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## Childhood Trauma, Attachment, and Adult Leadership Styles

Joshua S. Duncan  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Joshua S. Duncan

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Review Committee

Dr. Michael Langlais, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Livia Gilstrap, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Childhood Trauma, Attachment, and Adult Leadership Styles

by

Joshua S. Duncan

MA, Sioux Falls Seminary, 2016

BS, University of Sioux Falls, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

Walden University

August 2024

## Abstract

Past researchers have shown relationships between leadership styles and attachment and that secure attachment is positively related to transformational leadership. However, there is a gap in the research on how childhood trauma and attachment security relate to leadership styles in adults. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine how childhood trauma and attachment security relate to transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Social cognitive theory and attachment theory grounded this study. In this quantitative study, the specific research design was comparative. SurveyMonkey was used to gather data from supervisor/manager leaders who were recruited on social media ( $N = 124$ ). The instruments used to gather data were the multifactor leadership questionnaire, experience in close relationships, and the adverse childhood experience scale. SPSS software was utilized to analyze the data. Results of regression analyses showed that attachment avoidance and childhood trauma did not relate to leadership styles. However, attachment anxiety was associated with transformational and laissez-faire leadership styles (but not transactional). Additionally, in alignment with past research, the current study showed a positive correlation between transformational and transactional leadership styles. Characteristics of attachment security (and insecurity) may mirror specific traits of different leadership styles. The findings of this study could have implications for positive social change by identifying traits that can shape leadership, specifically how leadership relates to attachment and trauma.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my oldest brother, Derrick Duncan, who passed away at age 42 on September 11, 2019, two weeks after starting this program. To my grandmother Willa Mae Head who passed during the pandemic, December 11, 2020. To my biological mother, Pam Heard, who passed August 8, 2021. To a great counseling mentor, the late Dr. JC Chambers. Lastly, to the many other loved ones lost during this journey.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction and Background**

Success, thriving, or influencing others can depend on leadership style. For an organization, community, or family to be successful, a single person is required to lead, and the success can be associated with that leader's quality. A quality leader possesses leadership skills, character, communication, and the ability to guide people to a common goal. Specifically, a high-quality leader in the work environment will make it hard for employees to leave. However, a low-quality leader can make it easy for employees to leave. High employee turnover can cost organizations money, time, and overall organizational success. Leadership directly impacts employees' long-term commitment to a company's mission, vision, and growth (Kurniawati et al., 2022). Moreover, recent research has shown that the quality of leadership for adults, which is determined by their positive influence in organizations, is correlated to attachment security (Kurniawati et al., 2022).

Furthermore, what makes a quality leader, how are they developed into that, and what life journey of growth must they embark on? What leadership style and ability to connect must a leader embody to influence, inspire, and cause engagement in the company mission? What type of leader is a low-quality leader, and as mentioned above, what influences cause them to become that type of leader? In this study, I explored how childhood trauma and attachment security (anxiety and avoidance) are related to the development of adult leadership styles (transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire).

Thus, this study aimed to understand how attachment security and trauma relate to different leadership styles.

Over the last 50 years, studies of leadership styles and behaviors have found that transformational leadership is the best (Burns, 1978; Underwood, 2015). This leadership behavior is people oriented, meaning these leaders develop, coach, and mentor people to be their most powerful selves. Additionally, the transformational leadership style is highly relational, as it has been shown to create a high commitment in followers, improving attitudes in work environments and self-growth (Hansbrough, 2012; Underwood, 2015). Second, researchers have discovered that followers seek similar personality characteristics in a leader. Transformational leadership is one that followers are drawn to when they need to improve in areas and perceive that the leader has the quality they want to develop. For example, a leader could inspire through their communication, and a follower lacking communication skills and self-confidence can learn from that person (Hansbrough, 2012).

The transactional style of leadership has a focus on goal orientation. This style can cause an organization to be numbers focused and reward based on performance, creating a highly competitive environment (Reis-Neto et al., 2018). This style of leadership rewards and punishes people psychologically or materially. For example, teams or individuals may receive a large bonus if they meet company goals. If teams and individuals do not meet goals, they may be required to work extra hours (Reis-Neto et al., 2018). Employees who fail to achieve goals could feel disappointed, make excuses, and

possibly be punished by the organization (Reis-Neto et al., 2018). Again, this leadership style is goal oriented and ensures that goals are met.

The laissez-faire leadership style reflects apathy, lack of focus, low-quality leadership, and accountability and creates a hostile work environment due to the leader needing to be more caring (Ekmekci & Tosunoglu, 2016; Underwood, 2015). This type of leader would be characterized as destructive to organizations. This leadership style is defined as lacking presence or zero leadership. For example, they do not focus on the needs of the employees or those they lead. Not only that, but past research has also shown that these types of leaders with this style do not meet followers' expectations, are not role models, and are unengaged with conflicts, ultimately impacting the organization negatively (Ekmekci & Tosunoglu, 2016). The past research also determined that laissez-faire leadership does not seem to empower followers or prepare them with a vision of the future. Thus, the laissez-faire leader leaves their followers visionless, and followers are likely to become disengaged (Ekmekci & Tosunoglu, 2016).

Through research formalized by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1991), attachment security explains how early connections between caregivers and infants influence relational connections into adulthood. Attachment security demonstrates high balance and internal control in emotional self-management. Attachment-avoidant is defined as self-confident individuals who have a low emotional display and lack of internal control. Attachment anxiety is defined as individuals displaying more disconnection and anger emotions in relationships (Underwood, 2015). Attachment security is related to leadership style, as previous studies show that certain attachment

types correlate with leadership styles. For example, Underwood (2015) found that transformational leaders display a secure attachment style because transformational leaders are most likely to create high-quality, healthy work environments due to their people-oriented focus (Ekmekci & Tosunoglu, 2016; Underwood, 2015)). What is not known in studies is how trauma and attachment security are related to the development of leadership styles in adulthood. Attachment security for this study was measured using attachment anxiety and avoidance. Furthermore, attachment security and trauma have been individually investigated with leadership styles, but not simultaneously (Reis Neto et al., 2019; Underwood, 2015).

Chapter 1 will present the background to the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses, the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, the definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, significance of the study, and previous research on attachment and leadership styles. Chapter 2 will include the literature review, Chapter 3 will cover the research method, Chapter 4 presents the study results, and Chapter 5 includes the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

### **Background**

Although researchers have studied the issue of how leadership styles are developed, they have not included the impact of trauma in the leadership development process, which this study aims to research. Leaders set the overall organizational environment, and if a leader has poor leadership skills, it creates an unhealthy environment for followers. For example, poor leadership could look like weak



communication skills, lack of interest in followers' well-being and focus on productivity rather than developing people. All these leadership behaviors could negatively influence employee retention. Previous studies have focused on leadership styles and attachment security but have not also examined childhood trauma (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Oedzes et al., 2019; Underwood, 2015). These studies explored the relationship between attachment security and how it could predict leadership style. These studies found a direct correlation between attachment security and transformational leadership, but it is unclear regarding other leadership styles. This study included childhood trauma and attachment security in relation to all three adult leadership styles.

Leadership theories address the influence of hierarchical structures on the work environment and team performance in that they bring an understanding of how power dynamics influence leader–follower relationships. The leader–follower relationship influences how a team functions and whether it has low or high retention and can create a healthy or unhealthy work environment. Research has shown that the lack of strong leader–follower relationships due to poor leadership can create organizational challenges and impact growth. For example, leader behaviors are important, focusing on team development versus driving the business numbers, which can negatively impact employee retention in the long run because underperforming followers will not stay long (Oedzes et al., 2019).

Researchers have investigated how an individual leader's role can foster positive outcomes in organizations and in achieving goals and objectives (Oke et al., 2019). For example, a transformational leader is an authentic leader and will exhibit behaviors that

demonstrate and allow employees to be innovative and themselves. Furthermore, a transformational leader is associated with an authentic leader, and this behavior style could create spaces for safe environments and healthy cultures to develop, allowing for a culture of growth, development, collaboration, and long-term commitment from followers (Guenter et al., 2017).

The gap in the literature is the association of how childhood trauma and attachment security influence the development of leadership styles in adults (Underwood, 2015). For instance, Underwood (2015) communicated the relationship of leadership style with attachment security in that they discovered that secure attachment has a relationship to transformational leadership. However, a gap in the research is how childhood trauma and attachment security influence the development of leadership styles in adults, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles. Previous studies have shown a strong relationship between transformational leaders and high attachment security (Bass, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1995; Underwood, 2015).

### **Problem Statement**

The situation or issue that prompted this research study is that in current literature, it is not known how childhood trauma and attachment security are related to adult leadership style. Childhood trauma and attachment security can create challenges in learning how to meet needs in healthy ways, which can be due to high trauma and attachment insecurity. This research explored what predicts leadership styles in adults due to childhood trauma and attachment security. Previous research on these specific variables of leadership style and attachment security found a correlation between the two

(Bass, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1995; Eldad & Benatov, 2018; Underwood, 2015). More specifically, insecure attachment style was negatively related to transformational leadership, and high attachment security was related to transformational leadership.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This quantitative study examined how childhood traumas and attachment security are related to the development of certain adult leadership styles: transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire. Attachment security was measured by attachment anxiety and avoidance (see Hazan & Shaver, 1990). This study examined whether childhood trauma and attachment security may predict an adult's leadership style. This study predicts that if a person is transformational, they will have low childhood trauma and attachment security. This study also predicts that if a person has high trauma and attachment insecurity, they will have a laissez-faire leadership style. Thus, an adult with high trauma and attachment insecurity (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) has a leadership style that is less effective due to being less transformational.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

RQ: Does childhood trauma, measured by the adverse childhood experience (ACE) scale and attachment security (measured by attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) relate to leadership style (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire)?

$H_01a$ : There is no relationship between trauma and transformational leadership.

$H_{a1a}$ : There is a negative relationship between trauma and transformational leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>1b*: There is no relationship between attachment security and transformational leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>1b*: There is a positive relationship between attachment security and transformational leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>2a*: There is no relationship between trauma and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>2a*: There is a positive relationship between trauma and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>2b*: There is no relationship between attachment security and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>2b*: There is a negative relationship between attachment security and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>3a*: There is no relationship between trauma and laissez-faire leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>3a*: There is a positive relationship between trauma and laissez-faire leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>3b*: There is no relationship between attachment security and laissez-faire leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>3b*: There is a negative relationship between attachment security and laissez-faire leadership.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura (1977), is the theory that grounded this study. This theory focuses on watching, modeling, and imitating the behaviors of others. This theory is used to examine how environmental experiences and

cognitive factors interact to influence behaviors. The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of this study include the theoretical framework of SCT (Bandura, 1977) and the impact of childhood trauma on an individual. SCT connects to the nature of the study in that it addresses the learning and experiences that occur environmentally (relationally with attachment security) from early childhood into adulthood. This study will predict and conclude how both attachment security and childhood trauma factors contribute to developing adult leadership styles.

### **Attachment Securities**

The second theory utilized in this study was attachment theory developed by John Bowlby (Slater, 2007). Attachment securities are developed by engagement from primary caregivers from the time an individual is born. Attachment security is defined by how well people can connect and disconnect in relationships and balance and exhibit internal control in emotional self-management (Bowlby, 1982). This study measured anxiety and avoidance (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). *Attachment anxiety* is defined as individuals displaying more disconnection and anger emotions in relationships. *Attachment avoidance* is defined as individuals who are self-confident but have a low emotional display and lack of internal control. This interaction creates an internal working model of relationships used throughout an individual's life. This internal working model is a theory of four attachment styles: secure, anxious–ambivalent, disorganized, and avoidant. Second, Bowlby's attachment theory explored how early relationship connections and disconnections developed from primary caregivers influence children's ability to connect well into adulthood (Slater, 2007).

## **Leadership Theories**

The first two leadership styles are transformational and transactional, created by James MacGregor Burns (1978). *Transformational leadership* is a style that causes a change in individuals and social systems. This type of leader is transformed by developing followers into leaders using motivation and morale and being an intentional, people-oriented role model (Burns, 1978). The transactional leadership style has more structure and checks and balances and is goal-oriented (Burns, 1978). Kurt Lewin developed the third laissez-faire leadership approach. Laissez-faire is a laid-back, hands-off type of leadership style (Ekmekci et al., 2016).

## **Nature of the Study**

The research question was answered by a regression design to address this quantitative study. The specific research design is comparative. I surveyed 124 supervisor/manager-level leaders of profit and nonprofit organizations. The recruitment process involved social media advertisements on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. I used the experiences in close relationships (ECR) to measure attachment security (Fraley, 2000). Second, I used the multifactor leadership scale (MLQ) to measure the three leadership styles (Bass & Avolio, 1995). Lastly, the ACE scale was used to measure levels of trauma (Felitti et al., 2019). The survey took an average of 15-20 minutes to complete.

I used SPSS software and SurveyMonkey for this planned research design. SurveyMonkey was used to collect data from 124 participants, supervisor/manager level leaders of nonprofit and profit organizations. To have strong power to conclude

accurately about the population, the rule of thumb is no fewer than 50 participants for a regression, increasing when more variables are being evaluated (Wilson et al., 2007). In this study, the power was .95, the effect size was .15, and three predictors exist. For this study to have a strong effect size or success, the sample size minimum was 119 participants. This number was calculated using G\*Power software, which determines the needed effect size based on the variables, research design, and methods for the study (Kang, 2021).

With Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the ad was posted on social media to recruit participants. The data points from this survey were the scores from the ACE, attachment security, and one of three leadership styles from the completed questionnaires. With this study, I aimed to bring awareness to the association between leadership style and childhood trauma from the data.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Attachment security:* How well people can connect and disconnect in relationships, balance, and exhibit internal control in emotional self-management (Bowlby, 1969; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011). Attachment security means having high levels of warmth and balance of control (Underwood et al., 2016) and is represented by a predictable, safe, affectionate bond with the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 2007). For example, with this attachment security, the person has a positive view of self and others. A securely attached person will be comfortable with emotional intimacy, healthy boundaries, and trusting others.

*Attachment anxiety:* Individuals displaying more disconnection, anger, and instability in emotions in relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). For example, the person in the relationship has a negative view of self and a positive view of others but has high codependence due to a fear of abandonment.

*Attachment avoidance:* Self-confident individuals who have a low emotional display and lack of internal control (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). For example, the person in a relationship has a positive view of self and a negative view of others. This style will struggle with emotional intimacy, hold rigid boundaries, and find it difficult to trust others.

*Laissez-faire (non-leadership):* A hands-off, let-things-ride approach (Northouse, 2010) to influencing individuals in the workplace. Laissez-faire leadership is described as the absence of leadership and the avoidance of intervention (Ekmeckci & Tosunoglu, 2016).

*Leadership:* Leaders are agents of change whose actions can affect others more than the acts of others can affect them. Leadership from this perspective occurs when a member of the group modifies the skills of others in the group toward a common goal (Reis-Neo et al., 2018).

*Social cognitive theory (SCT):* A behavior change theory focusing on the importance of self-regulation as a source to direct life comprised of three components: self-monitoring, self-judgment, and self-evaluation (Bandura, 1986; Tougas et al., 2015).

*Transactional leadership:* Goal-focused, this type of exchange involves a leader's direction or mutual discussion with the followers with a punishing reward system that



allows them to achieve the desired goals. The punishment and the reward can be psychological or material (Reis-Neo et al., 2018).

*Transformational leadership:* A people-focused approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems. This style creates valuable and positive change in the followers to develop them into leaders by coaching or mentoring them (Roberts, 1985).

*Trauma:* An emotional or physical response when one experiences physically harmful or life-threatening events or circumstances that can cause adverse risks to one's mental and physical well-being for an extended period (Felitti et al., 1998).

### **Assumptions**

This study assumed that participants would answer all questions to the best of their ability and knowledge based on their life history. It was assumed that participants would be honest with all their responses. Also, the study assumed that participants could understand the terms and what the questions asked of them to give a valid answer. Thus, the test questionnaires and instruments could be used effectively and appropriately to yield positive results for this study.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A limitation of this study would be if participants do not respond correctly to a question and do not feel safe answering questions relating to sensitive issues. The participants could have limited time to complete surveys due to their schedules or time constraints with work, family, or other obligations. Furthermore, the comparative study could show a relationship between variables without controlling or manipulating the study. Moreover, not controlling the study is a limitation because that process does not

guarantee the researcher's ability to determine causation. Lastly, nonrandom sampling is another limitation because I was not selecting a specific sample and used a convenience sample. Lastly, the approach used was convenience sampling, which allowed for gaining information from participants who were easy to access for the research.

