dysfunction that tend to persist across generations. The developmental trauma disrupts attachment, emotion regulation, coping abilities, cognitive

functioning, and health in ways that impair parenting capacities and stability when the abused children have their own children. This propagates the cycle.

CHAPTER V: LESSONS AND THEORIES USED IN MY PERSONAL AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The initial conversations with my therapist made it clear that I did not have a good grounding or understanding of what it means to be an adult. Of course, my treatment with him was for therapy, not life lessons or a life coach. My therapist was well-versed in both organizational leadership and types of therapy. We were a natural match due to my present issues and how urgent both were for me at that particular time. This allowed me to be able to weave lessons into my recovery. The following were the theories and lessons used in my therapy to understand the context for the next chapter better. For privacy, throughout the rest of the paper, I will refer to my therapist as Sean.

Overview of Sessions

In 2016, after receiving the news that I would lead and be responsible for a group of techs, I reached out for help. The first session with Sean was a simple intake. An intake is a session where a therapist gathers basic information and background to get a baseline and learn more about the issues and reasons for the visit. The agreement was made early on that our therapy focus would be working on the most immediate needs first and going from there. The most immediate need from the start was to be able to lead others. A plan was conceived, and while working on my family trauma bit by bit, we began using military leadership lessons to help with the immediate needs. Military lessons were chosen because, during therapy, we concluded that I never had a role model or the opportunity to mature. By choosing the military lessons, I could subscribe to a more disciplined approach to leading.

Military Leadership Lessons

Approximately 71% of the 34 million 17-to-24-year-olds in the U.S. would not qualify for military service because of reasons related to health, physical appearance, and educational background, according to the Pentagon. The ineligible typically includes those who are obese, those who lack a high school diploma or a GED, convicted felons, those taking prescription drugs for ADHD, and those with certain tattoos and ear gauges. Feeney (2014) did an article based on statistics from the Pentagon. Some lessons that can be learned from the military have been forgotten in our current times. Some of these lessons that I used to overcome trauma were military terms and lessons.

With that purpose in mind, some might say that the current times and political climate do not need a military like was needed back in Roman times, so the military can be seen as obsolete and unnecessary. Rome fell on September 4, 476 AD. That is countless generations away from 2023. The argument can be made that military and or lessons do not have merit today due to armies conquering each other. If that were the case, why are we seeing what we see today? As of this writing, there are still battles being fought in Ukraine and Israel. World War II started on September 1, 1939. That was only 84 years ago. My father is 85, and my grandparents lived well past their 90s. So, these times are not so long ago when the Baby Boomers were still the majority. I argue that lessons like the ones I will explain below are essential.

My anger and aggressiveness made this marriage of military leadership and myself a very smooth transition. In fact, there is a correlation to trauma and military culture (Hall, 2011). In that study it showed how trauma survivor's displayed aggression was a disposition to be able to handle the structure and culture of the military.

My personal aggressiveness, trauma, and all other repercussions of trauma was a perfect blend for military discipline. I can see others needing that type of outlet as well. A chain of command and structure to a daily life can be a benefit to those who have suffered trauma (Solomon et al., 1988). Certain aspects of military culture and discipline resonated with my background.

Mental Toughness

A study found traumatized youth reported greater benefits from participating in military-style “boot camps” emphasizing mental toughness compared to non-traumatized youth (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Mental toughness is a concept that has been widely studied in psychology, sports science, and leadership. Generally, mental toughness refers to a person’s ability to persevere and thrive in adversity, stress, and pressure (Jones et al., 2002).

Some key findings from the literature on mental toughness:

- **Resilience:** Mental toughness has been linked to resilience, or the ability to bounce back from setbacks and persevere in the face of adversity. People with high levels of mental toughness tend to be better able to cope with stress and adversity and may be more resilient in the face of challenges.
- **Performance:** Mental toughness has been found to be positively associated with performance in a range of domains, including sports, academics, and the workplace. People with high levels of mental toughness tend to perform better under pressure and are better able to maintain focus and motivation.
- **Coping:** Mental toughness has also been linked to better coping strategies in the face of stress and trauma. People with high levels of mental toughness may be better able to cope

with traumatic events, such as injury or illness, and may be more likely to experience post-traumatic growth.