The delimitations for the study are those under 18 years of age due to the inability to monitor SurveyMonkey and adding the need for parental consent could create participant challenges. They are additionally, wanting those with more leadership experience. Non-leaders are not allowed to participate in the survey because this study focused on understanding leadership styles. Those who are 18, the age of consent in most states in the United States, are allowed to participate in this study if they have leadership experience.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because the original contribution was to examine the relationship of childhood trauma and attachment security with the development of adult leadership styles. Furthermore, the research could help future leaders understand the influence of childhood trauma and could aid organizations in becoming more trauma informed as they endeavor to create safer and healthier environments in their companies. When leaders lead well, research has shown that retention is high and impacts organizational success overall.

Second, this study could hopefully help organizations create best practices for coaching leaders who are not leading well in their positions. Low-quality leading could be due to unknown internal triggers, and the findings of this study could help leaders be

more intentional about healthy habits they must implement to influence better environments at work and home, resulting in long-term success. Leaders from small grassroots to large movements create waves of social change when a leader is self-aware, healthy, and people focused. The research could shed some light on how to help low-quality leaders who have suffered trauma develop into stronger leaders; thereby, families, communities, and organizations ultimately benefit.

### **Summary and Transition**

Improved leadership could influence homes, communities, and the world, creating positive social change. This study aimed to bring awareness of how leaders are made, and organizations can create interventions for leaders to improve when that is understood. Moreover, this study examined how childhood trauma and attachment security influence the development of leadership styles in adulthood. If leaders have an opportunity to understand themselves, then those they lead benefit considerably and some people, places, and things benefit as well.

To achieve the goals of this study, Chapter 2 introduces the literature review of trauma, attachment theory, and leadership theory and how it is essential to understand how they influence one another. Chapter 3 will discuss the research design and how this design is connected to the problem statement to justify the reason for this study and the quantitative study method. Chapter 3 also discusses instrumentation, recruiting participants, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this quantitative study, I examined how childhood trauma and attachment security may influence the development of three adult leadership styles: transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire. Studies have identified a gap in the literature concerning the relationship between childhood trauma(s) and attachment security and how these variables can influence the development of leadership styles in adults, specifically transformational, transactional (Burns, 1978), and laissez-faire leadership (Ekmekci et al., 2016). Past research studies have shown that attachment security and leadership styles can influence environments, particularly work environments in organizations. For example, transformational leadership is associated with maintaining steady employment (Neto et al., 2018). Because leaders are change agents (Neto et al., 2018), their actions directly impact people and organizations.

Attachment security can contribute to how healthy interactions occur between leaders and followers. Attachment security helps explain how a person connects or interacts with others, which develops out of primary caregiver relationships from early childhood (Underwood et al., 2016). Current research into how attachment security correlates with leadership style development has shown that adult attachment influences leadership styles. In studies of leadership style and attachment security researchers investigated transformational leadership and style in adults (Hansbrough, 2012; Neto et al., 2018). Underwood et al. (2015) found a relationship between dismissing attachment and the laissez-faire leadership style (Underwood et al., 2016). These studies brought

awareness that the leadership style of adults is impacted by attachment style, which also influences work environments. However, it is still unclear how attachment security, in combination with trauma during childhood, may also relate to these leadership styles, which a gap addressed in this study.

In addition to attachment theory, the theoretical framework of SCT (Bandura, 1977) was used to examine how modeling can influence the development of leadership styles. What is not known is how trauma and attachment are associated with leadership style development in adults. Research is still needed to investigate how trauma from childhood, attachment security (meaning attachment anxiety and avoidance), and leadership style in adults are related. This chapter will provide an overview of the literature, definitions of leadership, review the theoretical foundations of SCT, leadership, and attachment security, and provide a thorough literature of the variables associated with this dissertation.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The articles in this section were found using the EBSCO database, with publication dates ranging from 1950 to 2023. The APA PsycArticles, APA PsycBooks, APA PsycExtra, and APA PsycInfo databases were also used. The keywords searched in the Academic search premier database were *leadership, social learning theory, social cognitive theory, Albert Bandura, John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, attachment theory, adult leadership styles, transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, family systems, and childhood traumas*.

## **Research Gap**

Leadership is a process in which an individual influences other group members, allowing an organization to achieve its goals and succeed in its vision (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). Leadership styles are a way or method used to get followers to move an organization into success based on one's style of leading (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). Some examples of leadership included transformational leadership, which is people oriented; transactional leadership, which is goal oriented; and laissez-faire, which is a relaxed approach. In further sections, these three approaches will be reviewed.

The problem that this research sought to solve is determining how leadership styles are influenced by attachment and childhood trauma. The broader goal of this study was to explain ways to help adults be positive, strong, and healthy leaders who influence all aspects of life, including their followers, to be better positively. Many studies have examined the relationship between attachment securities and leadership styles in the workplace (Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Underwood, 2015). For instance, Hazan and Shaver (1990) found that leaders with a secure attachment and transformational leadership styles promote happy followers. Transformational leaders demonstrate sensitivity and awareness to their followers (Popper & Mayseless, 2003). Other studies have also found correlations between attachment style and leadership variables (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Popper et al., 2000; Popper & Mayseless, 2003). Although there is some information about attachment style and leadership styles, there is another variable that has not yet been investigated, which is childhood trauma.

Therefore, there is a gap in the literature regarding trauma and leadership styles. Studies have examined leadership and attachment (Khorakian & Sharifirad, 2019; Underwood, 2015), showing that transformational leadership is highly related to secure attachment. Additionally, these studies found that a person with an insecure attachment would develop a transactional leadership style. However, there is a lot that is unknown regarding how the level of trauma, together with attachment style, influences the development of leadership styles in adults.

Thus, the gap that exists in the literature is how childhood trauma and attachment security influence leadership style in adults. Past studies have investigated leadership styles and attachment securities but have not examined the role of childhood trauma. To address this gap, this research was designed as a quantitative study that addresses attachment and trauma to see how both variables influence leadership styles. The study will use inferential quantitative analysis techniques for this study to help fill this gap, notably linear regression.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

SCT, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), is one of the theories that grounded this study. SCT, originally known as *social learning theory*, focuses on watching, modeling, and imitating the behaviors of others and plays a significant role in developing leadership skills and styles (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) defined SCT as the social environment's critical role in motivation, learning, and self-regulation. This theory is used to examine how environmental experiences and cognitive

factors interact to influence behaviors. Initially, Bandura sought to examine aggression in adolescents.

In his research in the late 1950s, Bandura concluded that aggressive behaviors come from boys suffering dependency anxiety stemming from rejection and punishment (Grusec, 1992). The results of this research show that early negative interactions influence how children develop emotions and how they regulate them. Bandura's SCT was influenced by operant tradition or operant theory developed by B.F. Skinner (Grusec, 1992). Instead of mechanistic conditions explaining behavior, Bandura focused on how individuals process information (Grusec, 1992). Thus, observational learning, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and reciprocal determinism were identified. With these concepts in mind, it is also important to note that Bandura's theory has a premise of agency: a person can influence notable events in their lives (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). This happens by an individual using their cognitive and self-regulation capabilities. For example, an individual could set a goal to go to the gym three times a week for 1 hour to lose 5 pounds in a month. This approach shows how individuals can create a strategy, monitor it, and make necessary adjustments until the goal is reached (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Observational learning has four components that are valid and can be applicable when processing information. For observational learning to occur, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) described these components as the following: an individual must stay focused on the model, mentally keep what the model performed, then do the task they witnessed the model do, and have the motivation to do the task. A key component of



motivation for repeating the task is the perceived positive outcomes. Social interaction with observers helps to model the behavior that influences the outcome or meets the initial expectation (Schkunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). People learn from watching what others do in social settings (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). For example, a child observes how a parent holds a spoon a certain way, and they do not spill food. After the child observes the parent for a few weeks, they hold it like their parent, reducing food being spilled. The first component is that the person must pay attention to what is modeled, whether live or symbolic. The critical factor is the attention paid to the model. The model is not exclusively a person; it can also be a thing, for example, television, if it is attention grabbing (Grusec, 1992).

Self-regulation is the next component of SCT, defined as people maintaining constancy by developing their internal standards. Bandura found that people will bring their self-reactions into judgment when they do a task. Actions that meet their standards are met with positive internal self-talk, and actions that do not are met with negative internal self-talk (Grusec, 1992). The standards come from the adult that the child has as their model. If an adult in their life praises them for doing the dishes well, despite some mistakes, this teaches them how to have compassion. Suppose an adult in their life harshly criticizes them for their small mistakes when doing the dishes. In that case, this will teach them to become hypercritical, creating internal standards and rules that a child, as an adult, lives by as they move through their life (Grusec, 1992). Lastly, self-regulation is primarily developed by external input and reinforced by social, cultural, and environmental factors. For example, emotional regulation can be learned from a child

watching a parent when they are angry. The parents may throw objects when they are angry. Thus, the child internalizes that throwing objects is how they stop being angry (Grusec, 1992).

Bandura first introduced the concept of self-efficacy in 1970, and it is a crucial component of self-regulation. These concepts came about when Bandura was researching modeling and its impact on the treatment of phobias (Grusec, 1992; Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). Self-efficacy is when a person learns how to create specific beliefs, negative or positive, areas concerning their abilities and characteristics. These two components, self-efficacy and self-regulation, will ultimately guide the effort they put into achieving a new behavior or activity (Grusec, 1992).

The history of past events can influence a person as it relates to what they can or cannot achieve in a particular area. The person observing what others can achieve in comparison to their ability to achieve in that area guides self-efficacy. For example, if a person wanted to build a table, they would consider how well the table was built, something before, whom they saw, whether they did it well, and what skills they must acquire to build a table. The prevailing belief is, "Can I do this or not?" (Grusec, 1992). As Bandura developed this component, he realized that parents foster this through their responsiveness to babies by communicating and creating enriching learning environments. When a child does something well or engages in an activity, the parent affirms them (Grusec, 1992). Self-efficacy, thus, is a crucial component regarding someone's willingness to try something new or not based on the history of support from a primary caregiver.

Bandura's last concept with SCT is reciprocal determinism. This concept says that behavior, the environment, cognition, and various personal factors will influence each other, thus being a part of the decision-making process (Grusec, 1992). When making decisions, people will consider what they learned from their models, abilities, and standards. For example, when a child watches their parent pour a bowl of cereal, they will watch the entire process, and when they feel confident doing it on their own, the child will do it precisely as they have seen from start to finish by their parent. Based on what they previously learned, the child will learn this sequential order of pouring the cereal first, taking the milk out of the refrigerator, and how much milk they pour in. Reciprocal determinism relates to attachment theory (to be discussed next) in that it considers the determinants, and the challenges people experience.

Moreover, it considers that some people lack plasticity in their human behavior to grow or move away from negative patterns. For example, a person from a single-parent home struggles with time management and is consistently late for work because their favorite TV show comes on late. The person may have grown up in an environment where self-discipline may not have been modeled. Therefore, their internal working model did not learn or model the importance of self-discipline and accountability. As a result, this person struggles to get to work on time because they choose fun over getting to work promptly (Grusec, 1992).

Bandura argued that people contribute to their lives by choosing, influencing, and creating environments. Bandura (2020) discussed this from the agentic perspective of SCT: people play a part in their self-development. Bandura (2020) also communicated

that based on belief systems, people must be able to navigate life by practicing good judgment, understanding their capabilities, anticipating responses to problems, navigating sociostructurally opportunities, and self-governing their behaviors. Through life experiences, humans develop competencies, beliefs, self-efficacy, and regulation capacities, further setting a person up for positive or negative outcomes (Grusec, 1992).

### **Leadership Development Through Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura (1982), emphasizes observational learning and the reciprocal interaction between a person's cognitions (thoughts, beliefs), behaviors, and environment (Ishaq et al., 2021). Within leadership contexts, SCT posits that followers can learn vicariously from their leaders, potentially modifying their own behaviors based on these observations (Ishaq et al., 2021). Leaders who exhibit positive behaviors, such as effective communication and a focus on solutions during challenging situations, can serve as role models, influencing followers to adopt similar strategies (Ishaq et al., 2021). Conversely, leaders who display negativity or blame can potentially have a detrimental impact on follower behavior. This highlights the importance of leader self-awareness and the potential influence of their actions on follower development.

A study by Ishaq et al. (2021) investigated how leaders' personalities influenced their approach to workplace challenges. The study found that leaders who displayed extraversion and openness to change were more likely to exhibit innovative behaviors and effectively manage work demands (Ishaq et al., 2021). These findings suggest that leaders who embody these traits can positively influence followers to develop similar

characteristics, potentially leading to a more innovative and adaptable work environment (Ishaq et al., 2021). Organizations can benefit from fostering leadership development programs that emphasize the importance of positive leader behaviors and their potential impact on follower development and overall organizational effectiveness.

A key concept within SCT relevant to leadership development is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capabilities to achieve specific goals (McCormick, 2001). In the context of leadership, self-efficacy reflects a leader's confidence in their ability to effectively guide and motivate followers towards achieving organizational goals (McCormick, 2001). Research in sports psychology demonstrates a link between self-efficacy and performance; a decline in self-efficacy can contribute to decreased athletic performance (McCormick, 2001). Similarly, leadership development programs that focus on building leaders' self-efficacy can contribute to their overall effectiveness.

SCT emphasizes agency, the ability of individuals to self-regulate their thoughts, motivations, and behaviors (McCormick, 2001). This concept contrasts with behaviorist perspectives that view individuals as primarily reactive to their environment. Two key cognitive components for leadership development within SCT are personal goals and self-efficacy. Personal goals encompass an individual's needs, motives, and values, and are influenced by environmental factors such as work and home settings (McCormick, 2001). Self-efficacy, on the other hand, reflects an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish specific tasks and their confidence in possessing the necessary resources (McCormick, 2001). These cognitive components influence self-regulation, ultimately

impacting a leader's development and success (McCormick, 2001). Additionally, a supportive environment with strong relationships is crucial for leadership development, as individuals do not function in isolation; their environment shapes their performance demands and motivations (Khorakian & Sharifirad, 2019).

Childhood trauma can be a significant obstacle in a leader's development of strong self-efficacy. Trauma can negatively impact self-esteem and the ability to form healthy relationships in adulthood (Evgin & Sumen, 2022). Early childhood trauma can place a child in a survival mode, potentially leading to the development of coping mechanisms that may not be conducive to effective leadership (Evgin & Sumen, 2022). The effects of childhood trauma can extend into adulthood, making it difficult to establish and maintain healthy, secure relationships (Evgin & Sumen, 2022). This can hinder an individual's ability to effectively lead and motivate others. Furthermore, the absence of positive role models during childhood can further disadvantage individuals with a history of trauma, as they may lack strong, supportive, or confident figures to emulate in leadership positions.

SCT provides a valuable framework for understanding leadership development. By emphasizing the importance of observational learning, self-efficacy, and a supportive environment, SCT can inform the development of effective leadership training programs. Further research is needed to explore the specific ways in which childhood trauma may impact the development of leadership skills and how leadership development programs can best support individuals with a history of trauma.

## **Attachment Theory**

This dissertation is also situated in attachment theory. Attachment theory by John Bowlby (1982) explored how early relationship connections and disconnections develop from primary caregivers, determining the child's ability to connect well into adulthood. Bowlby (1982) defined *attachment* as how a person attaches to or relates to others and is influenced by the primary caregiver in childhood. Bowlby (1982) also proposed that attachments included behavioral systems, with a cognitive part of mental representations of the attachment figure, the self, and the early experiences that influenced the creation of their inner world. Bowlby defined these representations as a person's internal working model in the subconscious mind (Slater, 2007). For example, a child growing up with secure, healthy boundaries and consistent primary caregivers will develop a positive, confident, hopeful internal working model of themselves, which they can use as the basis for future relationships.

One's attachment security is revealed when the person who is the dependent, which could be a child or partner in a relationship, is scared, ill, or discomforted in conjunction with knowing if a caregiver or partner will respond (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby would eventually explore how babies respond to these situations by observing them. With these observations, attachment security, which is described as how well the person can or cannot feel safe and secure with the primary caregiver, may or may not form. A person feels secure or insecure based on the response of needs and how consistently or inconsistently one's needs are met (Bowlby, 1982).

John Bowlby's work on attachment theory began in the early 1930s when he began collaborating with young boys who struggled with adjusting to unhealthy behaviors. What he found from observing these young boys was a disruption in their connection with their mothers and that these disruptions could continue to develop into adulthood (Slater, 2007). The dominant theories at the time were psychoanalytic and social learning theories. However, these theories did not satisfy his current observations of babies and mothers and how they managed distress when separated for an extended period (Slater, 2007). Therefore, Bowlby sought a new way to explain child and adolescent behavior. Bowlby believed that a child's relationship with a primary caregiver could explain one's relationship behaviors.

First, Bowlby determined that intimate attachment bonds and the ability to form social relationships are directly related to the early environment of childhood interactions with the primary caregiver (Bowlby et al., 2007). For example, a child is more likely to form a secure attachment when a primary caregiver consistently responds immediately to their cry. However, when a primary caregiver is inconsistent in responding, the child could develop an anxious attachment security. Anxious style is when a person is unsure about their style and safety being met consistently with a primary caregiver or partner. An anxious person has a high fear of abandonment and needs constant reassurance (Bowlby et al., 2007). What Bowlby communicated to the psychological community, in essence, is that childhood attachment can evolve because of biological-based desires from the closeness that had a basis in the relationship with a primary caregiver, such as a close parent, often the mother (Slater, 2007).



Past research has explored how attachment theory is crucial in understanding protective factors in social and emotional development (Slater, 2007). Attachment anxiety or avoidance is when a person does not feel safe and secure and may occur due to inconsistencies in word or deed from a primary caregiver or partner. The person will struggle with intimacy and closeness and may form low self-esteem. For example, in early childhood, these types of experiences, going to daycare, being in the hospital for an extended amount of time, fostering or adoption, parental death, and divorce, are all experiences that can influence the development of attachment insecurity in children, which could also influence future relationships in adulthood. These experiences create fear of not feeling safe and secure and getting needs met consistently. Fear is a significant component of attachment insecurity (Slater, 2007). Bowlby also communicated that attachments are organized due to how the person views proximity with the primary caregiver. Attachment styles are organized in mind by mental representations; the self and environment create the experience of how close or attached one is to the primary caregiver (Slater, 2007). Bowlby defined this organized system in the subconscious mind as the internal working model (Slater, 2007).

Mary Ainsworth (1978) was another architect of attachment theory, and she studied how infants and mothers interact in a way that makes a child feel comfortable exploring an environment. More specifically, Ainsworth studied how a child interacts with the primary caregiver after a brief separation (Slater, 2007), resulting in three attachment categories: securely attached, anxiously attached, avoidant, and anxiously

attached ambivalent/resistant. The fourth attachment security, disorganized disoriented, would be defined later (Slater, 2007). This information is discussed in the next section.

### ***Attachment Styles***

Attachment style is developed in relationships because of group and family dynamics. Attachment style begins at birth and can develop or change into adulthood. At birth, babies become aware of the different caregivers in their lives, who are dependable and who are not (Bowlby, 2007). Bowlby (2007) discovered in his early research that babies have settled on showing one personal preference by 6 months. By 9 months, the attachment bond is established with the primary caregiver, in most cases, the birth mother (Bowlby, 2007). Last, by 12 to 14 months, the babies' bond with the primary caregiver is cemented.

After this research and observation, Bowlby concluded that attachment theory is a comprehensive relationship-based theory of personality development and how people progress through life psychologically (Slater, 2007). Attachment theory also addresses how the trauma of separation can influence the mechanisms and emotions that come from the separation from the primary caregiver. For example, these feelings, such as fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, and despair, are due to sudden or prolonged separation from primary caregivers and partners. These childhood traumas and experiences can develop and increase the prevalence of abandonment issues, co-dependency, low self-esteem, mental health disorders, anxiety, and depression (Ishaq & Sumen, 2022). These feelings can disrupt personality development and style, forming an attachment style (Slater, 2007). Lastly, attachment theory recognizes the subconscious mind and the defense

mechanisms that protect an individual from anxiety from future interpersonal events. For example, a potential future breakup, creating separation anxiety, abandonment issues, or provoking anger can contribute to the development of defense mechanisms (Slater, 2007).

The four types of attachment are as follows:

- **Secure style:** This attachment style has high levels of warmth and balance of control (Underwood et al., 2016) and is represented by a predictable, safe, affectionate bond with the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 2007). For example, with this attachment security, the person has a positive view of self and others. A securely attached person will be comfortable with emotional intimacy, healthy boundaries, and trusting others.
- **Dismissive (avoidant) style:** People with dismissive attachment security are self-confident but low emotional expressiveness (Underwood, 2015). For example, with this attachment style, the person in the relationship has a positive view of self and a negative view of others. This style will struggle with emotional intimacy, hold rigid boundaries, and find it difficult to trust others.
- **Preoccupied (anxious) style:** Preoccupied individuals will likely have extreme anger/ and or aggression and challenging discomfort in relationships (Underwood, 2015). For example, the person in a relationship has a negative view of self and a positive view of others but has high co-dependence due to the fear of abandonment. Preoccupied people will have porous boundaries due to their high anxiety and fear of being disconnected from their relationships.

- Disorganized (fearful–avoidant) style: Disorganized individuals have low self-confidence, self-image, and balance of control (Underwood, 2015). Additionally, they experienced a less predictable bond with a primary caregiver, which impacts future relationships (Bowlby, 2007). For example, in relationships, the person will have a negative view of self and a negative view of others; they have high ambiguity, going from trusting to not trusting others due to their level of fear. This person is uncomfortable with intimacy and could go from having porous to rigid boundaries.

Adult attachment style is commonly measured by using the relationship questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed by Hazan and Shaver in 1987, initially with three categories. Then Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed the test into the ‘Relationship Questionnaire’ with four categories, each representing the four attachment securities. The test is simple, with the participant putting a checkmark next to the statement that best reflects their attachment security. The test measures secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful attachment using a 7-point Likert scale (Underwood et al., 2016). Attachment theory also communicates an explanation for feelings that relate to the trauma of loss, separation, or abandonment. The trauma of separation and loss creates feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, and despair. If strong enough, these feelings can disrupt personality development, influencing how a person develops ways of relating to others as they move into adulthood (Slater, 2007). Ainsworth also documented the behaviors accompanying attachment security, including consistency in style and inconsistency in fearful attachment security (Bartholomew et al., 1991). Attachment

security is indicated by having low levels of attachment avoidance and low levels of attachment anxiety. The other three attachment styles have either high attachment anxiety, avoidance, or both.

### *Attachment Security and Leadership Style*

Recent research has addressed the correlation between attachment security and leadership style development in adults in the workplace. An adult with a secure attachment is more favorable in the workplace and could have better connections than others (Underwood et al., 2016). An adult with a fearful attachment to security will likely experience challenges with workplace relationships (Underwood et al., 2016). Additionally, as previous studies have discovered, a transformational leader is associated with attachment security because this style is secure, emotionally intelligent, and confident. A transformational leader tends to be good at motivating, is more inspirational and secure, and uses solid beliefs and ethics when leading (Underwood et al., 2016). A leader with a fearful attachment security may be less trustworthy and exhibit a laissez-faire leadership style (Underwood et al., 2016).

Attachment security and leadership styles are connected because attachment security explains how people connect with others. A secure, attached adult will have behaviors of warmth, confidence, and balance of control, allowing them to be adaptable in personal and workplace relationships (Underwood et al., 2016). Furthermore, this behavior reflects a transformational leader because they display giving, encouraging, and empowerment behaviors in how they lead (Underwood et al., 2016). The childhood

experiences, negative or positive, influence how a person develops their attachment, subsequently impacting the development of leadership styles.

Leaders with different leadership styles will develop and display different personality traits. More specifically, different attachment securities reflect different personality traits (Underwood et al., 2016). For example, a leader with solid confidence and high morals will be seen as a transformational leader with a secure attachment, according to the study done by Underwood. (2015), the Relationship Questionnaire and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire were used with 83 respondents out of 250 further to investigate the correlation between leadership style and attachment security. The research concluded that a leader's attachment security influences the adult's leadership style (Underwood, 2015). The research found that a trusted leader is connected to transformational and secure attachment securities. In contrast, an untrustworthy leader is connected to a laissez-faire and insecure attachment securities (Underwood, 2015). However, more research is needed to understand how trauma is related to attachment security and leadership style development in adults.

Children desire to feel safe, and when this is not established in their life with a primary caregiver from birth into infancy, it can disrupt their emotional and relational development with themselves and others (Mrazkova & Lisa, 2022). Another way to explain attachment is how a person will manage themselves positively or negatively when interactions are stressful with others. For example, when a person cancel plans at the last minute, a secure person will adapt and be able to move on. A person with an insecure attachment may see this last-minute cancelation as a moment of rejection

(Mrazkova & Lisa, 2022). Childhood neglect, emotional or physical, is a traumatic experience that can create insecure attachment. For example, when a primary caregiver is inconsistent or unavailable in meeting their child's needs, it impacts the child's need for comfort and style, knowing their need will be met (Mrazkova & Lisa, 2022). This research hopes to explain how trauma impacts leadership style development in adults.

## **Literature Review**

### **Definition of Leadership and Origins of Leadership Styles**

Leadership is described as a process in which the individual influences other group members, allowing an organization to achieve its goals and succeed in its vision (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). Leadership styles are a method used to get followers to move an organization into success (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). Lastly, Van Jarsveeld et al. (2019) defined *leadership styles* as consistent behaviors that a leader does in various approaches to influence an organization's effectiveness in their market objectively. These approaches include transformational leadership, which is people-oriented; transactional leadership, which is goal-oriented; and laissez-faire which is a relaxed approach.

The first two leadership styles are transformational and transactional, created by James MacGregor Burns (Burns, 1978). *Transformational leadership* is a style that causes a change in individuals and social systems. This type of leader is transformed by developing followers into leaders using motivation, morale, and being an intentional, people-oriented role model (Burns, 1978). The transactional leadership style has more structure, checks, and balances, and is goal-oriented (Burns, 1978). Kurt Lewin

developed the third leadership style – the laissez-faire approach. Laissez-faire is a laid-back, hands-off type of leadership style (Ekmekci et al., 2016).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

*Transformational leadership* is a style that brings change to individuals and systems. The primary purpose of this leadership style is to turn followers into leaders. Turning followers into leaders is done by the leader activating identity, defining the mission individually or organizationally, and modeling leadership for the followers (Burns, 1978). The exchange between leader and follower would bring about a mutual leveling up of morale and motivation. This behavior ultimately led Burns (1978) to describe two types of exchange with a leader: transforming and transactional. Burn's idea of transforming is that leaders exemplify morale that fuels the team, organization, or community. Another contributor to this leadership style is Bernard Bass, who shed light on the psychological mechanisms that described both transformational and transactional development developed by Burns (1978). Bass (1985) introduced the term both terms for leadership styles. A transformational leader hits these marks: followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward their leader (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders can exhibit charisma to motivate followers to connect with their mission and vision (Bass, 1985). Bass argued that a leader could be both transformational and transactional. Additionally what studies found is that these two can be positively correlated due to how they focus on motivating followers by building trust and setting clear expectations, because the overall goal is to increase follower performance (Bass et al., 2003).



A transformational leader impacts an organization positively through these four behaviors: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Individualized consideration is the ability of a leader to recognize their follower's needs and address them (Bass, 1985). Intellectual stimulation is how the leader can get their followers to think by positively challenging them and inviting them into the growth process. This process depends on the leader's openness to external input (Bass, 1985). Inspirational motivation is described as the leader being able to communicate vision powerfully and clearly to inspire their followers to action. Lastly, *idealized influence* is defined as the leader being the role model exhibiting high ethical behaviors, including pride, respect, and trust. The qualities are summed up as leader integrity (Bass, 1985).

A study showed how a transformational leadership style helped to build confidence in the environment. Nurses reported that they usually have a higher quality of life and job satisfaction when their leader shows a higher level of commitment to the development of followers, empowering work environment, and effective decision-making (Sabbah et al., 2020). The outcome of a leader demonstrating high commitment to their followers in the context of educational and health systems in Pakistan and Turkey is leadership effectiveness with male and female leaders. Four hundred MLQs were distributed for this study, and 174 females and 130 males responded (Begum et al., 2018). The results of this study showed that females scored higher with a transformational style than men. The educational and health systems benefited more from Transformational

leadership and found it to be the most effective with their followers (Begum et al., 2018). Followers can feel supported and connected with this style of leadership.

Some studies have provided recommendations for promoting transformational leadership. In a study done at Haramaya University to explore the impact of selective leadership style on the corporate success of 80 participants, they measured through (MLQ) transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Haile, 2017). The study results showed that both the above leadership styles, transformational and transactional, positively impacted corporate businesses. The recommendations for Haramaya University from this study are that leadership should intentionally guide followers to be better leaders themselves (Haile, 2017). In addition, a strategy is needed to have a reward system in place for followers to recognize when splendid work is being done. Lastly, leaders must endeavor to be transformative by creating meaningful and challenging work for their followers and being aware of individual needs for growth and development (Haile, 2017).

### ***Transactional Leadership***

The transactional leadership style has more structure, checks, and balances, and is goal-oriented (Burns, 1978). *Transactional leadership* is defined as a leader focusing on outcomes versus the employee. It is based on an achievement gains reward system. The transactional leadership style has the employees more focused on themselves and their achievements rather than the team's achievement (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020). A transactional leader will focus more on the system than the employees in the system. This type of leader will watch the highest performers that benefit the system, increasing higher

outcomes. Those that are outperformed are not kept. This behavior creates a highly competitive environment (Aboramadan et al., 2020). When a transactional leader guides followers, the environment has qualities of competitiveness, less collaboration among employees, each follower is more concerned about their interests and performance, and employees are rewarded based on individual performance rather than group performance (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Lastly, this environment can have low trust and a high turnover rate due to employees being unable to keep up with high-performance demands in the workplace (Aboramadan et al., 2020).

The study by Aboramadan et al. (2020) utilized social exchange theory, which says that followers respond positively or negatively to the behaviors of their leader through an agreement of mutual reciprocity (Aboramadan et al., 2020). For example, if a leader gives a follower a pass on being late to work consistently, the follower could be a strong ally against other followers who may not like the leader. A questionnaire was utilized for research into transformational and transactional leadership styles on work outcomes, 1200 tests were sent out, and 555 participants returned. The study utilized MLQ. In comparing the transactional leadership style versus the transformational leadership style, the study showed that transformational has a higher impact on outcomes of employees in work engagement, affective commitment, and organizational citizen behavior (Abormadan et al., 2020). In a quantitative study with twenty-five principals and 230 teachers to explore the relationship between principals' self-perceived and teachers' self-perceived leadership and teachers' job satisfaction, it was found that

transactional leadership style scores had a positive correlation with teacher job satisfaction.

In contrast, the laissez-faire leadership style negatively correlated with low job satisfaction (Muhamad et al., 2020). Thus, what can be concluded is that transactional leadership's reward system based on performance helped increase teacher job satisfaction (Muhamad et al., 2020). As Haile (2017) discussed, the transactional leader can positively impact an organization due to the reward system it sets up to incentivize an employee to work harder. The leader engages with the followers by monitoring their behavior to ensure they meet the organization's outcomes. Studies have shown a positive influence because of the reward exchange between leader and follower (Haile, 2017). The individual follower can benefit because they reach their goals, which benefits the organization. However, the organization suffers if the individual does not meet their goals (Haile, 2017).