- **Development:** Mental toughness is not a fixed trait but can be developed over time through training and practice. Various interventions, such as mindfulness meditation, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and goal-setting exercises, have been found to be effective in increasing mental toughness.
- **Cross-cultural differences:** There may be cultural differences in the way that mental toughness is understood and valued. For example, in some cultures, mental toughness may be seen as a key component of resilience and personal strength, while in other cultures, it may be viewed as an overly individualistic and competitive trait.

The literature on mental toughness suggests it can be crucial in resilience, performance, coping, and personal growth. It is a trait that can be developed over time through training and practice (Gucciardi et al., 2018).

My therapist described mental toughness as a shield. A large shield that protects someone from reacting to things negatively. A layer of skin that insulates a person. There is no way to stop the negativity completely. The literature regarding mental toughness looks compressive, offering different definitions and measurement tools to enhance mental toughness (Connaughton et al., 2008). Mental toughness is the ability to keep picking yourself up no matter what life hits you with, to keep marching steadily forward to achieve the specific victories you have made up your mind you are going to make happen (Teitelbaum, 1998, p. 2).

We all come from different backgrounds and have various things that can affect us emotionally. Mental toughness was an overarching theme of protection. Goggins (2018) called this having emotional calluses. Calluses are thickened and hardened parts of the skin or soft

tissue. This concept, he felt, can be applied to emotions. A callus takes time and pressure to form. Same as emotional calluses or mental toughness; both need time to form.

Mental toughness became an essential lesson in my life at the beginning of 2017. The therapy sessions between myself and Sean began pointing back to my childhood and family. Events that carved my life were beginning to fester. According to Sean, in February 2017, during Valentine's Day week, my past was blocked for so long that I could not go on further without addressing it. The relationship with my family had become toxic. The passive-aggressive comments became too much to bear. I would snap at almost any remark or comment. Sean described this as me being a spring. I was a spring that was wound so tight that with any flinch, my spring would explode. I needed not to be so wound up. This is where mental toughness became relevant.

Through visualization and affirmation, my heart and soul were protected by armor, just as how Sean explained it. Being able to be in situations where I knew I would be attacked served as lessons on the firing line. Constantly being fired upon by family and friends made the shots and blows not hurt as much. Essentially all the power that the words held went away. My armor sustained the onslaught. The comments that I will never find happiness did not sting. The yelling that I am a terrible son came from a place that I was able to accept was not true, and it did not hold weight. If someone yelled, "Hey, you are an aardvark," one would not pay it any mind because the person knows it is invalid. The same theory is applied here.

Front-Sight Focus

Front sight focus involves maintaining a clear vision of long-term goals and not getting derailed by immediate challenges or distractions. This approach can provide troubled youth with direction, motivation, and the skills to achieve greater future success (Catalano et al., 2004).

- Facilitating the development of realistic but ambitious long-term goals for their future (e.g., education, career, relationships). This provides direction and hope.
- Teaching strategies like planning, delaying gratification, and perseverance to make progress toward those goals. This develops self-regulation.
- Providing consistent mentors to model prioritizing long-term aims in decision-making. This shapes their priorities and thinking.
- Reinforcing their self-efficacy and worthiness of a positive future. This builds motivation and resilience.
- Celebrating small wins that align with big-picture goals. This sustains commitment through challenges.
- Framing rules and expectations as scaffolding to reach future dreams. This adds meaning to daily structure.

This theory became relevant during my initial therapy as well. I tended to take everything on at once. So I brought that into therapy. I would want to pile on the stress. This, of course, is counterintuitive. This was taught to me around June 2017. Having a good grasp of mental toughness, I wanted to introduce front-sight focus. I am learning to focus on the most important thing or what is in my front sight. Most situations do not happen in a bubble. There is always constant change and life happening all at once. As much as I wanted to focus on building my team, overcoming family trauma, and understanding who I am, all these things cannot happen simultaneously. There must be a target that gets the concentration. This way of thinking allowed me to proceed further in life and therapy.