### ***Laissez-Faire Leadership***

Laissez-faire is a French term first utilized in the political and economic sectors, referring to minimal government engagement. Kurt Lewin developed the third laissez-faire approach. Laissez-faire is a laid-back, hands-off type of leadership style (Ekmekci et al., 2016). However, as it relates to leadership, it simply means a hands-off, minimal direction or guidance from a leader to a follower (Ekmekci et al., 2016). Another way to describe this leadership style is an absent or avoidant leader. Lewin wrote that this type of leader ignores all responsibilities and neglects the role assigned to them (Ekmekci et al.,

2016). Lastly, this leadership style has zero presence, resulting in followers having no leader to follow (Ekmekci et al., 2016).

This leadership style does not often support an organization's values, interests, and mission. Due to the lack of concern or care, the leader's behaviors will be passive rather than active in leading, allowing any and everything to happen under their leadership. Organizational trust breaks down, and soon, the environment can become unhealthy (Ekmekci et al., 2016). Organizational trust is vital to an organization's ability to thrive and experience growth in all areas, particularly the economy, and staff. The strength of organizational trust correlates to positive outcomes, which in turn points to a company's ability to retain highly qualified employees (Ekmekci et al., 2016).

As discussed, a laissez-faire leadership style can impact job performance with principals' leadership style and how they lead their schools. Those principals with this leadership style are passive, allowing anything to happen, negatively impacting teachers' determination and job satisfaction (Muhammed et al., 2020). Teachers lack the incentive and support when a leader is not engaged in helping the organization or the leader to get better. In a study done to explore employee retention in the hotel industry, laissez-faire leadership was studied to see the impact it has on keeping employees engaged (Geh Ming et al., 2021). As reported, this style does not get involved in followers' affairs, providing little guidance, feedback, or rewards. If followers are highly skilled and motivated, this approach collaborates with individuals and teams; however, the challenge with this leadership style remains that the leader may lack the competence to supervise (Geh Ming et al., 2021). The study revealed that this leadership style did not keep employees at the

hotel because of poor leadership. This type of leadership creates a lack of trust between leader and follower (Geh Ming et al., 2021).

Lastly, this type of leadership can impact the well-being of the followers. In a study done in Lebanese hospitals, leadership style was assessed to help the nursing environment be stable, and this style was evaluated (Sabbah et al., 2020). The results showed that most nursing leaders view them as transformational and transactional, creating a healthy and stable environment. However, those who reported their leader had passive management styles, and there was less reported enthusiasm at work. This type of leader avoids conflict, delays decision-making and actions and does not fulfill leadership responsibilities (Sabbah et al., 2020).

### **Measuring Leadership Styles**

In understanding leadership measurement, discussing how several factors can influence the leadership style developed is essential. As discussed above, Adults can embody distinct leadership styles based on different influences. Further below, we discuss how trauma influences leadership style. In addition, as discussed above, attachment security plays a crucial role in leadership style development. Another factor connecting trauma and attachment security is emotional intelligence. *Emotional intelligence* is one's ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotions accurately and adaptively. It is one's ability to understand emotions and have a strong knowledge of inner workings (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). This self-awareness leads to the understanding that a person can change into a different leadership style from the one initially assessed as they address the areas of emotions that childhood trauma has created

emotional issues resulting in less warm, open, and inviting behaviors connected to transformational leadership. Accurately defining individual and group emotions in followers is a relational component of transformational leadership, leading to organizational efficiency (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014).

In a study by Ramchunder and Martins (2014), leaders exhibiting idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration were reported to be more effective in the workplace. These results mean that these leaders managed and led well because they understood their emotions and how to influence others' emotions to be their best selves (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). In this study to see who makes the best leader in a police context, the researcher discovered that those who can monitor and manage emotions correlate with a transformational leadership style. Thus, if one can grow in understanding their emotional state and that of others, they can move from a different state of leadership style (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). These studies provide support for studying childhood trauma and attachment security and its association with leadership style in adults.

### **Multiple Leadership Questionnaire**

The multiple leadership questionnaire is a tool used to determine the leadership styles of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire a person has developed (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). In a particular study involving the influence of leadership style in the academic area, research was conducted on how these styles influence student performances. How well a school is led can significantly influence the success of the overall school (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). Leadership is vital in maintaining balance in

several areas that lead to successful schools. Areas include management, culture, goal setting, and policies and procedures (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). The most common tool to measure leaders is the MLQ. The MLQ is a 36-item, five-point Likert scale test used to determine if a person is transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire in their leadership style (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019).

Reis Neto et al. (2019) used the MLQ in a study to measure the individual performance of a follower by assessing their leader's transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles. The assessment of leaders and followers on how well a follower performs the activities connected to their job researched their interaction with the leader and their style (Reis Neto et al., 2019). It was a quantitative descriptive study, with a research population of professionals and followers working in three companies of trade and enterprises. Three hundred nine people participated in the research, which yielded that the transformational leadership style positively affected individual performance more than transactional and laissez-faire due to the higher relational behavioral component of transformational (Reis Neto et al., 2019).

Lastly, a quantitative study explored leadership style (democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire) and the potential impact on employee motivation in bureaucratic environments that used the MLQ (Fiaz et al., 2017). Democratic leadership is close to transformational because it is relationship-based with the follower. Autocratic leadership is closely related to transactional leadership, which focuses more on performance (Fiaz et al., 2017). The researchers used a multiple regression analysis with three independent variables (leadership styles of autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire) and one



dependent variable (employee satisfaction) to complete the study. The sample study included 110 high- to mid-level managers of companies.

Furthermore, what was discovered by this study is that autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles create leadership deficits in organizations' ability to keep followers motivated (Fiaz et al., 2017). In contrast, the democratic leadership style keeps people motivated and working well. Thus, the MLQ helped the leadership to see the usefulness in helping the organization assess performance and motivation and increase the productivity of followers when they understand how they are leading based on leadership style (Fiaz et al., 2017).

Another study on leadership explored the correlation of leadership styles impact on performance and was comprised of 300 people, leaders, and followers. This study utilized the MLQ (Neto et al., 2018). Furthermore, this previous research is essential to this current research in that it shows that a leader has influence on followers and environments. Leaders can move an organization positively or negatively. Organizations are made up of people who, as a result, will perform or underperform based on their leaders' ability to lead them (Neto et al., 2018). This study revealed that in the past, individual performance, or a one-dimensional perspective, was based solely on the person. However, in recent times, due to unstable economies, companies have stepped back to realize that an employee's performance is multidimensional, with the leader being a factor in their performance (Neto et al., 2018). Lastly, the leader can directly affect the behavior and attitude of their followers, ultimately impacting an entire organization (Neto et al., 2018). The following section will review the literature on

trauma, the factors that contributed to the development of trauma from childhood to adulthood, and the impact of trauma on leadership style development in adults within the gap of this study.

## **Trauma**

Traumatic stress in the general population is prevalent in childhood. The trauma experience is correlated to the stress process or how children process their stress (Tinajero et al., 2019). Trauma is experiencing severe interpersonal or external conflict that interrupts normal developmental processes, resulting in a possible lifetime of emotional, behavioral, and psychological dysregulation (Milot et al., 2016). Another definition by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) defines *trauma* as experiences that lead to the threat of the life or physical integrity of a child or someone who has a close relationship with the child. The resulting experience creates extreme fear and hopelessness, which the child does not have the capacity or skills to cope with (Rosen et al., 2018). Childhood trauma or child abuse is a specific type of trauma when, during this time frame, children have experienced primary caregiver neglect, also known as child maltreatment (Milot et al., 2016). It is essential to note the long-lasting impact of maltreatment on children in the developmental stages of their lives, which can negatively impact children from cognitive to physical deficits. *Child neglect* is defined as an experience where they receive minimal care from a primary caregiver (Milot et al., 2016).

The most prevalent form of childhood trauma is maltreatment, with rates of 163 children out of one thousand for physical neglect and 184 children out of one thousand for emotional neglect (Widom, 1999). *Neglect* is also defined by Marc and Hanfy (2016)

as when a parent fails to provide for the good of their child's development. The areas of neglect can be health, education, emotional, nutrition, shelter, and safe inhabitable living conditions (Marc & Hanafy, 2016). Physical neglect or lack of care could be not interacting with the child by not giving the child a physical touch. Emotional neglect could be a lack of emotional support, comfort, or words (Marc & Hanafy, 2016).

A research study by Widom (1999) discovered the link between neglect and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in children developing into adulthood. The results of this study yielded a minor significance of PTSD symptoms. However, it laid the groundwork for future studies in which the combination of childhood neglect and other forms of maltreatment increased the risk of PTSD symptoms into adulthood, such as dissociation, avoidance, and hyperarousal behaviors (Milot et al., 2016). Around the world, distinct types of traumas or childhood abuse are reported differently from childhood in men versus women. For example, in countries like China, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, more men reported they experienced sexual and emotional abuse in childhood. Whereas in countries like Denmark, Germany, the USA, and South Korea, more women reported they experienced more sexual and emotional abuse in childhood (Khan et al., 2021).

Demographic differences were also examined regarding childhood trauma. Meng and D'Arcy (2016) sought to fill a gap as they found that many studies regarding childhood trauma and gender were unclear due to the inconsistency of measurement tools. Their study aimed to clarify the long-term risks of childhood abuse in people and the correlation between substance use and mental health disorders (Meng & D'Arcy,

2016). The study had over 25,000 respondents, men, and women ages 15 and older, answering the survey focused on mental health and childhood abuse from the Canadian Community Health data, a cross-sectional survey that collected data about 12-month mental health status, as reported by individuals. The Composite International Diagnostic Review was also used to capture mental health information. The disorders assessed were major depressive, bipolar, anxiety, and substance use disorders, which were the dependent variables (Meng & D'Arcy, 2016). The independent variable in the study was childhood maltreatment, which used the Childhood Experiences Survey. The study only had adults report traumatic experiences before age 16 (Meng & D'Arcy, 2016). The study showed that men were more likely to be exposed to physical abuse, interpersonal violence, and other forms of abuse compared to women. In contrast, women were more likely to experience sexual abuse (Meng & D'Arcy, 2016). Consistent with previous studies, as discussed above, the types of abuse and prevalence between genders seem different.

In addition, childhood abuse is consistent with previous studies correlating to a higher prevalence of mental health and substance disorders in both men and women. Women have a higher prevalence of alcohol use than men (Meng & D'Arcy, 2016). Trauma and abuse have other adverse risks in the realm of substance use into adulthood. In a more recent study of trauma, adults who had negative experiences of physical violence, parental separation or divorce, or mental illness of a family member often later had alcohol dependence issues (Kosecka & Stelmach, 2020). Furthermore, from their childhood events, men reported more physical violence, sexual abuse, and emotional

neglect, and in addition to these events, women reported experiences of emotional abuse and physical neglect (Kosecka & Stelmach, 2020). Lastly, in a 12-month follow-up, it found that women who had trauma in addition to substance use issues had a higher prevalence of relapse than those without a trauma diagnosis (Kosecka & Stelmach, 2020). Trauma can inhibit recovery in adults and increase the prevalence of other issues of substance use and mental and physical disorders in adults seeking a life of recovery.

### ***Primary Caregiver Risk Factor for Trauma***

The primary caregiver relationship is vital in providing stability for children when experiencing high stress levels. A primary caregiver is a person who supervises the child's physical or emotional needs (Milot et al., 2016). An example of a high to low-stress situation would be a parent showing up and being consistent or inconsistent with picking a child up from school on time. The child watches other parents picking their classmates up on time; however, the child's parent is late consistently, causing the child to be last. Internally, they feel unimportant, creating a stressful experience. Stressful experiences create a state of internal emotional instability within a child due to inconsistent behaviors from a primary caregiver (Milot et al., 2016). Neglectful primary caregivers put children at a greater risk of long-lasting stressful psychological states and a more significant disadvantage in dealing with daily challenges (Milot et al., 2016). For example, when a child struggles with zipping up their coat and lacks help from a primary caregiver, it may create a stressful state for the child, knowing that help is not immediate or coming.

Another determining factor in risk factors in childhood trauma is how communication occurs between primary caregivers and the child. A study was conducted on child and mother interaction by examining if a neglectful caregiver is a risk factor for their child's development (Milot et al., 2016). The research investigated specifically if a primary caregiver, in this instance a mother, contributed to their child developing PTSD behaviors due to their neglectful behaviors (Milot et al., 2016). The study found that neglectful behaviors of primary caregivers can contribute to a child developing PTSD behaviors. The study showed that a mother's communication quality is a factor in increasing or decreasing the potential for PTSD symptoms to show up in their child (Milot et al., 2016).

In addition to primary caregiver and child interaction, attachment security is determined by the child's ability to share positive and negative emotions. This exchange helps a child learn from their primary caregiver and develop their ability to self-regulate. This behavior connects to SCT in the observation and modeling component (Ishaq et al., 2021). This mechanism of the parent-child affective relationship points to whether a child will develop PTSD symptoms into adulthood (Milot et al., 2016). The primary caregiver has a role in how well a child develops attachment security in future relationships due to the amount of positive or negative interactions.

### ***Impacts of Trauma***

There are other numerous ways that childhood trauma can show up into adulthood. Adverse sleep patterns or disruption is one of them. Recent studies have revealed that a child who has experienced many traumatic events is associated with sleep

disorders or poor sleep (Tinajero et al., 2020). This issue was assessed with actigraphy and reports in sleep diaries (Tinajero et al., 2020). Sleep disturbances include shorter sleep, longer sleep expectancy, more physical movements while asleep, and poor sleep experiences (Tinajero et al., 2020). Another factor that is a symptom of trauma and influences poor sleep is hyperarousal when untreated, resulting in the disorder of insomnia. When EEG activity during non-rapid eye moments was monitored, it showed that participants with a history of childhood trauma versus those without had a higher beta EEG activity (Tinajero et al., 2020). This study means that the trauma-impacted the brain's normal functioning, demonstrating the challenge in that first hour of sleep for the brain to shut down due to the increased hyperarousal that comes from experiencing trauma. This study reveals an association between childhood trauma exposure and sleep disruption in adulthood (Tinajero et al., 2020).

Additional research has also shown that adults who have experienced trauma as children have a higher risk, compared to those who have not, of potentially developing attachment anxiety or avoidance, maladaptive schemas, dissociative behaviors, affect dysregulation, and a possibility for borderline personality disorder (Farnfield & Onions, 2021; Van Dijke et al., 2018). These types of psychological challenges can stem from developmental traumas. Developmental traumas refer to ongoing abuse and neglect that goes beyond just one incident but repeated ordeals, such as a child being sexually abused daily by a primary caregiver versus one incident occurring from a primary caregiver or someone close to the child (Farnfield & Onions, 2021). For instance, Van Dijke et al. (2018) sought to understand the interrelationship of bipolar disorders and childhood

trauma with adult psychiatric patients of 449 people ages 17 to 63 years. They discovered that those who had experienced sexual trauma in early childhood had a positive correlation, highlighting that they developed anxious or avoidant attachment security (Van Dijke et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the study discovered that childhood trauma could affect the core attachment fears of closeness and abandonment, increasing the symptoms of Borderline personality disorder severity in adults (Van Dijke et al., 2018). Lastly, attachment anxiety and avoidance research are being studied, which begins to develop in early childhood, starting in infancy. When a person does not attach securely as a child, it will show up in adulthood (Bowlby, 2007; Farnfield & Onions, 2021).

### **ACEs Development**

In 1989, Vincent Feletti published his first Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine (Feletti, 2019). Following that time, many other studies into trauma have been researched globally. This study, conducted in the late '80s, came from Feletti and his colleagues, who were researching the impact of weight loss on their patients. They found that obesity was a subconscious result of unresolved trauma in childhood (Feletti, 2019). Obesity was the chosen defense mechanism to protect themselves while harboring shame, secrecy, and social taboos they had experienced from childhood. This study was groundbreaking for developing the ACE scale (Feletti, 2019). In one instance, in interviewing a client, she had reported she was sexually abused at age ten by her grandfather, and that is when she started to gain weight, with her abuse happening for ten years. These stories repeated themselves, resulting in



186 reports of this type of history (Feletti, 2019). Feletti involved his colleagues in the study, which resulted in 286 interviews, with 55% of patients reporting childhood sexual abuse in their obesity program. This study began the gathering of several other types of childhood abuse. Years later, this study is still working to see that sometimes it takes years for biomedical outcomes to develop and show up in a person's life (Feletti, 2017).