Extreme Ownership

Extreme Ownership is a style coined by Jocko Willink, explaining his leadership style during his time as a leader in the Navy SEALs. All responsibility for success and failure rests with the leader of any team or organization. The leader must own everything in his or her world (Willink & Babin, 2017). Jocko Willink coined the leadership theory of Extreme Ownership after years in the military. Extreme Ownership is a theory of acceptance. He accepts and takes responsibility for all aspects of an operation. Willink discusses this theory in his book, *Extreme Ownership* (Willink & Babin, 2017). All responsibility for success and failure rests with the leader of any team or organization. The leader must own everything in his or her world. There is no one else to blame. The leader must acknowledge mistakes and admit failures, take ownership of them, and develop a plan to win. This type of theory in practice can present issues for the leader regarding over-extension. Taking on these many responsibilities can be observed as a lack of boundaries (Saunders, 2013).

Extreme Ownership is a breakdown of tenants that embody leadership in any field (Willink & Babin, 2017):

- Leadership: The concept of extreme ownership is primarily focused on leadership, and the idea that leaders must take full responsibility for the success or failure of their team or organization. Research has found that effective leadership is essential for organizational success, and that leaders who take ownership of their responsibilities are more likely to be effective in their roles.
- Accountability: Extreme ownership is closely tied to the concept of accountability, or the idea that individuals must take responsibility for their actions and their outcomes. Research has found that accountability is essential for individual and organizational

success, and that individuals who take ownership of their responsibilities are more likely to achieve their goals.

- **Teamwork:** The concept of extreme ownership emphasizes the importance of teamwork and collaboration in achieving organizational goals. Effective leaders must be able to work effectively with others and must be willing to share both successes and failures with their team members.
- **Performance:** Research has found that extreme ownership can have a positive impact on performance, both at the individual and organizational levels. Leaders who take ownership of their responsibilities are more likely to be motivated, productive, and effective in achieving their goals.
- **Implementation:** While the concept of extreme ownership has been popularized in the military and business contexts, its implementation in other contexts may vary. It is important to consider the unique characteristics of each context and to tailor the concept of extreme ownership to the specific needs of the organization or team.

Extreme Ownership was the final military lesson that Sean introduced me to. This lesson was geared more toward my professional career, but it significantly affected my personal life. In January 2018, Sean was trying to help me get to the point of acceptance. According to the Theory of Acceptance, psychological suffering and emotional distress often stem from attempts to avoid or control unwanted thoughts, feelings, memories, or sensations. This avoidance or control can lead to various problems, such as anxiety, depression, and relationship issues (Hayes et al., 2006).

The theory suggests that acceptance is a more practical approach to dealing with psychological difficulties. Acceptance involves acknowledging and allowing one's thoughts and

emotions to be present without trying to change or eliminate them. It does not mean liking or approving of these experiences, but rather, being willing to experience them fully (Hayes et al., 2006).

When Sean helped me reach the point of acceptance, I could take ownership of my life and work. The nature of extreme ownership worked well with my newfound acceptance. I was able to take acceptance of all my problems and situations. I began accepting my childhood so I could begin taking ownership of it. That was the most significant step I took in my recovery. I accepted what I could and could not control but took ownership of it.

Leadership-Related Theories and Framework

In 2017, Sean and I began moving from military discipline to more theoretical leadership practices. Again, Sean's background in leadership management was a blessing. Having the ability to install discipline with my team and, more importantly, myself, I began understanding and changing my leadership style.

When I found acceptance, I began taking ownership of all aspects of my life. This leadership became a mixture and mold of the following leadership models. A leader has to set the right example for whom they are leading. Leading by example can be a potent tool. Followers will copy leaders and colleagues, so if a leader influences lousy behaviors, the followers might get those habits from the leader and each other. This can cause a very toxic team, department, etc. Higginbottom (2017) states,

We recognize that leadership does not just happen at the organization's top. It permeates throughout an organization. If people learn behaviors from colleagues and see their colleagues getting ahead, and those behaviors are not great, they will copy that behavior.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve their full potential and to work toward a shared vision or goal.

Transformational leaders are seen as charismatic, visionary, and inspirational, and are able to create a sense of purpose and meaning for their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Transformational leadership is a style in which the leader identifies a needed change and creates a vision through inspiration (Ross & Kendall, n.d.). Transformational leadership is best suited for organizations with an established in from the followers because the leader and the followers help each other to a higher level of morale (Ross & Kendall, n.d.). A transformational leader must be able to create a vision and have a growth mindset (Ross & Kendall, n.d.).