Based on self-reporting from childhood, the ACE scale assesses the long-term risks of abuse and dysfunction in the household. It measures these outcomes of disease risk factors, quality of life, health care utilization, mortality, and incidences (Feletti et al., 2019). These areas comprise the 10-question scale, grouped into two categories: abuse and household dysfunction. The scale examined seven areas: physical, sexual, and psychological abuses, exposure to substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of mother or stepmother, and criminal behavior (Silverstein et al., 2023). The scoring reveals a high or low prevalence of health risks, drug usage, and relational issues. For example, with a score of five or more, those individuals are seven to ten times more likely to report substance use issues in adulthood (Silverstein et al., 2023). Silverstein et al. (2023) describe ACEs as being able to quantify several adverse health outcomes in adulthood, such as heart disease, obesity, and non-medical substance use.

Childhood maltreatment and house dysfunction have been linked to the psychosocial problems that adults experience. Problems include suicide attempts, alcohol abuse, intimate partner violence, depressive disorders, hallucinations, and poor mental health functioning (Arincorayan et al., 2017). Not only that but in the ACE study conducted by Feletti and colleagues (2019), they found that childhood maltreatment and

household dysfunction were associated with the leading causes of death in adults (Arincorayan et al., 2017). The continued work following Feletti with the ACEs, specifically with urban populations of young adults from economically impoverished areas, found that their ACE score was high. As a result, they were more likely to have symptoms of depression and engage in drug-using and antisocial behaviors (Arincorayan et al., 2017). The more adversity a child experiences, the more likely they will exhibit psychosocial and physical problems in adulthood (Arincoryan et al., 2017). However, studies also reveal that not every person who has adverse childhood experiences will exhibit dysfunctional behaviors due to them becoming resilient (Arincoryan et al., 2017). Resilience is when a person can overcome adverse challenges that threaten growth or change in life, resulting in positive outcomes (Arincoryan et al., 2017).

Research has pointed to the correlation between various health risks, engagement in substance use, and developing co-occurring issues or disorders in adults. Co-occurring means a substance use problem and a mental health problem co-occur (Larkin et al., 2017). This co-occurring challenge ultimately interferes with an adult's healthy aging process due to them having high ACEs. Some research lacks how trauma affects adults developing co-occurring disorders later in life. Within this, ACE works to examine how substance use disorders are connected to health and social problems and how generalized anxiety disorder is related to higher ACE scores (Larkin et al., 2017).

### **Coping Mechanisms and Strategies for Trauma**

Developing coping strategies following traumatic experiences is essential in supporting physical and cognitive development. Intensive psychological treatments

involve play and art therapy, group therapy, family therapy, and psycho-educational classes (Ziegler, 2015). A therapy that encompasses some of these is trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), an evidenced-based treatment approach for ages three to eighteen who remember having experienced at least one traumatic experience. Drs created TF-CBT. Drs Anthony Mannarino, Judith Cohen, and Esther Deblinger in 2006 with a focus on psychoeducation for children and parents to give them coping skills, help re-regulate emotions, and address maladaptive behaviors, thoughts, and emotions (Cohen et al., 2012). It is used for children and adolescents and supports parents or other primary caregivers. This approach focuses on decreasing negative and behavioral responses from the child or adolescents experiencing sexual abuse, maltreatment, physical abuse, loss, or complex traumas. Furthermore, the approach seeks to create an environment that is supportive and conducive to them changing their beliefs and learning to cope with emotional distress.

The TF-CBT approach draws on family therapy, attachment theory, neurobiology, behavioral therapy, and developmental neurobiology (Cohen et al., 2012). A child or adolescent could be in this therapy from four to six months. This therapy was studied against regular play therapy to treat PTSD and relational and emotional issues in children: 209 8–14-year-olds with their primary caregivers were randomly assigned one of the treatments. The results of the study showed that those who had TF-CBT showed a significantly more improvement and reduction of symptoms relating to depression, PTSD, and behavioral problems (Cohen et al., 2004). Furthermore, these therapies aim to

bring back the confidence and ability to bond, thereby creating secure attachments with primary caregivers, which was also the result of TF-CBT (Cohen et al., 2004).

Within the therapeutic process, children receive five new skills: making good decisions, self-love and self-care, spiritual health, cooperation, and empathy (Ziegler, 2015). These all help a child regain their power. These strategies can also work for adults who have not worked through their traumatic experiences.

The opportunity to gain experience in practicing self-improvement happens when children begin to learn how to celebrate life with family meals, gardening, and outdoor trips. With that in mind, children become more active, and Yoga is a coping activity as it helps a person to become centered, aware, and develop better self-compassion (Arabella et al., 2022). *Yoga* is an activity that engages the mind, body, and spirit combined with physical movements. These practices have been shown to help those who have experienced psychological trauma to see an improvement in their mental health (Arabella et al., 2022).

Adults can also utilize yoga or mental health therapy when learning to cope and heal from childhood trauma. Additionally, adults can participate in psychotherapies such as dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), which focuses on acceptance and change created by Marsha Linehan in the 1970s. (Su & Stone, 2020). DBT is usually done as group therapy, creating social support for the adults, and learning emotional regulation skills, self-awareness, and self-acceptance skills. In addition, adults can start music and art therapy, engage in community engagement to overcome anxieties and triggers, and exercise (Su & Stone, 2020). People who experience extreme psychological distress can

take medications such as antipsychotics and mood stabilizers in hopes of reducing emotional distress, allowing them to participate in therapies (Su & Stone, 2020). These therapies, coping skills, and psychoeducation are opportunities for those adults in leadership roles to gain internal stability and heal from their trauma as they gain self-awareness and self-acceptance.

### **Attachment Security and Trauma**

Depending on the intensity, a person's trauma can inhibit the reduction of stressors and other issues. For instance, researchers explored trauma with 382 adults who reported issues with obsessive-compulsive disorder as adults (Tibi et al., 2020). The study hoped to see the protective factors needed to reduce obsessive-compulsive disorder over 4 years. Those participants who saw a continued reduction after 4 years improved through extensive cognitive behavior therapy, a protective factor, and improved attachment security (Tibi et al., 2020). This research shows that a secure attachment is a protective factor that helps an adult to overcome adverse issues, such as trauma.

Another previous study investigated factors that lead people to use substances, analyzing the strength of protective factors in early childhood to adulthood. In this case, protective factors mean a supportive family environment, less conflict between primary caregivers, and children experiencing affection (Lee et al., 2020). When a child has better communication with their parents, it reduces the likelihood of them using substances. The study utilized the Family Interactional Theory (FIT), which says that an environment with less conflict and greater parental affection decreases the likelihood of children using substances as they develop into young adults to early adulthood (Lee et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in previous studies, it has been concluded that parent and family factors are big influencers on the future substance use of children (Newman et al., 2008). Thus, the result of parental and family factors influencing the prevalence of substance use leads to the understanding that when primary caregivers and children have strong attachment security, studies have shown that it decreases the likelihood of using substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis.

One of the attachment security-strengthening behaviors is communication. When communication is solid and consistent, communication reduces adolescent substance use, resulting in a preventative protective factor (Newman et al., 2008). Again, these studies show that the primary caregiver and the type of environment created through relational connection, communication, and physical presence influence how the child grows up with either increased or decreased potential to use substances due to the strength of their attachment security (Lee et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2008).

Some studies have shown that another type of trauma, betrayal trauma, can lead to attachment insecurity when trust becomes broken. Betrayal trauma is when person experiences trust violation from their partner. For example, a betrayal could be an affair outside of a marriage or a committed couple. Specifically, this type of relational trauma can break the secure bond (Butler et al., 2022). When this attachment bond becomes shaken, it creates a dynamic of leaning in and out of each partner due to their moments of ambivalence (Butler et al., 2022). This behavior is how the mind safeguards further trauma for the couple to work through the healing process to establish a stronger bond (Butler et al., 2022). The way forward from betrayal trauma is for each partner to work to

become dependable, accessible, responsive, and engaged to the needs of their partner to re-establish a secure attachment (Butler et al., 2022). The following section will further address the correlation of attachment security, trauma, and influence on leadership style. It will discuss how the higher attachment security a leader has, the better a leader can address their trauma.

### **Attachment Security, Trauma, and Leadership**

Attachment security is related to higher emotional functioning, which allows a person to form healthy relationships with other adults. On the other hand, low attachment security is related to emotional dysregulation, severe depression, low intimacy, and, in some cases, delinquent behaviors (Fuchshuber et al., 2019). These behaviors show that emotional functioning in adulthood is linked to attachment security. For example, when a follower is given feedback based on having high attachment and emotional functioning, they will respond positively by viewing it as a growth moment. Meanwhile, a person with low attachment and emotional functioning will view feedback as a critical defeating moment. Leadership influences an organization's performance (Fein et al., 2020). Leadership is the person's ability to use social influence to move a group toward common goals.

Trauma can positively or negatively influence how a leader develops and leads. Previous research has shown that a military leader who would be a transformational leader may experience a change in style when they experience trauma. The reason is that the trauma causes a decrease in their emotional vulnerability (Kramer & Allen, 2018). However, the specific outcomes of the type of leadership style are not yet known due to

minimal empirical studies. What can be determined from the literature is that growth can happen from adverse challenges in leadership.

Attachment security plays a role in a leader's ability to lead in that leadership influence is connected to relationships. Relationships are strong in trust, mutual respect, and care for the followers (Fein et al., 2020). This type of leader has a secure attachment. As Bowlby and other researchers have discovered, attachment theory's strong premise is that adults desire proximity, a haven, and a secure base for relationships (Fein et al., 2020). Researchers have also discovered that employees have reported that a supervisor or a manager is one of the most influential people in their lives. Including how well they performed in the workplace and stayed engaged (Eldad & Benatov, 2018). What is not known is the relationship with all three variables of attachment security, trauma, and leadership development in adults being researched to see how they interact with one another.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed studies on leadership, leadership styles, SCT, attachment theory, attachment security, leadership styles, and trauma. This literature review mainly looked at the interaction of leadership and attachment studies from past research and juxtaposed the potential influence of childhood trauma (Underwood et al., 2016). This section reviews the interactions, especially with leadership and attachment security, trauma, and attachment security, and how leaders can address their childhood traumas healthily, for example, through individual and group therapies, Yoga, and building a support system. What is also made aware in this section is that no current studies have



examined trauma's influence on leadership style development and attachment security. Therefore, this study examined how trauma and attachment influence adult leadership styles. The following chapter will describe the research design and approach for this quantitative study, the recruitment of participants, instrumentation and materials, data collection, data analysis, possible threats to validity, and ethical considerations.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between childhood trauma, attachment security, and the adult leadership styles of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire. In this chapter, I will discuss the research method used, specifically the study design, participants, instrumentation, research procedures, and data analysis. I discuss the framework for ethical considerations for the participants, as some questions could be triggering, and the survey methods used to gather the data.

### Research Design and Rationale

The quantitative, comparative study was conducted to answer the following research question and hypotheses:

RQ: Does childhood trauma, measured by the ACE scale and attachment security (measured by attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) relate to leadership style (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire)?

$H_{01a}$ : There is no relationship between trauma and transformational leadership.

$H_{a1a}$ : There is a negative relationship between trauma and transformational leadership.

$H_{01b}$ : There is no relationship between attachment security and transformational leadership.

$H_{a1b}$ : There is a positive relationship between attachment security and transformational leadership.

$H_{02a}$ : There is no relationship between trauma and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>2a*: There is a positive relationship between trauma and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>2b*: There is no relationship between attachment security and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>2b*: There is a negative relationship between attachment security and transactional leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>3a*: There is no relationship between trauma and laissez-faire leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>3a*: There is a positive relationship between trauma and laissez-faire leadership.

*H<sub>0</sub>3b*: There is no relationship between attachment security and laissez-faire leadership.

*H<sub>a</sub>3b*: There is a negative relationship between attachment security and laissez-faire leadership.

The research study employed a quantitative methodology with a comparative design to examine if trauma and attachment security are associated with adult leadership style development. Using quantitative methods was the best approach in the pursuit of obtaining statistical analysis of measured variables while exploring numerical patterns (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The specific design was a quantitative methodology with a comparative design. This study also collected data that can be analyzed statistically rather than using a qualitative approach that uses interviews and coding (Szymanski, 1993). This approach allowed for the data to be easily transformed into the comprehensible presentation of tables and graphs.

Second, this study did not use a qualitative methodology because this study was not going to be centered on understanding subjective lived experiences. Furthermore, attitudes and behaviors were not studied over time in a specific group within a population, which would be the goal of content analysis. Content analysis focuses on the characteristics of a sample population and how those factors influence a population. Data from this research were analyzed using statistical techniques, providing an objective measurement form. *Inferential statistics* is a technique that utilizes sample data to generalize an outcome to the population of interest. Furthermore, using standardized measures allows for a study's replicability (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Thus, the approach for this study was quantitative as opposed to qualitative.

Estimating (inferring or generalizing) information is powerful in empirical research. The rigorous empirical approach to research was appropriate for this study because inferences were made based on data gathered from an appropriate sample of the target population. Last, the quantitative methodology aligns appropriately with the problem statement, research questions, and hypotheses for this study because of the collection and analysis of numerical data. Past research that examined the predictive relationship between attachment security and leadership styles utilized quantitative methods. For example, Underwood (2015) aimed to determine how the two variables related to determining leadership style are developed based on attachment security in adults. This quantitative study allowed me to use numerical data and inferential statistics to assess and compare the relationship between three variables. Qualitative methodology was initially considered, but with further exploration, direct contact and personal

interviews would not meet the objective needs of this study. Numerical data were needed to examine the relationship between trauma, attachment security, and leadership styles. Therefore, the quantitative approach was justified.

### **Methodology**

In the following sections, I explore population, sampling and sampling procedures, procedures for recruitment and data collection, and instrumentation.

#### **Population**

The population for this research was individuals in positions of leadership. Adult leaders were the target population. The sampling frame was adult leaders, team leaders, supervisors, and managers, including executive-level leaders in profit and nonprofit organizations. The participants were a minimum of 18 years of age with at least 1 year of leadership. The reason for the age limitation is that the ACE (the measure used to identify trauma in this study) is designed for 18 years and above in the way it measures childhood trauma. Most leaders in the population who are working in profit/nonprofit are over 18, so this was a reasonable exclusion criterion. Additionally, the age for adulthood is 18, which helps with not needing parental consent, making it easier to recruit for this research.

#### **Sampling and Sampling Procedure**

The specific research design surveyed 124 leader participants in various levels of profit and nonprofit organizations with adults, based on the result of a power analysis that was discussed. A study should be able to, from a scientific perspective, reach a significant effect so that it can be considered evidence based (Kang, 2021). If a study

does not have a large enough sample size, it does not have enough data to find an effect if an effect exists (Kang, 2021). According to Wilson et al. (2007), a study like this needs a power of .95, an effect size of .15, and three predictors to have a strong power or ability, yielding 119 participants needed. Furthermore, to accurately conclude the population, the rule of thumb is no fewer than 50 participants for a regression increase when more variables are being evaluated (Wilson et al., 2007). The last variable to consider with sampling is the rate of attrition. To control attrition, I added 10% of participants to increase my sample size to 131 participants to account for participants who may not complete the survey or if they provide insufficient data. Therefore, 157 participants were recruited for this study, and 124 completed the study, exceeding the needed amount. Thirty-three participants did not complete the survey.

### **Recruitment Procedures**

An online questionnaire was developed using Survey Monkey. This online survey platform was the medium to collect data to investigate trauma, attachment security, and leadership style. For this study, the participants were recruited through social media advertisements focused on leadership groups and various leadership networks. These recruitment approaches represent a convenience sample. A convenience sample gets anyone willing to participate in a study and is the most approachable or easily accessible to the researcher (Scholtz, 2021). The advertisement was posted on my social media accounts, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. The advertisement described the nature of the study (see Appendix A for a copy of recruitment materials). Those interested clicked the link on social media, bringing them to the survey.