Transformational leadership also has a significant flaw, prioritization. Transformational leaders have a tendency to mentor only the individuals in the in-group (Future of Working, 2018). Even though the theory has major flaws, it still can produce and make drastic changes to groups. A significant flaw of the theory is that the long-term goals and vision, short-term and everyday challenges, and internal struggles might be ignored. Transformational leadership can overlook reality because the team and leader concentrate on just the vision (Future of Working; 2018). If there are challenges requiring detail, transformational leaders struggle with these situations. (Future of Working, 2018).

In addition, transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of personal development and growth. Leaders who adopt this style invest time and resources in developing their team's skills and knowledge, which ultimately benefits both the individual employee and the organization as a whole. This approach promotes continuous learning and encourages employees to take on new challenges and pursue professional growth opportunities. Overall,

transformational leadership is a powerful approach to leadership that inspires innovation, fosters collaboration, and helps organizations achieve their goals (Podsakoff et al., 1996).

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes the importance of being true to oneself and others, and of fostering honest and transparent relationships with followers.

Authentic leaders are seen as genuine, ethical, and trustworthy, and are able to create a positive and supportive work environment that promotes individual and organizational well-being (Ilies et al., 2005). Authentic leaders have critical interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Penn State, 2018). Interpersonal is due to the required relationship between leaders and followers (Penn State, 2018). Intrapersonal skills are based on how well leaders regulate emotions (Penn State, 2018). Authentic leadership can be described as a process that results in one being self-aware and displaying self-regulated positive behaviors that influence others to foster positive self-development (Cameron et al., 2003). One of the characteristics of authentic leadership is passion (Penn State, 2018). Authentic leadership must achieve authenticity through self-awareness, acceptance of oneself, and authentic actions and relationships (Gardner et al., 2005). Through those relationships, there must be transparency, guidance, and emphasis on follower development (Gardner et al., 2005). There are major flaws to this leadership style, though. When a leader encourages followers to be their best selves, there is often resistance (Gruenfeld & Zander, 2011). People do not typically want to change behaviors that feel natural, even though everyone would agree the change would be good and the best version of themselves (Gruenfeld & Zander, 2011). Another possibility is the leader. If a leader is a dishonest person, and that is their true self, it will be reflected by their team (Gruenfeld & Zander, 2011).

Trauma Informed Leadership

Trauma-informed leadership is a leadership approach that recognizes and responds to the impact of trauma on individuals and organizations. Trauma-informed leaders prioritize safety, trust, and transparency, and work to create a supportive and empowering environment for their employees or followers (Oliva, 2020). Originally for academics, success has also been found using the framework for mental health and social-emotional learning (Arora et al., 2019; Weist et al., 2019). Most of the literature on trauma-informed leadership is based in the healthcare field. In this dissertation, the focus of this leadership style will be more in an organizational context, but the early work regarding healthcare must be addressed. The impact of trauma can be different for each person. Trauma is an emotional experience that directly impacts each student slightly differently but has a definite and lasting impact on learning. Kristin Souers and Pete Hall (2016) point out, “Our interpretations influence the degree of impact we feel following exposure to a traumatic event” (p. 16). The foundation of being a trauma-informed leader is transformational work that heals adult trauma inside out (Scruggs-Hussein & Neely-Opipari, 2018). This type of leadership is one method for those suffering trauma to become leaders. There is no substitute for experience; having bouts of trauma allows one to empathize with those who suffered or are suffering through trauma. This is how trauma-informed leadership works. It provides the leader empathy while allowing their followers the opportunity to grow. This also provides some benefits of communicating and venting issues as the leader. Trauma is prevalent in our world and impacts everyone, including our staff, colleagues, and clients (Gerbrandt et al., 2021). Trauma-informed leaders and the employees led by those leaders are aware of the pervasiveness of trauma and its significance in people’s lives. Trauma-informed leadership is a way of understanding or appreciating an emotional world of experiences rumbling beneath the surface of

the workplace. When emotional responses are triggered in the workplace, each person responds according to the extent of their emotional scars, traumas, and emotional strengths (Tweedy, 2018). Leaders of prosocial change are sometimes propelled by traumatic personal experiences to lead other sufferers to wholeness to prevent future tragedies similar to their own (Fazio, 2009; Frazier et al., 2012). According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; 2014), a program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

- Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Seeks to resist re-traumatization actively.

Gerbrandt, in the book, *A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces*, discussed his critical steps to achieving a trauma-informed workplace:

- Promote Awareness
- Shift Attitudes
- Foster Safety
- Provide Choice
- Highlight Strengths

Traumatic loss has been cited as the motivation behind the foundation of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Susan G. Komen Foundation, and numerous parent-led organizations. Survivors have also organized successful efforts against trafficking and slavery

(Cadet, 2011; Lloyd, 2012). Kirschman (2004) alluded to this in writing, “This will change you, but it does not have to damage you” (p. 182). Trauma survivors are not damaged but are often improved for enduring and surviving (Almedom, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Self Authorship Theory

Self-authorship is considered an evolution of consciousness. Robert Keagan developed the original theory; later, Baxter Magolda added elements to its use. The further one goes into evolving their consciousness, the more it can be rewritten. I understand that our minds cannot change history, but how it affects us can be manipulated (Kegan, 1982). Baxter Magolda (2001) discusses becoming an author in your individual life as part of a journey through self-authorship after you come to a crossroads. The term self-authorship refers to a phase of development within the lifelong process of self-evolution (Baxter, 2010). Self-authorship is characterized by internally generating and coordinating one’s beliefs, values, and internal loyalties, rather than depending on external values, beliefs, and interpersonal loyalties. Self-authoring individuals take internal and external responsibility for their thinking, feeling, and acting (Baxter, 2010). In addition to seeing themselves as the creator of feelings, they can internally reflect on and hold conflicting or contradictory feelings rather than being subject to these changing emotions. Questions of personal integrity are essential from a self-authoring perspective because individuals evaluate themselves based on internal standards (Baxter, 2010).

If you were writing your own story, you would write yourself as the hero. Even villains think they are doing the right thing for themselves, so they are heroes in their own mind. This is the power of self authorship. It provides one with the power to lead themselves in their own situation and or story.

There comes a limit to what a person can accomplish without help. That was my situation when I was allowed to become a leader of a team in an organization. My aggression and no-excuse attitude led me to the ceiling. A ceiling that many lower-level employees know all too well. When a question must be asked, “Now what?” My organization entrusted me with a new position where I had to be responsible for a team. A team of people who would be looking to me for leadership and guidance. Two things I knew I did not have within me. That scary sensation led me to seek a professional therapist. Before that decision, I would bury myself in work. That was the only aspect of my life I had control over. I had zero friends outside of work. This no doubt came from my isolation as a child and teenager. I always needed to learn how to bond and communicate with others. I would naturally shut down most emotions around people, and relationships were mainly only single-layered. My search started with therapists that specialized in childhood trauma and PTSD.

Professional Progress

The more and more I began letting go of my past, the more I was able to begin empathizing with my team on their own personal feelings and start gaining their trust. The value of my therapy started to pay off for my team and I pretty quickly. My team was coming up against major deadlines and as a new team leader, I was looked at with much scrutiny. The new manager without a college degree. Without experience leading others. I was always socially awkward due to the already stated issues from my past, so putting me in a position to lead others was a huge risk that the organization took. The company was in a desperate situation due to the fact that at the time, technology in the Bay Area of California was booming. This made hiring not as experienced professionals a must due to budget restraints on smaller companies. So I do have to admit I had a rare opportunity to move into a leadership position when normal.

One of my leads needed to talk to me about a personal problem. This was January, so it was about six months of constant therapy. She looked really phased and concerned, so we walked into a conference room and closed the door. The room was not scheduled to be used, so I felt it would be a safe space for us to discuss her issue in private. She began explaining to me that she was having marital issues and suffered from a traumatic childhood as well. Her father choked her on a certain occasion, and she has been haunted by it. The trauma played a large role in her marital issues. I decided to help her as a leader and as a person who has suffered similar trauma as well. This was an opportunity to use some of the guidance I was receiving in therapy in my professional life. Trauma Informed Care is definitely something I was able to use in this situation. I understood the trauma she felt all too well. We were able to come up with a plan moving forward. She would at times begin crying. With PTSD, a lot of the scenes and emotions play back and random times. I advised her when that time does come, she can use my office and lock the door if I am not in a meeting. It was a simple solution that really helped her move forward.