The limitations of this study were that the participants did not respond to all the questions. The reasons for this lack of responses are unknown, but perhaps answering in-depth questions may have been overwhelming or a question triggered them. To address the concerns, participants skipped the questions that made them feel uncomfortable or stopped participating in the survey, as there were 33 incomplete surveys. Another area for improvement for participants was the lack of availability to complete the survey due to their schedules or time constraints. Furthermore, there needed to be more access for participants to come back to the test to complete it in multiple settings.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, I used SurveyMonkey to collect data. The participants were recruited to complete an online survey with valid, reliable measures. The ECR was used to measure attachment security, a predictor variable. To measure leadership style, I used the MLQ-Self, which measured transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles; this was measured as an independent variable. Last, to measure the dependent variable for this research study, the ACE was utilized (see a copy of the survey in Appendix B)

### **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

#### ***Attachment Security***

An instrument that measured attachment security is the ECR (Fraley et al., 2011), a 36-item questionnaire that measures attachment in parental, platonic, and romantic relationships. A copy of this test is included in Appendix B. The ECR allows a researcher to have a more comprehensive view of relationship interactions to determine if an individual has high or low attachment security by examining their level of attachment

avoidance and anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998). This test measures these two factors in adult attachment: avoidance and anxiety. Avoidance involves fear of dependence and interpersonal intimacy, an excessive desire for independence, and a high reluctance to share intimate information. Anxiety is defined as a person experiencing interpersonal rejection, abandonment, and a high need and desire for approval from others, including distressed feelings when a partner is unavailable (Brennan et al., 1998). A Likert scale format is utilized for participants to rate their response to each question from *disagree strongly* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). It uses continuous scores, resulting in strong statistical power. For this test, Items 1–18 focus on anxiety, and 19–36 focus on avoidance. Some sample questions from anxiety are: (a) I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love, (b) I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me, and (c) I often worry that my partner doesn't love me. Some sample questions from avoidance are: (a) I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down, (b) I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners, and (c) I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings.

To score this variable, the average of Items 1–18 is taken for the anxiety score, and the average of Items 19–36 is used for the avoidance score; both were used for this study. This test is highly reliable because it targets specific measures of mother, father, best friend, and romantic partner, with overall reliability in a test–retest of .80 and above (Fraley et al., 2011). In another study using the ECR, there was high internal consistency with alpha coefficients of .91 in anxiety and .94 in avoidance (Brenk-Franz et al., 2018). When an individual has higher scores, it represents more anxiety or avoidance.



### *Leadership Styles*

The test that measured transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles was the MLQ (Bass, 1985, 2019; Underwood, 2015; Van Jaarsveld et al., 2019). The test used for this research is the MLQ Self, which has 45 items (Bass, 1985, 2019; Underwood, 2015; Van Jaarsveld et al., 2019). This test measures these subscales within the leadership styles:

Transformational (5-I's)

Idealized attributes (builds trust)

Inspirational motivation (acts with integrity)

Intellectual stimulation (encourages innovative thinking)

Individual consideration (coaches and develops people)

Transactional (constructive & corrective)

Contingent reward (rewards achievement)

Management by exception—active (monitors deviations & mistakes)

Laissez-faire (passive & avoidant)

Management by exception- passive (fights fires)

Laissez-faire (avoids involvement). (Underwood, 2015; Van Jaarsveld et al., 2019)

Participants self-rate themselves as people in leadership positions and are asked how frequently they behave with the (MLQ). The sample questions from the survey (see Appendix B) will ask a participant, as a leader: “I talk optimistically about the future, I spend time teaching and coaching, I avoid making decisions.” The participant then

chooses one answer from the following: 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *once in a while*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *fairly often*, 4 = *frequently if not always*. Participant responses are averaged across each subscale for analysis.

The MLQ has been utilized across several studies to evaluate leadership styles in different sectors. Additionally, it has shown increasing reliability and validity in research completed by Van Jaarsveld et al. (2019) into how leadership style influences school performance, the work environment, and job satisfaction in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The MLQ has substantial validity and reliability evidence, according to Cronbach's alpha reliability above .80 for all MLQ scales (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This study has yielded strong validity as it was able to help see the different perspectives of teachers and principals in how they lead, showing the lack of team cohesion impacting the students (Van Jaarsveld, 2019). Teachers had an average of 2.83 with a transformational style, and principals had an average of 3.15. In transactional, teachers had an average of 2.56, and principals had 2.48. In the passive avoidant, teachers had a 1.15 average, and principals had a .54 average.

The scores are added based on how the participant answered and showed the highest scoring in each leadership style, determining the dominant style. For example, in the Transformational area, a score of 1.5 in the area of "inspires others" would mean they do that occasionally. The average score would be 3.08, meaning they "inspire fairly often". The data and average scores were calculated via the SPSS program utilizing descriptive statistics. This measure is an excellent tool for individual and group assessments, which take about 15 minutes to complete (Bass & Avolio, 1995).

## ***Trauma***

The ACE was used to measure the level of trauma a person has in this study. In its 20-plus years, the ACE has been used in medical research with the CDC and Kaiser Permanente, involving 17,337 people. These individuals consisted of middle-aged and middle-class adults providing their current medical and mental health history, social function, and life span with ten categories of adverse experiences from childhood (Felitti, 2017). These experiences are from what an adult has experienced through infancy, childhood, and adolescence.

The ACE questionnaire comprises ten questions that give the participant a yes or no option. If the participant answers yes, that is one point toward their final score. The leading question for context at the beginning of the questionnaire asks: “During your first 18 years of life, you were growing up...”

Some test sample questions are.

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household swear at you, insult you, put you down, humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household o often or very often Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
3. Did an adult or person at least five years older than your e ever Touch or fondle you, or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or Attempt or have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?

Once completed, the checkmarks are added up. Once added up, this gives a person an ACE score of one to ten. Research has shown that the higher the number, the increased prevalence of substance use, physical and mental health issues, and other possible chronic life issues such as legal troubles (Burkey et al., 2020). For example, a person who scores a four or more is likely to have drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempts. Those scoring six or more died early by at least 20 years, to those with no reported ACE score (Burkey et al., 2017). Counseling resources were made available for those with high scores.

The validity of this scale is based on its self-reporting nature. In the study that Felitti et al. (2019) conducted on childhood exposures and clustering health risks, they discovered that of those who reported no childhood exposures, 56% of them did not have any of the ten risk factors explored. Risk factors such as smoking, severe obesity, and physical activity, to name a few (Felitti et al., 2019). The ACE questionnaire has been found to have internal consistency and validity with clinical and non-clinical samples. Internal consistency was measured with Cronbach's alpha; the ACE was administered in a study of 101 women who resided in foster care during their childhood. The result of the study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, determining sufficient internal consistency (Bruskas, 2013). The entire scale can be seen in Appendix B.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

This research study used a linear regression analysis. Regression analysis helps to bridge the gap for the researcher, allowing them to predict the relationship between the dependent variable and one or more independent variables (Wagner, 2019). This study's

dependent variables are leadership styles (transformational, transaction, laissez-faire), and the independent variables are ACES and attachment security (as measured by attachment anxiety and avoidance). Linear regression analyses were used to analyze the relationship among these variables. Three different linear regression models were conducted, with each leadership style denoting a different model. All models will include attachment and trauma as independent variables. SPSS was used to answer this study's research questions. The first sample of data was imported to SPSS, allowing extraction of the .sav file, then double-clicking to import the data from Survey Monkey. The researcher inspected the data to ensure the data imported works. The next step was to standardize the variables in regression analysis. To do this, the variables in the data set were examined using descriptive statistics in SPSS.

There were multiple steps in completing the regression analyses. Step one included the predictor variables, which included the measures of ACES (childhood trauma) and two measures of ECR (attachment anxiety and avoidance). The attachment security variables (attachment anxiety and avoidance) were calculated and entered separately per instructions for the scale. The dependent variable was leadership styles, as measured by the MLQ (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire). These steps were done three times for each leadership style with the same predictor variables (ACES, attachment anxiety, and attachment avoidance).

### **Threats to Validity**

Validity is the cornerstone of research defined. A definition of validity by Cook and Campbell (1979) said it is the most incredible obtainable estimate of the truth or

falsity of proposals (Szymanski, 1995). Concerning quantitative studies, validity seeks to make clear subjective bias. The areas that could threaten validity are statistical conclusion, internal validity, construct validity, and external validity (Gundry, 2019). Statistical conclusion validity is described as the strength of the presumed cause and effect of the data (Gundry, 2019), this is demonstrated in statistical power. The strength of statistical power comes from meeting the minimum set for participants in the research (Gundry, 2019).

As stated above, this research will require 119 minimum participants to meet statistical power. The step to address this is that at least 600 surveys were sent out to get statistical power, and 131 were recruited to account for attrition. Cognitive bias means that if something triggers a negative thought, their innate desire to do well, to figure out how to cheat, and be over-concerned with the outcome of their answers (Gundry, 2019). The step happened by communicating with test participants that their answers would not be considered right or wrong and to be aware of their feelings and thoughts while testing to ensure that they do not give answers based on their reactivity.

Lastly, external validity seeks to answer the question of can the research findings be generalized to other populations, situations, and specific people groups (Gundry, 2019). As mentioned above, this study has three variables that explore the human experience of childhood through adulthood. Additionally, participants were to answer a question, "For this item, select 1," to know that they were reading the directions in each section thoroughly.

**Data Storage**

To maintain data confidentiality, in alignment with the IRB, the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 2010), the Walden IRB, and federal guidelines, according to 45 CFR 46.115 for the Department of Health and Human Services determine all data was stored for 3 years on a password protected device. After 3 years, data will be destroyed by permanently deleting all digital files.

**Ethical Procedures**

This research had a couple of ethical concerns due to the sensitive nature of answering questions about trauma in childhood. Due to this, steps were taken to communicate therapeutic resources available to test participants before beginning the questionnaire. This was disclosed through the consent form and the debriefing statement at the beginning and end of the survey pages. Participants can skip any questions without penalty or stop the study if stressed. Additionally, test participant names were kept anonymous. The researcher will take steps to keep responses confidential, as the researcher can only access the results. The scales utilized in this study have been previously used in other research; therefore, it was concluded that extreme distress might not be present in the participants. The samples of informed consent (Appendix C), online survey via SurveyMonkey (Appendix B), and social media posts (Appendix A) can be found in the appendices.

Participant recruitment can begin after the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Before starting the survey, participants will read the informed consent

form and then select “I agree to participate in this study” before being able to start the online survey. Participants can stop at any time during the survey if they experience triggering moments from the questions, and this was shared with them in the consent form. Participants also have the option to skip questions if, at any time during the survey, they feel uncomfortable. Participants will not be penalized if they do not finish the surveys, and this information was provided in the informed consent form.

### **Summary**

The research from this present study examined how childhood trauma and attachment injury influence the development of leadership styles in adulthood. A survey was utilized for this quantitative study. The ACE will measure trauma, the ECR will measure attachment security, and the MLQ will measure leadership style. These tests have been used for many years in myriad studies, exhibiting strong validity and reliability for this research. In addition, a multiple regression analysis was used to measure the variables using (SPSS) software. Lastly, this chapter discussed the research design and rationale, the methodology, threats to validity, and ethical procedures. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the data analysis in detail.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine if childhood trauma and attachment security, measured by attachment anxiety and avoidance, are related to adult leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. The research question for this study is: Does childhood trauma and attachment security relate to leadership style (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire)? The criteria for the study focused on adult leaders eighteen and older in leadership positions in the United States. In this chapter, I describe the study participants and review the findings of this study by analyzing the data. This chapter will focus on data preparation and data analysis.

### **Data Collection**

After approval from the IRB, study participants were recruited using Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. To begin the research, I posted a flyer on the above social media platforms on January 31, 2024, stating that I was researching to understand leadership experiences. That information from this study could help inform leadership development. Leaders were invited to participate in an online survey about childhood trauma, attachment, and leadership styles. For example, the survey was posted on Facebook in the Sioux Falls Therapist and Black Professionals groups of Sioux Falls. It is unknown how many participants came from each social media platform, as SurveyMonkey does not track that information. The post had a link to a SurveyMonkey for those interested.

Additionally, I set up the post to run in an advertisement format on Facebook and Instagram for \$80. The advertisement was set to run in the United States for 1 month. The survey was responded to well, receiving at least five to 10 respondents daily. However, it stagnated for a few days. The shares of the original post, which other social media followers shared organically through snowball sampling, helped to meet the sample size needed to complete the study. This study had a total of 57 shares on social media. I knew to stop when I reached the goal of 119 completed surveys on March 8, 2024. I had planned for the advertisement to run until I reached that number. My goal was to get that number within 7 weeks. As a result of these approaches, the total number of participants who at least started the online survey was 157.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The data were collected within 6 weeks through SurveyMonkey. A total of 157 participants contributed to the online survey. However, of the 157 participants, only 124 completed all items in the survey. Due to incompleteness or missing data, 33 participant surveys were deleted from the study. From Chapter 3, the sample size needed for sufficient statistical power was 119 participants. Thus, the survey had enough participants to complete analyses.

Details of the study sample can be found in Table 1. Participants were predominantly female (58.1%), ages 25–61. The remaining participants were male (41.9%), ages 21–76. The mean age for participants was 45.10 years ( $SD = 12.88$ ). For ethnicity, many participants were White (46.8%), Black or African American (45.2%), Hispanic or Latino (5.6%), Asian (.8%), American Indian (.8%), or another race (.8%).

Among participants, 53.2% working in a for-profit job setting, and 46.8% indicated working in a nonprofit. Concerning relationship status, 56.5% reported being married, 3.2% widowed, 12.1% divorced, 1.6% separated, 4.8% cohabitating with a significant other, single, never married, 21% and .8% preferred not to answer. The mean for years of leadership was 15.04 years ( $SD = 11.87$ ).

The means of leadership style and attachment are presented in Table 2. Out of a scale of four, the participants averaged 3.12 ( $SD = .51$ ) in transformational leadership, 2.37 ( $SD = .58$ ) in transactional leadership style, and .97 ( $SD = .60$ ) in laissez-faire leadership. These results showed that most participants possessed characteristics of a transformational leadership style. Lastly, the mean for attachment anxiety was 2.77 ( $SD = 1.33$ ) and 2.73 ( $SD = 1.21$ ) for attachment avoidance.

**Table 1***Demographic Information for Study Sample (N = 124)*

	Variable	Frequency	
Gender	Female	72	58%
	Male	52	42%
Age	21–30	13	10%
	31–40	41	33%
	41–50	28	23%
	51–60	21	17%
	61–70	16	13%
	71–76	5	4%
Ethnicity	White	58	47%
	Black	56	45%
	Hispanic	7	6%
	Asian	1	1%
	American Indian	1	1%
	Another race	1	1%
Relationship	Married	70	57%
	Widowed	4	3%
	Divorced	15	12%
	Separated	2	2%
	Cohabiting with a significant other or in a domestic partnership	6	5%
	Single, never married	26	21%
	Prefer not to answer	1	1%
Years of leadership	1	8	7%
	2	1	1%
	3	8	7%
	4	6	5%
	5	10	8%
	6	4	3%
	7	4	3%
	8	7	6%
	9	2	2%
	10	9	7%
	12	1	1%
	13	2	2%
	14	1	1%
	15	11	9%
	16	1	1%
	17	3	2%
	18	1	1%
	19	2	2%
	20	16	13%
	22	1	1%
	25	10	8%
30	4	3%	
34	1	1%	
35	4	3%	
37	1	1%	
39	2	2%	
40	2	2%	
50	1	1%	
70	1	1%	

## **Preliminary Analyses**

Preliminary analyses were conducted but not before coding and scoring the measures that contained the online survey questions for the study. The independent variables mentioned above for this study are attachment security (measured by attachment anxiety and avoidance) and childhood trauma (measured using the ACE scale). The dependent variable is leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire). The first step in this process was to download the research data from SurveyMonkey and export it into SPSS. The next step was to clean the data by removing incomplete data from participants in the data set in SPSS. I removed 33 incomplete surveys. The next step in the process was to identify the variables in the data set in preparation for analyses. For example, I renamed the variables for each measure, which included the ACE, MLQ, and ECR scales, to each response by naming them ACE1, or MQ1, or ECR1 according to the number of questions for each measure.