Conclusion

I look back at my trauma and life. The lessons learned. The beatings taken. Iron sharpens iron in the end though. Would I be able to understand resiliency without going through so much trauma? It is something that for obvious reasons I would never be able to answer. At the end of it all, I am grateful for it all. The ups and the downs. It taught me resiliency, discipline, and grit. Without all the trauma, I do not think I would be as successful as I have been. I feel that the end of this road, my story is not about trauma, it is about redemption. I overcame wrongs, some were of my own doings, but in the end, I was able to see my own transformation. Hopefully this journey will be a help to others.

CHAPTER VI: NOW WHAT?

Introduction

This entire process was grounding and therapeutic. Writing my past is not an example of self-authorship theory, but what I could do after therapy is. This story can help other young leaders who had a bad start to be able to lead others. Leadership development is an ongoing process that involves self-reflection, learning from experience, and seeking feedback from others. Effective leadership can significantly impact organizational success, employee engagement, and overall well-being (Northouse, 2019).

Summary of Findings

Leadership theories can help individuals accomplish endless goals. There is more than one leadership theory, but the methods I used to achieve what I have to go deeper, some might say toxic. Leadership is a social influence process involving guiding and directing a group toward a specific goal or objective (Northouse, 2019). Different leadership styles can be effective depending on the situation and context. For example, transformational leadership effectively inspires followers and achieves long-term goals, while transactional leadership can effectively ensure compliance and meet short-term objectives (Bass, 1999). Authentic leadership involves being self-aware, transparent, and guided by ethical principles and has been linked to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, trust, and commitment among followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others, has been linked to effective leadership and positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Goleman, 1998). Leadership development is an ongoing process that involves self-reflection, feedback, and continuous learning (Day et al., 2009).

Leadership theories became crucial in overcoming trauma by providing me a framework for understanding how to hone in on skills, behaviors, and attitudes to lead myself better and, in turn, lead others. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve a shared vision by creating a positive and supportive environment. Individuals who have experienced trauma can benefit from transformational leadership by focusing on personal growth, self-reflection, and building supportive relationships with others (Podsakoff et al., 1996). Authentic leaders are transparent, self-aware, and guided by ethical principles. Individuals who have experienced trauma can benefit from authentic leadership by focusing on self-reflection, honesty, and integrity. Authentic leadership can help individuals develop a sense of purpose and direction (George, 2003).

The traits that I used early in my professional career were based on fear, shame, and anger. No leadership theory is based on fear, shame, and anger as positive motivators for followers. However, some theories discuss how negative emotions such as fear, shame, and anger can be used negatively by leaders to manipulate or control their followers. The abusive supervision model suggests that leaders who use fear, shame, or anger to exert power over their subordinates can cause adverse outcomes such as increased job stress, reduced job satisfaction, and decreased performance. (Tepper, 2000). Similarly, toxic leadership describes leaders who exhibit destructive behaviors such as bullying, intimidation, and scapegoating, which can create fear, shame, and anger among their followers (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

The abusive supervision model is a theory that describes how negative leadership behaviors can harm employees and organizations. The model suggests abusive supervision occurs when leaders engage in harmful or unethical behaviors towards their subordinates, such as verbal abuse, intimidation, or belittlement. These behaviors can create a hostile work

environment, leading to adverse outcomes for employees and the organization (Tepper, 2000).

The abusive supervision model also suggests that several factors can contribute to abusive supervision, such as the leader's personality traits, the organization's culture and climate, and the power dynamics between the leader and their subordinates (Tepper, 2000). The toxicity I learned does have a model and research behind it, but my success came when I was able to overcome my trauma using more positive approaches to leadership. I compare the abusive supervision model to a bad parent/child relationship. Abusive parent-child relationships can be influenced by a range of factors, including parental mental health problems, substance abuse, poverty, and social isolation. Parental history of abuse and neglect can also be a risk factor for abusive behavior towards children (Belsky, 1993).

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research into leadership theories and overcoming trauma could provide valuable insights into how individuals can use leadership skills and behaviors to promote healing and resilience after traumatic experiences. One potential avenue for research could be to explore the effectiveness of different leadership approaches, such as transformational, servant, and authentic leadership, in supporting individuals who have experienced trauma. This research could examine how leadership styles and behaviors can influence outcomes such as post-traumatic growth, well-being, and job satisfaction.

Research could be done to investigate the role of leadership development programs in promoting resilience and recovery from trauma. This research could assess the effectiveness of leadership training programs in improving leadership skills and behaviors among individuals who have experienced trauma and examine how these skills can be applied in personal and professional contexts.

Another area of future research could be the intersection between leadership and technology in the context of trauma. With the rise of telehealth and other technology-based interventions, leadership theories could be adapted to better incorporate technology in promoting recovery from trauma. This could include developing virtual leadership development programs, incorporating technology into trauma-informed leadership practices, and using technology to support and provide resources for individuals who have experienced trauma.

Future research could explore leadership approaches that focus on equity and social justice. Trauma is often associated with experiences of inequality and discrimination, and leadership approaches that prioritize promoting equity, and social justice could be particularly effective in overcoming trauma. This could include examining the effectiveness of anti-racist leadership practices in promoting recovery from trauma and exploring the potential for leadership theories specifically designed to address the effects of systemic oppression and discrimination on individuals and communities.

Additionally, future research could explore the intersection between leadership, trauma, and diversity. This research could examine how different cultural, social, and personal identities can influence the experience of trauma and the effectiveness of leadership approaches in promoting healing and resilience.

HEA - Heal Enhancement Assessment

There is significant evidence that trauma can be cyclical in nature and continue across generations (Doucet & Rovers, 2010). Trauma has been demonstrated to recurse in cycles through a variety of biological, psychological, and social mechanisms. Breaking these traumatic chains requires focused interventions.

Healing can be seen in a similar cyclical fashion. A study on male childhood sexual abuse dreams found that their dream patterns were cyclical. It would typically go from (Meier et al., 2008):

- Fear
- Anger
- Shame
- Empowerment
- Healing

I feel the management of trauma itself can be seen as cyclical as well. Certain memories or trauma are probably not going to be forgotten or numbed. That is why there needs to be more research on practical management of it. Of course, there needs to be more practical research done in the future on this. I do have a hypothesis on the matter. I feel that the cycle would look like the following.

Figure 6.2*HEAL Graph*

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- Healing Stage is a specific phase within the process where individuals begin to experience positive changes and progress towards their desired goals. The goal for individuals is to begin to experience positive changes and progress towards their desired goals (Herth, 1991).
 - Assessment Stage is an important phase in various contexts, including education, professional settings. It involves the systematic gathering and evaluation of information to understand a situation, identify needs, determine capabilities, or make informed decisions (Cohen, 2018).
 - Enhancement Stage refers to the process of improving or refining a skill to a higher level of performance or proficiency. It involves making progress beyond the initial acquisition of the skill and actively working to enhance and develop it further. Enhancing a skill often involves honing specific aspects, deepening understanding, and striving for higher

levels of competence. It may include refining technique, expanding knowledge, improving efficiency, increasing accuracy, or adding creativity and nuance to the skill. Enhancement implies a continuous effort to go beyond the basic level of proficiency and reach a more advanced or expert level of mastery (Dweck, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this autoethnography has offered a profoundly introspective and personal exploration of the intersections between culture and lived experiences. Through the lens of self-reflection, storytelling, and critical analysis, I could delve into the complexities and nuances of my own life, revealing the rich tapestry of narratives that shaped who I am.

Throughout this autoethnography, I blended subjective experiences with scholarly insights, weaving together a narrative that informs and emotionally resonates with the reader of this study. Autoethnography is a powerful tool for challenging dominant narratives and questioning established norms. It encourages a reflexive examination of the self, prompting us to question our biases and assumptions.

Moreover, I hope to add to the larger academic discourse by offering a valuable insider's perspective on cultural practices, traditions, and social dynamics. It provides a firsthand account that can inform and enrich scholarly understandings, inviting readers to reevaluate their preconceived notions and consider alternative viewpoints on masculinity and other themes.

Ultimately, this study serves as a testament to the transformative power of self-narrative. By embracing vulnerability, challenging assumptions, and embracing the complexity of the human experience, I hope to inspire others in similar situations as I was in.

May this autoethnography inspire others to embark on their own journeys of self-discovery, to explore the contours of their identity, and to share their stories with courage

and authenticity. By doing so, we can collectively foster a more inclusive and compassionate society that honors and values the richness of diverse lived experiences.

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