The next step of the initial analyses was to compute the means, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, and zero-order Person correlation between the key variables. These preliminary analyses were conducted to check each scale's reliability, examine the variables' distribution, and identify outliers (Jhangiani et al., 2019). The variable that needed to be reverse coded was the ECR due to how the measure was developed. For example, Items 9 and 11 are high numbers that represent low anxiety rather than high anxiety and, therefore, need to be reverse coded. For this scale, the first 18 items measure attachment anxiety scale, and Items 19–36 measured attachment avoidance. Once items were reverse coded, I calculated the mean of attachment anxiety

and avoidance by taking the mean of the first 18 items for anxiety and the mean of the second 18 items for attachment avoidance.

The MLQ was calculated by averaging the scores for the items on this scale. This scale had 45 items in it. The score can be calculated by summing the items and dividing them by the number of items that make up that leadership style. For example, Items 10, 18, 21, and 25, corresponding to transformational leadership, were averaged to get a score for this leadership style. Transactional score, for example, had Items 1, 11, 16, and 35 added and divided by 4. Laissez-faire had items 5, 7, 28, and 33 added and divided by 4. No items needed to be reverse coded for this measure. Finally, the ACE had 10 items calculated by adding all the yeses to get the score. Yes was coded as 1, and no was coded as 0 in SPSS. The variables' ranges, means, and standard deviations were calculated by analyzing, selecting descriptive statistics, and selecting the variables of ACES, transformational, transactional, laissez-faire styles, avoidance, and anxiety (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Range, Means, Standard Deviation, and Cronbach's Alpha for Variables (N = 124)*

Variable	Range	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
ACES	10	3.04	2.53	.90
Anxiety	5.06	2.77	1.33	.90
Avoidance	4.61	2.73	1.21	.94
Transformational	2.58	3.12	.51	.89
Transactional	3.13	2.37	.58	.62
Laissez-faire	2.5	.97	.60	.75

Next, I used the scale reliability function on SPSS to calculate internal reliability by clicking on analyze, scale, and reliability analysis. The Cronbach's alphas were acceptable for this research study, ranging from .62 to .90. To calculate the Pearson

correlations, I analyzed correlation and bivariate. I then picked out the dependent variables and the independent variables. The correlations are presented in Table 3. ACES was positively associated with attachment anxiety ( $r = .21$ ) and avoidance ( $r = .26$ ). ACES was not associated with the three leadership styles. Transformational ( $r = -.16$ ) but had a low correlation with transactional ( $r = .01$ ). Attachment anxiety had a positive association with attachment avoidance ( $r = .57$ ) and laissez-faire leadership style ( $r = .46$ ). Attachment avoidance had a positive correlation with laissez-faire leadership style ( $r = .21$ ) and negative association with transformational leadership ( $r = -.19$ ). Last, transformational and transactional leadership style had a positive correlation ( $r = .49$ ).

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlations of Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ACES	---	.21*	.26**	-.16	.01	.02
2. Anxiety		---	.57**	-.28	-.06	.46**
3. Avoidance			---	-.19*	-.04	.21*
4. Transformational				---	.49**	-.32
5. Transactional					---	.02
6. Laissez-faire						---

*Note.* \* = Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed); \*\* = Correlation is

significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

**Tests of Assumptions for Linear Regression**

This study's design was comparative and involved conducting linear regressions. The variables included ACE, a yes and no question, causing it to be measured nominally, and the MLQ and ECR (anxiety and avoidance) were on a continuous measurement scale. Anxiety and avoidance were measured separately. All three scales could be put in a linear

regression analysis in SPSS. Testing normality for the first assumption of regression analyses required a linear relationship between the criterion and predictor variables. A P-P plot of leadership style (transformational, transactional, and Laisses Faire) criterion variable and the predictor variables of (ACES and attachment security) were plotted on SPSS. A visual inspection of these scatterplots showed that a linear relationship was met between the variables, as there were no significant outliers on the diagram. The VIF values were below 10, confirming a lack of multicollinearity. Upon visual inspection, homoscedasticity was met, and the plotted residuals of the variables in this study showed a normal distribution. Outliers were also examined, including any variables  $\pm 3$  standard deviation of the mean, but none were found.

### **Results**

For this study, three separate linear regressions were run. The three regressions were to analyze (a) transformational leadership, (b) transactional leadership, and (c) laissez-faire leadership styles. To run each regression analysis, I clicked on analyze, regression, and linear and used the MLQ scores as dependent variables (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire). The independent variables were ACES and ECR (attachment anxiety and avoidance) scores.

The first regression model predicted transformational leadership with ACES and the ECR (attachment anxiety and avoidance) as predictors. Results showed that the model was good, even though only one predictor was significant (see Tables 4-6). There was no statistical significance between the dependent variable and ACES ( $B = -.02, p = .29$ ) and attachment avoidance ( $B = -.01, p = .81$ ) as they relate to transformational leadership



style. However, attachment anxiety was related to transformational leadership style ( $B = -.10, p = .02$ ). The  $R^2$  value displays a small effect size, where this model explains 8% of the variance in transformational leadership. Thus, my alternative hypothesis is partially supported.

**Table 4**

*Model Summary of Transformational Leadership*

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.29a	.08	.06	.49

*Note.* Predictors: (Constant), Avoidance, ACES, Anxiety

**Table 5**

*ANOVA Results Predicting Transformational*

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
	Regression	2.89	3	.96	3.89	.01
	Residual	29.73	120	.25		
1	Total	32.62	123			

*Note.* Dependent variable: transformational; predictors: (constant), avoidance, ACES, anxiety

**Table 6**

*Regression Coefficients Predicting Transformational Leadership Style*

Model		Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	3.47	.12		28.59	<.001
	ACES	-.02	.02	-.10	-1.07	.29
	Anxiety	-.10	.04	-.25	-2.29	.02
1	Avoidance	-.01	.05	-.03	-.24	.81

*Note.* Dependent variable: Transformational

Next, I conducted the second regression model where the dependent variable was transactional leadership style, and the independent variables were ACES and the ECR (attachment anxiety and avoidance) (see Table 7- 9). This analysis showed no statistical significance. There was no statistical significance between the dependent and individual variables: ACES ( $B = .01, p = .79$ ), attachment anxiety ( $B = -.03, p = .59$ ), and attachment avoidance ( $B = -.01, p = .90$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted for this hypothesis.

**Table 7**

*Model Summary of Transactional Leadership Style*

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
2	.06	.01	-.02	.58

*Note.* Predictors: (Constant), avoidance, ACES, anxiety

**Table 8**

*ANOVA Results Predicting Transactional*

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
2	Regression	.19	3	.07	.19	.90
	Residual	40.72	120	.34		
	Total	40.91	123			

*Note.* Dependent variable: transactional, predictors: (constant), avoidance, ACES, anxiety

**Table 9***Regression Coefficients for Transactional Leadership Style*

Model	Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.44	.14		17.19	<.001
ACES	.01	.02	.03	.26	.79
Anxiety	-.03	.05	-.06	-.55	.59
Avoidance	-.01	.05	-.01	-.13	.90

Note: Dependent Variable: transactional

Finally, the third regression model tested the dependent variable of laissez-faire leadership style with independent variables of ACES and the ECR (attachment anxiety and avoidance; see Tables 10–12). There was no statistical significance between the dependent and individual variables of ACES ( $B = -.00, p = .38$ ) and attachment avoidance ( $B = -.00, p = .51$ ). However, there was statistical significance with the relationship between laissez-faire and attachment anxiety ( $B = .20, p = <.001$ ), which means that there is partial support for the alternative hypothesis.

**Table 10***Model Summary of Laissez-Faire Leadership*

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
3	.47	.23	.21	.53

Note. Predictors: (Constant), avoidance, ACES, anxiety

**Table 11***ANOVA Results Predicting Laissez-Faire*

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
	Regression	9.877	3	3.292	11.615	<.001
	Residual	34.015	120	.283		
3	Total	43.893	123			

*Note.* Dependent Variable: Laissez-faire; Predictors: (Constant), Avoidance, ACES,

Anxiety

**Table 12***Regression Coefficients Predicting Laissez-Faire Leadership Style*

Model		Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	.47	.13		3.62	<.001
	ACES	-.02	.02	-.07	-.88	.38
	Anxiety	.23	.04	.52	5.25	<.001
3	Avoidance	-.03	.05	-.07	-.66	.51

*Note.* Dependent Variable: Laissez-faire

The null hypothesis and alternative hypotheses were partially supported. ACES and avoidant security were not related to laissez-faire leadership. However, this study did show a positive relationship between anxious attachment and laissez-faire leadership styles.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the research question and hypothesis were assessed, which aimed to decide if childhood trauma and attachment styles were related to leadership styles in adults. The data was collected through Survey Monkey, with 157 participants contributing to the survey. After the data was cleaned, the researcher found that 124 participants had completed the survey. Thirty-three participants were removed from the survey due to missing data. Using linear regression, the researcher's findings did not support the study's hypotheses. The findings showed that anxious security was related to two leadership styles in adults, but no other variables were significant concerning leadership styles. Transformational and transactional leadership were positively correlated which is consistent with past research. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and limitations of this study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

It is not known how childhood trauma and attachment security are related to adult leadership styles (transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire). Researchers have shown relationships between leadership styles and attachment and discovered that secure attachment is positively related to transformational leadership. This research study was prompted because, in the current literature, childhood trauma has not been factored into the above variables. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine how childhood trauma and attachment security (measured by anxiety and avoidance) are related to the adult leadership styles of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire.

In this quantitative study, my hypotheses were partially supported by the findings. The findings established that attachment security—specifically attachment anxiety—was related to two leadership styles in adults. The findings from this study also support previous research in the positive correlation of transformational and transactional leadership styles. However, childhood trauma was not related to any of the three leadership styles. In this chapter, I discuss the findings, limitations, recommendations for future studies, and implications of study results.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The current study had these findings: (a) attachment anxiety was positively associated with laissez-faire leadership and negatively associated with transformational leadership, (b) attachment avoidance had no relationship with leadership styles, and (c) childhood trauma did not have a relationship with leadership styles. Results from this

study support previous research on attachment security. For example, the results of this study show a relationship between low anxiety and transformational leadership, which is supported by previous studies (Neto et al., 2018; Underwood, 2015). Yet, the results of this study are inconsistent with other studies that examined childhood trauma and leadership styles (Fein et al., 2020; Fuchshuber et al., 2019), as the current study did not find a significant relationship between leadership styles and ACEs. Generally, this study's results support the three theories the research was grounded in.

### **Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance and Leadership Style**

There are some possible explanations for the study findings. First, attachment anxiety was related to the transformational leadership style because a leader with attachment anxiety may be less trustworthy, which is the opposite of a transformational leader with attachment security (Underwood et al., 2015). Moreover, this is evidenced by previous research; a laissez-faire leader demonstrates apathetic behavior, lack of focus, low-quality leadership, and lack of accountability, and creates a negative environment (Neto et al., 2018; Underwood, 2015). These behaviors of laissez-faire leaders are similar to individuals with attachment anxiety, who exhibit fear of abandonment, low self-esteem, lack of self-control, mistrust of others, and poor boundaries (Bowlby, 2007; Underwood, 2015). Essentially, the relationship between attachment anxiety and these two different leadership styles is because anxiety is similar to the traits of a laissez-faire leader and antithetical to the traits of a transformational leader.

Furthermore, previous studies relate to this study in that most leaders had a transformational style, which is associated with low attachment anxiety (Anselan &

Mulder, 2020; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998). Attachment anxiety can hinder leaders from becoming transformational, which is consistent with previous studies (Haile, 2017; Underwood, 2015). Moreover, previous studies have shown that a transformational leader is confident, consistent, secure, and steady; however, attachment anxiety is not these behaviors (Sabbah et al., 2020). The results of this study could have occurred because the leaders, especially those with many years of leadership experience, have grown in confidence and attachment security, possibly by putting themselves in healthy relationships and environments, allowing attachment anxiety to diminish. Because this study is cross-sectional, however, evidence is needed to support this rationale.

Furthermore, with attachment anxiety, there is a lack of ability to manage high-stress situations, as individuals with this attachment insecurity will lack skills to regulate themselves emotionally (Mrazkova & Lisa, 2022), making them less reliable leaders, the very opposite of transformational leaders. Therefore, to explain the rationale of the results further, leaders in a positive environment could help them become transformational. This idea is supported theoretically by Bandura with SCT in that being in an affirming environment can help change negative behaviors through self-agency. Self-agency is a component of SCT that allows people to self-regulate their thoughts, motivations, and behaviors (McCormick, 2001), thus reducing anxiety and increasing transformational leadership behaviors.

Next, attachment avoidance was not related to any leadership styles. The implications for the data are that people with relational styles of attachment avoidance



may be the determining factor in them not becoming transformational leaders.

Underwood et al. (2016) communicated that transformational leaders have attachment security. An attachment-avoidant person will have a negative view of others, cannot emotionally connect, and will hold rigid boundaries (Bowlby, 2007; Underwood, 2015), and these behaviors do not relate to transformational or transactional leaders. Though not studied in this research, this type of attachment would make it challenging to lead and develop healthy connections with followers and for followers to connect with their leader.

Explaining the results and where leaders can grow and mature in the right environment is another consideration. Leaders need the right person to help them grow in positive attributes and behaviors (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). Perhaps this study's participants were either consistently low on attachment avoidance or found ways to manage these avoidant behaviors as leaders (see McCormick, 2001). Perhaps some leaders may not have experienced adverse issues in childhood, resulting in no attachment avoidance in adulthood (Gondek et al., 2021; Karatekin & Hill, 2018). Further study is warranted, as the years of leadership may have a relationship with childhood trauma, therefore reducing this variable's association with leadership style.

Moreover, attachment avoidance was not found to be associated with any leadership styles, as previous studies have discussed (Underwood, 2015), because attachment avoidance is an absence of leadership (Ekmeckci & Tosunoglu, 2016). Furthermore, the statement is not true of the participants from this study because they identified themselves as leaders to meet the testing criteria. Lastly, another point to

consider supporting the results is that these leaders could have addressed areas of concern for their behavior, fear of dependence, and interpersonal intimacy, which could explain the findings of no association between attachment avoidance and leadership styles (see Brennan et al., 1998). When people are not anxious or avoidant, they can be secure; this relates to leadership in that security in leadership means they will demonstrate stable, consistent, and positive behaviors, which aligns with previous research (Oke et al., 2019). This type of leader (i.e., secure) attracts followers (Simsa & Trotter, 2020). However, more empirical data are needed to support these claims.

## **ACES**

Another finding in this study is that there was no relationship between childhood trauma and leadership styles. Previous research and current leadership research discussed that great managers are leaders of influence who perform well in the workplace, create stable and safe environments, and keep healthy relationships with their followers (Eldad & Benatov, 2018). These studies imply that a person with unresolved trauma could have poor relational connections, low self-esteem, and lack confidence, which is the opposite of a transformational leader (Rosen et al., 2018; Salehzadeh, 2017). There are a few explanations for why ACEs may not relate to the different leadership styles.

ACES did not relate to transformational leadership, as this study showed. This result of the study is possible because a transformational leader demonstrates emotional intelligence and can self-regulate and manage their stressors (Tinajero et al., 2020). What is not known from the study is what the participants who identified high trauma did to reduce the adverse effects of their trauma from childhood or adverse issues. Adverse

issues that an adult could have from childhood are low self-esteem, hypervigilance, and emotional regulation issues (Tibi et al., 2020). Past research that supports the current study communicates that trauma is not permanent. This statement was not studied; however, the participants could have engaged in one or more of the following positive behaviors to reduce their trauma: therapy, a close friendship, or a significant other who has behaviors of consistent communication and healthy relational interactions (Newman et al., 2008). Lastly, a transformational leader has a desire for growth and development; perhaps these participants utilized those to help overcome their trauma to succeed in all aspects of their lives (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). These positive behaviors from previous research could explain why the null hypothesis was found.

ACES and transactional leadership did not have a relationship with each other. Even though transactional leadership is goal-oriented in nature, it still is not related to trauma. This lack of relationship could be because participants again recognized behaviors they would like to address within themselves to be better leaders. Previous studies show that transactional leaders can still motivate followers positively and successfully (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014; Underwood, 2015). Transactional leaders are associated with getting things done, using rewards and punishments, and achieving goals due to their ability to focus. As the results show, trauma is none of these things, which probably explains why there was no relationship with transactional leadership (Feletti, 2019; Haile, 2017).

ACES and laissez-faire leadership did not have a relationship with each other. Laissez-faire leaders have a hands-off approach, letting things ride with their followers

(Ekmeckci & Tosunoglu, 2016). Regardless of this, one would think that trauma should be a factor in this leadership behavior because of how it can create negative self-view, unhealthy relational patterns with self and others, and poor views of self and others (Feletti, 2019). However, an assumption that could contribute to this null finding is just poor parenting. What is not known by the participants is the type of attachment style their primary caregivers had. Previous studies have examined parental style as a factor associated with shaping leadership behaviors (Eldad & Benatov, 2018), but it is not clear how this relates to laissez-faire leadership. Parental styles shaping adult leadership could explain why ACES and laissez-faire leadership had no relationship. Thus, future studies should also focus on parental attachments and leadership styles.

There is little past research on how trauma correlates with adult leadership styles; however, what we do know about trauma is that trauma can be treatable. The ways trauma is treatable is if a person engages in healthy relationships, a therapeutic process, and ultimately, developing healthy coping mechanisms can see the reduction of the risks of trauma (Ziegler, 2015). Trauma-focused therapy could be weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the severity. Coping skills such as deep breathing exercises, drawing, or working out. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 2, the trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy approach draws on family therapy, attachment theory, neurobiology, behavior therapy, and developmental neurobiology (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). The entire purpose of this therapy is to restore bonds and confidence and create secure attachments. Trauma starts with unhealthy relationships but is also healed through healthy relationships, as these are ways for a person to begin to address their childhood

trauma to move towards relational wholeness. Some individuals/leaders included more healthy and strong relationships in their adult lives. Some may have sought out professional help by going to therapy to address their trauma, which could be why trauma did not show a strong relationship with leadership styles and explain the null finding.

### **Implications**

#### **Theoretical**

Albert Bandura created SCT in 1977, which focuses on watching, modeling, and imitating the behaviors of others, playing a significant role in how developing leaders can develop their skills and styles (Schunk & Dibendetto, 2020). Additionally, SCT explores how environmental experiences and cognitive factors relate to behaviors. The findings in this research further showed that a person's environment or adverse life experiences could not relate to who or what they achieve in adulthood. Negative experiences such as childhood trauma, which aligns with the environmental and cognitive factors of SCT, are types of development challenges. However, another component of SCT is self-efficacy (Grusec, 1992), which is connected to modeling, in which a person can learn how to create specific beliefs concerning their abilities and characteristics in particular areas. Modeling or observational learning is where a person observes another person's behaviors and is influenced by them. Through higher education and years of leadership, it could be that a teacher or mentor showed positive behaviors that these leaders used to improve their lives. This theory thoroughly helped to support the research and does not need any changes because what was concluded is that trauma was not related to adult leadership styles. The results of this study support this theory.

Attachment theory by John Bowlby explored how early relationships with primary caregivers can establish healthy attachment or detachment styles that go well into adulthood (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby proposed that attachments included behavioral systems, with a cognitive part of mental representations of the attachment figure, the self, and the early life experiences that ultimately created the inner world, known as the internal working model (Slater, 2007). The findings also support that in attachment theory and leadership theories, attachment anxiety appears to contribute to transformational and transactional leadership styles, which continue to be in alignment with previous research (Neto et al., 2018; Underwood et al., 2016). This theory fully supports the research and does not need further changes.

The current research supported the leadership theories by James MacGregor Burns of transformational (people-focused) and transactional styles (goal-focused) (Bass, 1985), and Kurt Lewin developed the laissez-faire style (Ekmecki et al., 2016) (easygoing) support the current research. The evidence of this current research supports this theory because transformational leaders have low anxiety and low avoidance, and transactional and avoidant leaders have high anxiety and high avoidance. These behaviors align with these theories' descriptions (Bass, 1985; Ekmecki et al., 2016). Transformational leadership style is associated with change in individuals and social systems, developing leaders using motivation and morale (Burns, 1978). Lastly, this concludes that transformational remains people-focused, transactional is goal-focused, and laissez-faire is unengaged (Underwood et al., 2016) because of the high correlations

between attachment anxiety and avoidance in the two leadership styles, which the study revealed.

Last, in alignment with previous research, transformational and transactional leadership styles were positively correlated. The study done by Bass et al. (2003) supported this association as they discovered that these two leadership types both seek to improve follower performance. Though the processes are different, the goal is the same. A transformational leader will use motivation and coaching, while a transactional leader will use reward and punishment to improve their followers' performance and behaviors (Bass et al., 2003).

### **Positive Social Change**

It is also essential for society to note that relationships, healthy or unhealthy in a person's life, can determine the course of their future. However, as some participants reported, their high achievements in higher education do not mean the end of their future. Future studies should examine what specific help, such as therapy or other forms of treatment, leadership classes, were sought that could have mitigated leaders from being affected by their childhood trauma. The research brings awareness to businesses, leaders, and employees that if they want to create a healthy, thriving organization, the leadership will need most managers, supervisors, or their higher-up structure to have a secure attachment style. The reason is that previous research (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Underwood et al., 2016) and the current research show that this is related to a transformational leader. Transformational leaders want to see their followers grow and see them more successful than they are. For leadership, this creates a people-focused,

coaching, and development environment (Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019). A transformational leader is associated positively with society and organizations. This study showed that anxious attachment security could become a barrier to styles in adult leaders.

Additionally, this further implies that a person who could be prone to negatively influencing the environment has low self-esteem and co-dependency. Thus, the negative behaviors could make the business leader, team, or organization unstable, which could how this leadership approach may impact employee retention (Underwood et al., 2016; Van Jarsveeld et al., 2019).

The research from this study aimed to help leaders understand if childhood trauma and attachment security were related to leadership style. Childhood trauma impacts in various ways can have long-term risks on relationships from private to professional. The results of this study help to show that a person can have longevity in leadership and graduate college and graduate school despite having high trauma from childhood. Creating a positive life despite high trauma is impactful for an individual as it can give hope that they can become much more than what happened to them in their childhood. This survey shows that a group of people can become resilient in the face of adversity, become better for themselves, and end the generational trauma cycles. Also, the positive social change with attachment security is that as leaders show up in the organizations, communities, and families they lead, they can create healthy spaces for growth and thrive with their followers. We know that attachment security has leaders showing up confidently, having a positive self-view, and having a positive view of others. With this



type leading the way in most spaces, what type of world could be created for future generations?

Organizations will benefit from this study as they can see that cognitive and environmental factors can contribute to leaders developing into strong, healthy leaders despite adverse early-life risks. Organizations can create or implement training tracks that help leaders become aware of trauma challenges by developing self-awareness courses, ensuring employees know how and when to use EAP services, and connecting with support in the community for trauma recovery. Organizations can bring awareness to leadership teams that may be struggling and can help them increase relational awareness through training about attachment and leadership styles. This awareness will help create better organizational health. Transformational leaders are people-focused and can increase the positivity in an organization. Supplying those leaders with insecure attachment styles with emotional intelligence training could be vital in the health of a leader and the organization they lead to increase efficiency. Based on the results of this study, the message for society is impactful in that it shows people, against all odds, can finish better in life than they started, despite the trauma they experienced early in life.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was able to increase awareness of childhood trauma and lack of risks in adult leadership style development. Additionally, this study brought further awareness to studies that have already investigated the research into the relationship between attachment styles and leadership styles. The limitation was the data being collected on social media. Even though it was posted on three different social media platforms,

Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, it was ultimately just one medium. This method limited the study because some businesspeople do not use social media enough to have noticed a study to participate in. If leadership groups or networks had been contacted, this could have even reached this specific population for this survey.

This study lacked diversity regarding ethnicity, as white and Black participants were the highest, and Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian participants were the lowest. The origin state of South Dakota has a small minority population where the researcher resides and has limited connections on social media with minority groups and individuals. Another limitation of the study was not knowing if participants who scored high in childhood trauma received therapy or sought help. This study also limits generalizability because it is leadership-focused; not every person online could take it. So, the study's results do not apply to a broader population.

Another limitation was that this research was a cross-sectional study. A cross-sectional study utilized the ACES, ECR, and MLQ because these questionnaires pointed to a specific childhood time, current relationships, and reporting on the participants' leadership behaviors. The limitation is that it is hard to establish associations with relationships or to analyze behaviors over time. Future studies should include a qualitative study to find out what participants could have done in adulthood to reduce the association of trauma with their childhood. Additionally, future studies should include questions about specific interventions that the participants can report that helped them to become better leaders, such as whether they could have started as laissez-faire or transactional leaders.

## **Recommendations**

This research study brought attention to childhood trauma and its possible risks for adults in general. As it was discovered in this study, childhood trauma did not have any relationship to leadership styles in adults. Attachment security was measured with the ECR (attachment anxiety and avoidance) as the current research showed that anxious attachment security relates to adult leadership style. Past and current research has shown that attachment styles are related to adult leadership style types (Underwood, 2015; Underwood et al., 2016). Attachment styles begin to develop in early childhood, and poor primary caregivers create a risk of disruptions in emotional and relational areas (Mrazkova & Lisa, 2022). A transformational leader positively impacts an organization (Bass, 1985). Future researchers should focus on qualitative studies because what is not known, especially with leaders with years of experience who have high trauma but are unaffected, is what they did to grow. Those leaders should be interviewed, especially those with high trauma (a score of three or higher) and a transformational leadership style.

Secondly, another recommendation is to form a focus group to concentrate on the longitudinal changes in the leader's life. The focus group will hopefully allow them to gain insights by way of life interventions on how a leader may have started as a laissez-faire type of leader and then developed into a transformational leader. The type of life interventions a leader could have tried, such as mental health therapy, obtaining a life coach, or, if needed, addiction treatment. To find common themes among the group, this could create other training material or a training development track for leaders learning

how to recover from childhood trauma—additionally, providing a necessary tool for those leaders who have experienced trauma but did not seek help and have an anxious or avoidant attachment style, which is not only their work but their home life.

Future studies could add a control variable, as this study did not have one, to strengthen the internal validity of their research better. Lastly, a focus group that is explicitly for minority populations to gain a better understanding of their leadership experiences is another recommendation in the United States, as this study had a tiny minority population with Hispanic and Asian Americans. At what age did they possibly get a mentor? What specific intervention was associated with positive change in their life? These are some focused questions that are connected to SCT.

Furthermore, what was reported in the study is leaders having high trauma. However, it was not related to their leadership style, as most reported a transformational leadership style. Their cultural experiences with a highly familiar correlation with their attachment security are essential to understanding how a person leads in the work environment (Balikici, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The results of this research revealed that childhood trauma does not correlate with leadership styles in adults. I assumed that childhood trauma would determine if a leader would have a transactional or laissez-faire style. Another finding from this research study was that anxious security had a relationship with the laissez-faire style of leadership of adults. However, the results did not support the hypothesized interaction of relationships between the variables. However, the data provided valuable insight that warrants further

qualitative testing. Insight into the results, such as years of leadership, is valuable to being a transformational leader.

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### Appendix A: Social Media Recruitment Post

What life experiences influences how a person leads? Take part in this 10–15-minute online survey to explore how trauma, attachments influence adult Leader styles!

If you have any questions, you can reach .

Click post to complete the survey.

## Appendix B: Online Survey via Survey Monkey

### Demographics

Age\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_ Education Level\_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status\_\_\_\_\_

State\_\_\_\_\_ Years of Leadership\_\_\_\_\_

### ACE Questionnaire

#### Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire

Due to copyright questions were not printed.

### Multifactor Leadership Questionnaires – short

MLQ SHORT FORM This purpose of this questionnaire is to assess your leadership style as you perceive it. These items can apply to your current or former work, a sports team, a volunteer activity, academic teams, etc. Think about them in aggregate across your experiences. The word “others” may mean your peers, clients, direct reports, supervisors, and/or all of these individuals. If an item is irrelevant, or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave it blank. Descriptive statements are listed below.

Judge how frequently each statement fits you. Highlight or bold the number that indicates its frequency for you on average.

0 - Not at all 1 - Once in a while 2 -Sometimes 3-Fairly often 4- Frequently, if not always

Sample Items:

As a leader ....

I talk optimistically about the future.

I spend time teaching and coaching.

I avoid making decisions.

The person I am rating....

Talks optimistically about the future.

Spends time teaching and coaching.

Avoids making decisions

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Experience in Close Relationships Questionaries

Due to copyright questions were not printed.

## Appendix C: Approval for Use of Surveys

### MLQ Approval

For use by Joshua Duncan only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on December 21, 2023

#### Permission Letter



[www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com)

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

#### **Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire**

The license holder has permission to administer the complete instrument in their research, however, only three sample items from this instrument as specified below may be included in the research write-up, thesis, or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument form may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

**Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.**

#### **Sample Items:**

As a leader ....

- I talk optimistically about the future.
- I spend time teaching and coaching.
- I avoid making decisions.

The person I am rating....

- Talks optimistically about the future.
- Spends time teaching and coaching.
- Avoids making decisions

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Sincerely,

Robert Most  
Mind Garden, Inc.  
[www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com)

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## ECR Approval

12/21/23, 11:04 AM

Mail - Joshua Duncan - Outlook

Re: requesting to use the ECR in an online survey



Thank you for the prompt response!

---



**Subject:** Re: requesting to use the ECR in an online survey

This is fine with me. Good luck with your project. — Phil Shaver

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---



**Subject:** requesting to use the ECR in an online survey

Good morning Dr. Shaver,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University requesting to use the ECR in an online survey for my dissertation. The topic is "The Relationship between Childhood Trauma, Attachment, and Adult Leadership Styles"

It will have a sample size of 119 participants, distributed through Survey Monkey, and open for two weeks, starting in January 2024.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards.

Joshua Duncan.

## ACE Approval

The image is a screenshot of a webpage. On the left side, there is a sidebar with several sections: 'Resources', 'Email Updates' (with a form for entering an email address and a 'Submit' button), and 'Links' (with a list of links including 'Statistics (WISQARS)', 'Overdose Prevention', 'Traumatic Brain Injury', 'Vehicle Safety', and 'Room'). The main content area on the right contains several sections: a list of resources, a section for 'Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWRs)' with three bullet points, a section for 'ACEs Questionnaires' with a paragraph and a list of questionnaire links, and a section for 'Journal Articles by Topic Area' with a 'Commentary:' heading. The text is somewhat blurry but legible.

Resources

- [Learning from Wisconsin's Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACE\) Story](#) [221 KB, 2 Pages, 508] Describes how Wisconsin utilized their ACE data to provide a platform to increase support for evidence-based strategies that promote protective factors.

**Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWRs):**

- Swedo EA, Aslam MV, Dahlberg LL, et al. Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences Among U.S. Adults — Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011–2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2023;72:707–715. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7226a2>
- Anderson KN, Swedo EA, Trinh E, et al. Adverse childhood experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and associations with poor mental health and suicidal behaviors among high school students — Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, United States, January–June 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2022;71:1301–1305. DOI: [10.15585/mmwr/mm7141a2](https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7141a2)
- Merrick MT, Ford DC, Ports KA, et al. *Vital Signs: Estimated Proportion of Adult Health Problems Attributable to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Implications for Prevention — 25 States, 2015–2017*. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019; 68:999–1005.

**ACEs Questionnaires:**

The questionnaires are not copyrighted, and there are no fees for their use. If you include the ACE Study questionnaires in your research, a copy of the subsequent article(s) is requested (send to [dynquiries@cdc.gov](mailto:dynquiries@cdc.gov)).

The Family Health History and Health Appraisal questionnaires were used to collect information on child abuse and neglect, household challenges, and other socio-behavioral factors in the original CDC-Kaiser ACE Study.

- Family Health History Questionnaire
  - [Male Version](#) [PDF 183KB]
  - [Female Version](#) [PDF 196KB]
- Health Appraisal Questionnaire
  - [Male Version](#) [PDF 208KB]
  - [Female Version](#) [PDF 109KB]

The BRFSS ACE module was adapted from the original CDC-Kaiser ACE Study and is used to collect information on child abuse and neglect and household challenges. Please see the [BRFSS Questionnaires website](#) for the most up-to-date versions of the BRFSS ACE Modules.

[Top of Page](#)

**Journal Articles by Topic Area**

Commentary: