THE WOUNDED EDUCATIONAL LEADER:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOW SIX SUPERINTENDENTS

DESCRIBE AND UNDERSTAND A WOUNDING EXPERIENCE

by

Rafaela Yulissa Espinal

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Eleanor Drago-Severson, Sponsor
Professor Jeffrey Young

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ABSTRACT

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Rafaela Yulissa Espinal

Leaders are often wounded in practice, most often psychologically. My dissertation is a qualitative three-part interview study that explored how six superintendents describe and understand a wounding experience—defined as a serious conflict, dilemma, or critical event in leadership practice that has a profound impact on the person. This study was built on Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998, 2000a, 2000b) and Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2001, 2002a) series of research studies. It addressed a gap in educational research by providing insights needed to better understand how six superintendents described, processed, and made meaning of their wounding experience. Additionally, I explored how they learned, healed, or recovered. Two professors with expertise in educational leadership and practice recommended superintendents who self-identify as having been wounded. I purposefully selected participants located in the eastern United States and conducted three in-depth interviews. All six participants described and understood their wounding crisis as follows—it: (a) originated from doing what they referred to as the right thing for students (and other stakeholders); (b) was a "rub" against their "core values"; and (c) was a "blindsiding experience," which they did not anticipate. All participants (6/6) stated that they believed that wounding happens to most educational leaders and that being wounded felt inevitable when standing by tough leadership decisions that impacted stakeholders. In addition, all participants (6/6) told me

that they had rarely—if ever—discussed their wounding experience. I concluded that these superintendents, who expressed that they cared deeply for their students and communities (i.e., their moral purpose), experienced hurtful wounding crises that they framed predominantly as *adaptive challenges* in which their values were threatened or compromised, and for these participants, the wounding crises were emotional experiences that were—for the most part—often left undiscussed. These findings imply that spaces are needed where wounded leaders can tell their stories in confidence. I recommend creating forums for voicing, processing, responding to, and learning from wounding crises where leaders can express their emotions to determine avenues for recovery and healing. Supports may include social-emotional development, reflective practices, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and coaching.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this monumental and vital work to my grandmother, Rafaela Estevez (Doña Fellita), and my great aunt, Juana Vargas. Both of these models of empowered and independent women raised me until the age of seven in the Dominican Republic before I was taken to New York City. My Rafaela could not read or write—this doctorate is for her and the love of education she instilled in me. When I was removed from her loving arms, she had my aunt Ñega write letters to me every month. Although Doña Fellita could not read or write, she was an amazing mathematician with an entrepreneurial spirit who ran a small business out of nothing to support her family and the community. When my grandmother was finally able to travel to New York City, she came to gather food and clothing for others she considered less fortunate—even though we were considered economically disadvantaged by American standards and labels. Doña Fellita and Doña Juanita—the two most important women in my life, who unfortunately can only guide me and celebrate with me from heaven, made this hard work all worthwhile. Their spiritual guidance and blessings from them and God above have made this possible during the most trying times in my career and life. To add, during a universal pandemic.

My mother Francisca Vargas risked it all to come to the United States undocumented at the time and later became a citizen. Leaving four of us behind, she forged ahead with resilience and pure determination to bring her children to Harlem, New York, for a better future. In 1977, when I was seven, I arrived at Amsterdam and 126th Street, not far from Columbia University, where I will receive my Doctoral Degree at Teachers College. We all became citizens later as well. Because of my mother, I was able to walk through the campus at Columbia University as a child—my elementary school, P.S. 125, where I became the principal 30 years later, was just a few blocks away. My father also taught us the value and ethic of hard work.

It seems like yesterday when I would walk through the campus thinking how unattainable this dream once was. For years, I was encouraged to forego pursuing a bachelor's degree and live within the traditional gender roles so prominent in my culture. However, I attended the City University of New York, obtained my teaching degree in Bilingual Elementary Education and several master's degrees, all of which afforded me the confidence and opportunity to attend the university of my dreams. I thank one teacher of many, Maureen McAllister, who assured me that I could be the first college graduate in my immigrant family.

Other teachers inspired me along the way, even those who judged me when I did not speak English and dismissed me as an honor student because I did not look like or represent who they believed deserved to be in their honors classes. I dedicate this dissertation to the adversity they created, which made me stronger and more resilient. While I gained my inner courage from Doña Fellita, who led a family and community after becoming a young widow, my personal experiences of judgment and prejudice in America fostered my drive to pursue the highest academic achievements and roles in my career—as both principal and superintendent. Despite being wounded after 24 years of dedicating my life to the craft of teaching, leading, and learning, I still believe in the power of transforming the education system. I dedicate this dissertation to the children who possess an unlimited potential that resides deep within their brilliant minds and hope they know that education and believing are the core elements of achieving dreams envisioned.

I also dedicate this to my daughter Emma-Francis, who inspires me daily with her inquisitiveness, creativity, brilliance, and grit. Emma outperforms every expectation and is the second graduate in our family and her generation with bachelor's and master's degrees from prestigious universities—I am so proud! Empowered women empower women—you are a source of empowerment for me as your mother. You have supported me in this journey more than you could ever imagine—and in more ways than I could

ever demonstrate my gratitude. You read the original 500-page version of this work, made coffee runs, cooked meals, and shared words of encouragement along the way. Please know that you were pivotal to the birthing of these eight chapters. I know that you will change the world in education; after all, you delivered professional development for teachers at age 10, wrote your first school proposal at age 12, and read school profiles for fun. You make a difference in the daily lives of students every day—you are awsometastic [our own code]!

To my son Frankie, still in college, I dedicate this dissertation as well. I hope that it serves as an inspiration for continuing your studies and a reminder of the power of education. You are more brilliant than I could ever be and have unlimited potential and power—you too can achieve your wishes and desires, and I am here to help.

To working mothers across the world, and young girls everywhere, we too can—I dedicate this work to you to serve as inspiration for what could be, even when English is our second language.

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I thank Dr. Eleanor Drago-Severson, my sponsor and advisor. I met Dr. Ellie in a superintendents' meeting in New York City, where she provided training and development. I always knew someday I wanted to be a professor and get a doctoral degree; Dr. Ellie inspired me, believed in me, and guided me every step of the way to achieve this goal. With immense gratitude for her coaching and patience along this journey—beginning with my 180-page proposal—thank you for reading every idea and teaching me the way! I appreciate your dedication to my research and careful attention to each idea, sentence, and challenge. Your support in a safe holding environment, one that you so lovingly created, was outstanding. I could not have processed my own wounding experience or dared to engage in this research without your inspiration to switch topics and do this work. Your coaching, intense feedback, and support were invaluable and priceless. You would not disturb the chrysalis, knowing that the struggle served me well in order to fly with strength and survive present circumstances and the future that awaits. I thank you, Dr. Ellie!

I thank the other members of my committee. I acknowledge my second reader, Dr. Young—wow, what an honor to learn from such an experienced superintendent. You pushed my thinking with wonderings and thought partnerships from superintendent to superintendent. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, one of the original researchers in the work of the Wounded Leader. It was an honor and privilege to have you on my committee. Your work with Dr. Ackerman was the anchor for my study. Your research and poignant writing across studies served as a model and inspiration. I can only hope that my work expands the education sector's knowledge as we continue to support and sustain educational leaders.

I want to acknowledge my daughter Emma-Francis Pacheco for her patience and support during this journey. Emma, thank you for your gentle nudges and belief in my

abilities to pursue and complete this goal. I am a doctor because you and Frankie inspire me and uplift me daily. Emma and Frankie, you are the dream achieved and my greatest accomplishment. To my mother Francisca Vargas, for many meals delivered to my desk and desire to read my work if I translated it into Spanish so that she could help. The offer was sufficient.

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I acknowledge God's presence and power with whom all things are possible and who can heal all wounds—as he too was wounded but rose again.

R. Y. E.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Today's school-level challenges are complicated: new technologies, globalization, and the rapid exchange of information make leadership even more complex (Ackerman et al., 2018; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustices illuminated by the Black Lives Matter movement exemplify only two challenges leaders may face. As Young et al. (2017) suggested, the time seems ripe for understanding the experiences of educational leaders. With increased accountability, which publicly highlights where districts and schools stand in relation to national and state measures, examining educational leadership and the stories of educational leaders is vital (Young et al., 2017).

In 2002, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) reported:

> The current state of leadership practiced in schools makes leadership seem increasingly at risk. There is widespread agreement that in the United States schools are facing a dearth of school leaders capable of providing good leadership. (p. 3)

A national shortage of school leaders, coupled with concerns and stressors regarding the job, results in more leaders leaving or languishing in schools than ever before (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a; Mahfouz, 2018). In fact, limited research shows that the typical superintendent remains on the job for three to four years (Chingos et al., 2014; Grissom & Mitani, 2016). It is indeed important for leaders to be responsive to and

supported in the variety of contexts in which they lead in order to respond appropriately to the different contextual demands they face (Leithwood et al., 2019).

Contexts, experiences, and crises that produce a *wound* are especially important to understand as an educational community in the 21st century (Ackerman et al., 2018). A *wound*, for the purpose of this study, is a mental or emotional hurt, a rift in or blow to a political body or social group that causes emotional pain (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d). For an educational leader, a wound can be a serious conflict, dilemma, or critical event that has, in some way, profoundly affected them emotionally and professionally (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a). As Ackerman et al. (2018) stated, it is important to work together to understand underlying issues in educational leadership. Researchers, districts, and communities can all benefit from knowing more about how to support leaders in the current climate.

My research focused on understanding how wounds occur, what has caused them, and how six educational leaders who are or were at one time superintendents interpreted their experiences. In my research, I sought to explore how these superintendents described and understood their wounding experiences as a way to possibly shed light on how the education sector can better support and retain current and future leaders. Participants in my study self-identified as having experienced a wounding crisis and were identified by two educational leadership faculty and researchers at Teachers College. Through a series of interviews, I asked the six superintendents to describe and understand what their wounding experience meant to them and what, if anything, supported them in recovery. Building on the existing research on wounded leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b), I explored how each superintendent described their wounding experience prospectively (what happened at the time—then) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience—now in present time),

I chose to focus on superintendents because it is important to learn from these educational leaders—research that focuses on superintendents and their experience of wounding remains scarce. As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004b) concluded, leaders' feelings and the quality of their subjective experiences are increasingly relevant and purposeful; this type of research can be illuminating in helping identify the sustaining qualities of the work of leadership (p. 312).

Problem Statement

The nature of leadership is complex in many ways because of the uncertainty of the future of the work, rapidly growing inequity, a changing environment, and increased anxiety for all age levels, all of which make for a "dangerous world" (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019, p. 93). Issues such as the growing influence of social media, market-driven school reform, demands for constant accessibility, and mounting uncertainties all increase the complexity of problems faced by superintendents, districts, and their communities (Ackerman et al., 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2014; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2019). Yet, there has been a dearth of scholarship on the wounded educational leader since Pat Maslin-Ostrowski and Richard Ackerman published their initial studies in 1998 through 2002. Indeed, wounded leaders have been studied, it was decades ago—and very little of the research focused on superintendents and their experiences of wounding. Furthermore, there is still no simple language or vocabulary in the workplace to speak of some emotions that emerge during leadership, including vulnerability, isolation, fear, and loss (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b).

With the acknowledgment that cultural, economic, and contextual factors directly influence—or at times restrict—leaders' actions, practices, and behaviors (Leithwood et al., 2019), it is important to understand how leaders respond appropriately to the different contextual demands they face (Drago-Severson et al., 2014; Drago-Severson &

Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018). As I discuss in the next sections, the educational field is filled with complex leadership challenges (including repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racial issues exposed partially by the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020). More studies are needed to explore how educational leaders describe and understand the challenges they face, especially ones that lead to being wounded. My hope is that my research contributes to the field by providing more information about how to support valuable leaders in an ever-changing, complex educational landscape.

Purpose of the Study

Building on Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) series of research studies, the purpose of my study was to describe and understand how six superintendents discussed a leadership crisis or wounding experiences; what it meant to them, and how, if at all, they believe their wounding experience influenced them professionally and personally. I also hoped to understand and describe how these superintendents coped with and responded to wounds from their practice.

Unfortunately, popular conceptions of leadership still do not consider who the leader is, including their vulnerabilities and uncertainties (Ackerman et al., 2018)—I sought to do so. For the purpose of my study, I used Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2000a) definition of wounding since my research expanded and built on their previous studies, as described above. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004b) defined a wound as a significant conflict, dilemma, or critical event in a school leader's practice that profoundly affects them emotionally and professionally. I sought to add to the limited research on educational leaders' wounding experiences because it is important to understand how leaders respond to the different contextual demands they face in educational leadership (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018).

Research Questions

In this study, I interviewed six superintendents who self-identified as having experienced a wounding crisis and who were identified as superintendents who met the criteria for my research. These superintendents were recommended by Dr. Drago-Severson and Dr. Young, educational leadership experts at Teachers College, since they were leaders who met my selection criteria. I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do six superintendents, who have been identified and who also self-identify as having been wounded, describe, and understand a wounding crisis or experience prospectively (what happened at the time—then), and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now—in present time)?
2. How do these school leaders describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience?
3. How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say that they have healed? How, if at all, do they describe how they are still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?

Background and Context

In this section, I briefly discuss literature focusing on the background of the wounded leader, the changing contexts and climates in which leaders work today, the emotions they experience, the challenges they face, and the adaptive leadership framework in terms of their relevance to my study. I end this section with a summary.

The Wounded Leader

Wounding is not a new concept for leaders in the education system, and it is not isolated to any particular group of leaders (e.g., superintendents, principals, or district leaders; Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). Since the 1990s, when the first study of the wounded leader was published (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998), there have been attempts at education reform—none more vigorous than in the intersections of public school governance and leadership, as well as policy and practice (Ackerman et al., 2018; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Petersen & Barnett, 2005). However, to the best of my knowledge, there is little to no current research on the wounded leader, and why is that? What are the characteristics of wounding? How do educational leaders describe and understand their wounding experience? How do superintendents describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience? How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? How do superintendents who have been identified and who also self-identify as having been wounded describe and understand a wounding crisis prospectively (what happened at the time) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now)? These are the questions I sought to address in my research as I interviewed the six participants who have experienced a wounding crisis.

The Costs of Leadership

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) stated that “to lead” is to “live dangerously” because leaders must solve multiple challenges and manage multiple roles (p. 82). Indeed, the leadership life in education and schools can change rapidly from an inspired moment to a crisis because “school is a human event” where a leader must manage conflicting forces and where school leaders are expected to know how to solve everything (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. xii). Ackerman et al. (2018) explained that it is often hard for leaders to acknowledge their limitations—leaders might feel inferior because they believe

they must demonstrate certainty even when they do not have solutions to complex challenges.

As I explored in this study, many leaders carry wounds from expressing their points of view or experiencing ego-deflating conditions (Goens, 2005; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 5). Superintendents, for example, have a highly visible position of authority, where they may be pushed out of the position not on their own terms—leaving them with a void full of emotions and hurts, which contributes to wounding experiences (Goens, 2005). As Goens stated, picking themselves up off the floor is not as quick or easy as people may think. More recently, Ackerman et al. (2018) echoed this finding. As the context changes, a leader may be too close to see the impact of the experience until it is too late (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). These are some of the themes I explored in my interviews with wounded leaders.

Leadership Challenges

In order to fully grasp wounding experiences, it is important to understand the challenges educational leaders face in the current climate. These challenges include adaptive, technical, and mixed challenges, which I discuss in the following sections.

Adaptive challenges. In light of the current complexities, leaders are increasingly encountering *adaptive challenges* (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017), which are situations in which the problem is not easy to tease out from the broader context and where there are no readily available solutions (Ackerman et al. 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2012). As Heifetz and Linsky (2017) described:

> The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems. What's the difference? While technical problems may be very complex and critically important (like replacing a faulty heart valve during cardiac surgery), they have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how. They can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization's current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things. (p. 19)

Heifetz and Linsky continued:

> Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the new capacity to thrive anew. (p. 19)

Ackerman et al. (2018) added that adaptive challenges are "a wicked problem" (p. 37) because there is no easily identifiable cause, no easy way to find a solution, or there are too many solutions with no clear choices. "These kinds of problems require the addition of new knowledge, new developmental capacities, and new tools to solve the problem even while working on them" (Wagner et al., 2007 as cited in Drago-Severson et al., 2012, p. 45; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Wagner et al., 2006). Exploring the concept of adaptive challenges is important to my research, since adaptive challenges can create new tensions and vulnerabilities within today's leaders (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). These new tensions and vulnerability may lead to wounding experiences.

In 2016, Drago-Severson named a variety of adaptive challenges faced in the complex educational context. These challenges include meeting the diverse needs of students, closing the achievement gap in the age of accountability and reform, and the implementation of new evaluation systems; all are meant to be in service of students (Drago-Severson, 2016). During the completion of my dissertation, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the devastating COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019), forcing school closures globally and increasing anxiety for all. A current survey (July, 2020) of school leaders found that they strongly feel responsible for ensuring the welfare of their students during this crisis (https://www.globalpartnership.org/covid19; https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-07-16-the-pandemic-s-toll-on-school-leaders-is-palpable-here-s-what-s-needed-for-a-successful-school-year). Thus, the spread of the severe acute respiratory

syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) adds an additional challenge for school leaders in a system that already faces enormous challenges.

In this study, I sought to understand some of the contexts and challenges that lead to wounding. As the research has shown, adaptive challenges are complex and unresolved dilemmas that cannot be solved via "authoritative" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 13) or subject matter expertise (Heifetz et al., 2009). Many of these challenges can be rooted in the steps a leader has to take in order to do the work expected of them, including acting on behalf of their values (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018). However, changes and progress take time, and leaders must at the same time comply with complex demands to be successful (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). In the next section, I discuss technical challenges; challenges that are as important as adaptive challenges—even though they have a clear solution.

Technical challenges. In contrast to adaptive challenges, *technical challenges* have readily available solutions that exist within the organization's "know how" and procedures (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 13). Drago-Severson and Maslin-Ostrowski (2018) stated that even if leaders cannot solve the problem themselves, they can find experts to help them find a solution since the solution is known (p. 3). Technical problems can be defined, diagnosed, and solved by authoritative figures through routine processes and existing expertise (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

According to Ackerman et al. (2018), "school leaders frequently find themselves sandwiched between the need for technical rigor required by educational policies and the more ambiguous dilemmas" (p. 38). Making a distinction between adaptive challenges and technical challenges within the context of education leadership was essential to my study because it is these challenges that may contribute to many of the wounds that leaders face, as illustrated in many of the narratives of wounded leaders depicted in

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's case stories (2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b) and as I found in this study.

Drago-Severson (2016) posited that education leaders face technical and adaptive challenges every day and that understanding these issues is "an important part of the soil of our landscape" (p. 60). Recently, Drago-Severson and Maslin-Ostrowski (2018) found that helping leaders understand the distinction between adaptive and technical challenges can aid in how the field supports leaders to develop the capacity to address those challenges. The researchers also found that most pressing challenges are a combination of both adaptive and technical challenges (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018). Heifetz et al. (2009) classified these as *mixed challenges* since they contain elements of both. In the next section, I discuss adaptive leadership, a framework for responding to adaptive challenges, and how it relates to my study.

Adaptive Leadership Framework

Adaptive leadership is a framework and an approach for diagnosing and responding to or taking action to address adaptive challenges, which do not have one clear solution (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009). The nature of adaptive work requires leaders to be "on the frontier of new and complex realities," because if all leadership challenges are within a leader's competence, then "life would be a string of mere technical challenges" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 174).

Understanding the process and practice of how adaptive challenges affect leadership is important since, in education, much of the work grows from the relationship among systems, adaptation, and changes led by the leaders (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Thus, in my study, I explored: how, if at all, adaptive challenges influenced superintendents' experience as they describe a wounding crisis (Research Question 1) and how, if at all, these leaders make sense of or learned anything from their wounding experience (Research Question 2). Furthermore, finally, I asked how, if at all,

they describe the ways in which they have recovered and what they learned after a wounding experience (Research Question 3). That is, by reflecting on the wounding experience, six superintendents investigated their loyalties and reflected on what lessons they would take from the past as learning opportunities.

Background and Context Summary

In this section, I explored the context of the education sector and the costs of leadership, as well as concepts of adaptive challenges, technical challenges, mixed challenges, and the adaptive leadership framework. As I discussed, the most common cause of failure in leadership are challenges "that can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 24). Engaging in educational leadership, as complex as it is, often causes many wounds to arise (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b). It can be difficult to lead and see the dangers of leading—leaders can get wounded because they sometimes never see the danger until it is too late to respond (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Munby, 2019). Many of these examples surfaced in the case stories described by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a, 2002b). However, according to Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b), "the important thing is not that wounds happen, but how administrators handle them" (p. 5). These are questions and issues that my research explored further through semi-structured interviews with a sample of today's wounded leaders. In the next section, I discuss my personal interest in this research, my professional and personal experiences, and the influences that inspired me to conduct my study.

Personal Interest

In this section, I share the personal experiences that have driven me as an educational leader and how they influenced my decision to explore this topic. I also share

what inspired me to conduct this study. Course learnings and feedback from my advisor, Dr. Drago-Severson, inspired me to keep developing this idea, which started when I reflected on a wounding crisis I had had as an educational leader. Professor Drago-Severson introduced me to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's work and the concept of the wounded leader to the class.

Professional and Personal Experiences

There have been many key personal and professional experiences and literature that have influenced my educational leadership trajectory. My personal experiences in education began as a new immigrant formally labeled as a newcomer and English Language Learner (ELL). In the Dominican Republic, where I was born, education is seen as a privilege, not a right, as it is in the United States of America.

I began my professional journey as a bilingual teacher that taught English Language Learners (ELLs) how to read, write, and reach goals that no one believed they could achieve. I was also a trained reading specialist as well as a literacy staff developer. These experiences made me a strong instructional leader and served as the foundation for leading the work of supervising instruction. My main focus as an instructional leader was building a community of learners that learned to value and nurture language while still increasing student learning, as evidenced in both engagement and achievement. When I became a principal, I turned around a low-performing school plagued with teacher centeredness, along with deep-rooted beliefs of students, parents, and communities, and their inability to create a sustainable change to increase student achievement. It is the gathering of these past experiences that influenced my role as a community school district superintendent.

The work that engaged me for so many years was leading me to fulfill what Coelho (1993), in my favorite book, *The Alchemist*, calls my "personal legend." However, suddenly a 24-year career had been cut short by one single wounding crisis. This crisis

shook me to the core and made me question who I had been as a professional and an individual defined by lifework, career, calling, and purpose.

Influences That Inspired Me to Conduct This Research

The concept of *wounds* to facilitate and engage in the practice of reflection helped me refine my thinking. I can relate so much to Bruce in *The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Times of Crisis* (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). In the chapter titled "To the Stars through Adversity (Ad Astra per Aspera)," Bruce was, like me, a leader; he was known as being tough, constantly visible, and fair. His whole life came to a halt due to an unforeseen event—an accusation from a parent claiming Bruce was manipulating the grades of favored athletes at his school. Despite his efforts to dispel the rumors, the crisis escalated. As a result, Bruce experienced a huge disconnect as he began to question himself and his own leadership. This disconnect was described as the *beginning of the wound* (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a).

The authors suggested that after experiencing a disconnect, or feeling out of touch with ourselves, we need to address a "collision with the organization environment," which stirs up conflict and anguish; we can do so by engaging in reflective practice (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, pp. 4-5). Reading Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's articles confirmed my need to continue to focus on the use of reflective practice to make sense of and unpack personal wounds. For me, telling my story was the first step to healing by sharing the story, describing it, and trying to make sense of the wounding experience. With this study, I sought to understand how other leaders describe and understand how they made meaning of, processed, and responded to their wounding crisis then and now. I began to wonder how, when, and if at all leaders share experiences of wounding as part of leadership growth and development.

Reading "To the Stars through Adversity (Ad Astra per Aspera)" and the book *The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Times of Crisis* (Ackerman &

Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b) helped me process the wound differently. The questions that were posed and discussed in class with Professor Drago-Severson introduced me to the wounded leader concept, inspired me to begin the necessary hard work of being "healthful and replenishing" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 6), and inspired me to nurture myself so that I am better prepared to continue the demanding work of leadership. Allowing the wound to "represent an extraordinary source of learning and a critical opening" created a "potential catalyst" for my growth, allowing me to avoid being "enmeshed in crisis" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 7).

In a biography of intention, an assignment completed as part of the class I took with Professor Drago-Severson, I shared that I hoped to learn strategies for reflecting more deeply within the fast-paced environment we live and work in as educational leaders. Engaging in reflective practice and going deeper in a process called collegial inquiry greatly benefitted my personal and professional growth. It allowed me to experience what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) described as the "vulnerability paradox" (p. 30), because feedback added to the wound in my heart, but also pushed me to learn and grow. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski explained that the vulnerability paradox places a leader's heart at its greatest vulnerability, and in that same wounding experience, the leader can find some self-direction in the very opening that was created by the wounding crisis (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a). The wounded leader concept frames many emotions as an occasion for transformation and allows one to begin to confront the questions that hurt by processing the wound through storytelling (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a, pp. 30-31).

As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a) described, "a crucial event can spark an attack that has nothing to do with the leader's genuine competence" (p. 29). In my current situation, wounding feels like an attack on the heart. "Like a physical heart attack, such an experience involves loss of control, powerlessness, fear, and vulnerability. It often forces the leader to confront an essential question: Who am I, really?" (p. 29). As I

continue my productive struggle, I am thankful for the multiple opportunities to unpack feelings, ideas, and thoughts through writing and gaining better understanding via multiple venues for discourse.

The concept of reflective practice helped me to continue to explore the "blindspots" I may be unaware of that impacted my behavior (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. xii). Blindspots are "hidden biases" that are "capable of guiding behavior without our being aware of their role" and aid in aligning behavior with inner intentions (p. xii). I hoped that the study of wounded leaders would help me better understand how educational leaders described and understood a wounding crisis, which may surface their "blindspots," as they reflected on how they processed, made meaning of, and responded to their wounding experience prospectively (what happened at the time) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience). In many of the stories of wounding, the superintendents in my research revealed blindspots that surfaced in the telling of their narratives of wounding, as I discuss in the Findings chapters.

Overview of the Literature

In this section, I provide a summary of the studies I reviewed and used to inform and build the foundation for my study. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's multiple empirical studies are relevant and provide a context for investigating the phenomenology of wounding. Their research frames the purpose, questions, framework, methodology, and methods that I expanded and replicated in my study.

Seminal Case Studies

Initially, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski conducted three comparative studies prior to 1998 to investigate the differences between the *case study* method (i.e., an objective factual representation) and the *case story* (i.e., an oral description of a real-life

situation that brings emotional context into the portrayal of what happened) with 215 participants who were practicing or prospective educational leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a).

These three investigations on the comparison of the case study and case story led to the idea of studying the concept of the "wounded leader" that emerged in the case stories. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a, 2002b, 2004) also noticed the similarity of the stories of crisis that leaders shared and those of patients confronting an illness. As a result of the three original studies, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski conducted four subsequent phenomenological studies by using case story methods to speak with self-described wounded educational leaders about a wounding crisis. They then combined their findings in one book, *The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Time of Crisis* (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). These studies, which encompassed 65 participants over time from various regions in the United States, are summarized in Table 1.

In Table 1, I have captured the five studies conducted by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998, 2000a, 2000b) and Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a). In addition to key literature on the studies of the wounded leader and the concept of wounding, themes emerged within the seminal studies and connections across the educational leadership literature. The topics that informed my study included: the self as leader, perspectives on the work and practice of leaders, and the *Givens of Leadership*, which I discuss in Chapter II.

Table 1. *Overview and Summary of Studies Conducted on the Wounded Leader*

Study	Purpose	Findings/Themes
The Wounded Leader: Looking for the Good Story (1998)	Described how significant leadership crises created a context for storytelling. Captured content of stories (actions, events, & responses); determined *how* stories addressed woundedness/ healing.	Increased understanding of how school leaders construct stories of crises (*quest*, *restitution*, & *chaos*), similar to the narratives told about an illness (Frank, 1995). Wounding is a double-edged sword: it is a calamity & an opportunity.
On Being Wounded: Implications for School Leaders (2000a)	Built on prior studies of leaders whom experienced a serious conflict, dilemma, or critical event in their practice that profoundly affected (wounded) them.	Woundedness is likely an inevitable and necessary part of leadership; "it might even be considered part of the job" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a, p. 9).
The Wounded Leader: Implications for Educational Leadership Preparation & Professional Development (2000b)	Explored what school leaders learn from their wounds, and how educational leadership preparation and professional development programs might better support the growth of wounded leaders.	Leadership programs must provide challenging contexts for aspiring leaders so that they are better equipped with strategies to cope with wounding experiences; this includes paying attention to interpersonal (with others) and intrapersonal (with self) development.
The Emotional Landscape: Lessons from Wounded Leaders (2001)	Sought to understand the emotional dimensions of becoming a wounded leader.	Added insight into how leaders coped with/respond to significant dilemmas in their practice.
Seeking a Cure for Leadership in our Lifetime (2002a)	Explored the relationship between a leader's wounding experience and the practice of school leadership. Based on and extended prior studies and represented the culmination of the wounded leader studies.	Leadership work has four essential byproducts (i.e., givens): vulnerability, fear, isolation, and powerlessness; A deeper understanding of the wound; and, Implications for the work of leadership itself since leaders think they have to be fixers who cannot show vulnerability.

Summary: Significance of the Literature to My Research

My research focused on wounded educational leaders to explore how they described and understood a wounding crisis or experience prospectively (what happened at the time then) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now); and how, if at all, wounded leaders make meaning of and respond to a wound. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2001, 2002, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) conversations with school leaders about dilemma and crisis covered a vast territory of leaders in the education sector in the United States. My study focused, specifically on superintendents.

The world has changed since Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's original studies were published, yet these studies provide an excellent foundation for my dissertation study. In the next section, I define terms that I use throughout this research.

Definition of Terms

In this section, I define key terms, sometimes borrowing from prior studies that I expanded to ensure clarity in understanding the literature review and the language I used throughout the study. Definitions are critical to the understanding of the research on wounded leaders and are presented here:

Adaptive challenges: Heifetz (1994) described this as a gap between an organization's values and physical circumstances that creates a dilemma that cannot be solved by organizational policy or procedures.

Crisis: For the purposes of my study, a crisis or crises (plural) may encompass many different themes of cognitive, emotional, and social nature. A crisis is a turning point for better or worse, a paroxysmal attack of pain, distress, or disordered function, an emotionally significant event or radical change in the status of a person's life (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

Educational leader: For the purpose of this study, an educational leader is a school-, central-, or district-based leader in an educational setting. In 1998, Fullan cited

Evans (1996) to define what is "wanted" in an education leader. This definition, although dated, appears to be the most accurate:

> A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure chronic second-guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper, and work double shifts (75 nights a year out). He or she will have carte blanche to innovate, but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset any constituency. (p. 6)

This definition is fitting for my study of superintendents since the attributes used to describe what is wanted in an educational leader capture what I believe are sources of the wounding experiences based on my review of the cases highlighted in Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's studies (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

Wound: For the purpose of this study, a wound is a mental or emotional hurt or blow, a rift in or blow to a political body or social group, to cause (someone) to feel emotional pain (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d).

Wounded or wounding: Wounding tends to occur in relation to a leader's efforts, conscious and unconscious, to cope with what we think of as endemic conditions or *givens of leadership*: vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, 2004a, 2004b).

These definitions informed the way I listened to responses in the qualitative interviews I conducted, as the participants constructed their stories of a wounding experience during interviews and in my analyses of them. These definitions also influenced how data were coded and organized when and if these themes emerged.

Methodological Overview

In this section, I discuss the research design and methodology I employed in my research, which in some ways replicated and also expanded parts of the five studies conducted on the wounded leader by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a,

2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). In addition, I extended their research by looking at leaders' descriptions and understandings of wounding in today's complex educational context with its new demands.

Selection of Participants and Sites

A purposeful sample was selected by recruiting participants from school districts in the United States. Participants were recommended by two scholars/practitioners who work with educational leaders providing coaching and professional development from various sites that were geographically accessible to me in the eastern United States.

Approximately 15 educational leaders were recommended. Six of these superintendents, who were willing to participate in three interviews, were selected. This purposeful selection enabled me to select individuals with lived experiences that assisted in answering my research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Collection Methods

I used qualitative interviews to understand the wounding experiences of six superintendents. Prior to the interviews, I piloted the interview protocols (see Appendices A, B, and C). I piloted the questions in each protocol with a school leader. This pilot was important in order to surface weaknesses in the interview protocol and obtain insight into any areas of concern in the research design (e.g., timing, time allocation, questions, the order of the questions, structure, word choice).

After receiving approval from the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) in January 2020, I conducted a three-part series of qualitative interviews with six superintendents (approximately 90 minutes each—though a couple were shorter). In each of the three interviews, I used predetermined questions to learn about the leader's lived experience with wounding. One participant was able to conduct each interview on three separate occasions. In four cases, participants asked if they could engage in two of the three interviews one after the other (i.e., the second and the third interview on the same

day). In one instance, after the first interview, a participant asked to continue with the next two interviews on the same day. This participant also agreed to meet me and to be interviewed in person. Due to the participants' preferences, five out of the six interviews were conducted by phone and tape-recorded. My preference would have been to use the format (each interview conducted on a separate day) that I had planned and discussed with my advisor, but I decided to honor the participants' requests in regard to when the interviews were conducted.

Interview 1. During the first interview, I invited the participants to reconstruct their life/career history, to tell about their background as an educator up to the point of the crisis, and to begin to share the story of the wounding experience. The interview topic was "telling" of the story of wounding. This addressed my first research question, which focused on understanding how the participants described and made meaning of their wound.

Interview 2. In the second interview, I invited participants to continue telling the experience of being wounded and to discuss the barriers or boundaries, if any, that prohibited leaders from seeing their wounds. In other words, what made it hard for the leader to see it coming, if at all? What made it hard for the leader to believe that this experience was truly happening to them, whether something internally (in their mind) or externally (in their environment), and made it difficult to understand the experience at the time? This interview addressed my second research question and helped me understand how participants responded to and processed (analyzed and synthesized) their wounding experience.

Interview 3. Finally, in the third interview, I invited participants to retrospectively (looking back on the experience now) reflect on what was said in the first two interviews. I also shared some of my interpretations. During Interview 3, I asked participants to talk about what the wounding experience meant in terms of who they are today (i.e., at the time of the interview) as a leader and as a person. I wanted to know how they recovered

or healed, if at all. The third interview topic had two parts: (1) What was learned, if anything, from being wounded? and (2) How did wounding influence the participant's leadership then and now (i.e., implications for learning from wounds for education leadership development)?

Although I did not anticipate that half of the participants (3/6: Emma, Francis, and John Black), whom I introduce in Chapter IV, selected significant wounding crises that happened in the educational context years ago, I could not dictate the story they chose to tell me. The participants generated a narrative linking present circumstances with past wounds and vice versa. Emma said, "Aren't we witnessing it [racial tensions, gender issues] right now in the country?" John Black stated, "The external factors [inequitable resources in underserved school districts] that existed in that time past persist in the time present and will forever persist." Francis said, "Restructuring happens all the time in education.... And if I still have commitment and belief about what should happen for children, and it's not yet happening every single place, there's always work to be done, [it's] still relevant." Like Julie, Juanita, and Frankie (3/6), who selected to share recent stories, Emma, Francis, and John Black also cited related stress, tensions, growing pressure, social problems (desegregation), and emotions. Therefore, regardless of the setting in time participants selected, this study is informative for contemporary society since the findings that surfaced could be universal.

Data Analysis Methods

I conducted data analysis by recording the interviews, having them transcribed verbatim by a professional, memoing, reflective journaling, coding field notes, searching for themes, and reviewing analytic notes. I hoped the three interviews and reflections would allow saturation to take place (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). I aimed to achieve saturation as participants shared rich and thick descriptions by giving them time to

respond thoroughly to each interview question in each protocol, and any additional follow-up questions that surfaced during the three-part interview (Maxwell, 2013).

I analyzed data in the following methods: I digitally voice-recorded and had each interview transcribed by a third party. This was one of the ways in which I attended to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, I shared the interview transcript with the participants to ensure that I captured what they said, how they said it (e.g., after each interview, I emailed the transcriptions of the interviews). Before the second and third interviews, I gave each participant an opportunity to share their thoughts regarding the transcripts (except for one participant who requested to conduct all three interviews in one day and received the transcripts within 48 hours after the day of interviews; he also received an invitation to clarify any parts of the transcripts received). Next, I coded the interviews using emic codes and theoretical codes (Maxwell, 2013). I also identified common themes across interviews to identify relationships and connections that emerged across interviews.

Limitations

I identified the following limitations: researcher positionality, researcher bias, and the number of participants (i.e., small sample size). Because I am an educational leader who has experienced a wounding crisis, my positionality and bias may have influenced the process. In Chapters III and VIII, I describe how I attended to this.

Validity

In this section, I briefly discuss how I attended to validity threats, which I describe in more detail in Chapter III.

Research bias. I did my best to attend to research bias by crafting questions free of assumptions, examining data carefully, and writing memos to track my assumptions, as Maxwell (2013) suggested. For example, I asked a group of fellow doctoral students in a research class at Teachers College, Columbia University to assist me with my research.

These trained qualitative researchers reviewed my interview protocols, research questions, and the design of the study in order to attend to this validity threat and to address any possible bias as a result of my own experiences.

Reactivity. Reactivity is the influence I bring as a researcher on the participants in the study (Maxwell, 2013). As Maxwell suggested, I needed to name that possibility up front. This includes the multiple positions I have held as an educational leader as a principal, district leader, and superintendent that may have influenced the setting or individual. My experience of a wounding crisis was another possible threat, and I let the study participants know up front that I, too, had been wounded so that they knew I empathized with them; I had been in their position. In cases where I knew the participants, I made sure to explain (verbally and in writing, as stated in Appendix D and prior to each interview) that it was entirely voluntary for them to participate. I attended to the confidentiality of the participants in the study. I informed each participant verbally, and in writing, that I was careful to attend to my procedures to safeguard the interviewees' identities using pseudonyms, password-protected computers, and locked files.

Descriptive validity. Descriptive validity connects to the accuracy of what I heard and observed (Maxwell, 2013). I digitally recorded all interviews and took notes so that I could capture nuances in behavior and emotions. I had the transcripts professionally transcribed verbatim. I checked the audio recording against transcripts for accuracy. I then shared the transcripts with individual participants for accuracy (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). Every participant received all transcripts via email, and each was offered an opportunity to clarify any parts of the transcript via email or a phone call if they chose to do so. One participant offered written clarifications, while the other five participants found the transcripts accurate.

Interpretive validity. Interpretive validity is the accuracy of the analysis of the data collected and the accurate representation of the participants' viewpoints,

experiences, and thoughts to the best of the researcher's ability (Maxwell, 2013). I allotted time in my interviews (see Appendices A, B, and C for interview protocols) to review and answer any participant questions. I conducted member checks (Maxwell, 2013) during the third interview, where I shared my interpretations of what the participants said and felt during the first and second interviews to ensure I was accurate in making sense of what they shared.

After collecting data, I invited other colleagues who are doctoral students and who are trained in qualitative research to cross-check codes and help with alternative interpretations, as Maxwell (2013) recommended.

Theoretical validity. To address theoretical validity, I examined the data for both confirmations and discrepancies in order to attend to my bias and subjectivity and to begin to develop a very preliminary grounded theory about these superintendents' experiences of wounding (Maxwell, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) contended that leadership requires being vulnerable since leaders' goals may reach beyond personal achievement as they seek to make life better for those they serve. However, this vulnerability can open leaders up to wounding experiences that remain relatively underexplored. Therefore, more research is needed to understand how leadership crises challenge and wound educational leaders and "the quality of that subjective experience" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004, p. 7), since, as Ackerman et al. (2018) stated:

> most conceptions of leadership focus on the external aspects of leadership behavior, emphasizing what the leader should do without taking into account who the leader is and how he is made aware of his own vulnerabilities and uncertainties. Leadership is practiced at a busy and sometimes hazardous intersection of personal and professional realms, where there is often a

> thundering flow of traffic. It is frequently thought of as a life of service in which personal wishes are turned toward the needs of others. (pp. 37-38)

Existing theory and research are limited, and there is a paucity of literature on wounded leaders in educational leadership—especially in the superintendency, as described above. Exploring the experiences of wounded leaders in the climate of adaptive, technical, and mixed challenges can help us better understand how, if at all, such wounds affect current leaders and the organizations they serve. Next, I discuss how wounding influences educational leadership and call for understanding this kind of experience.

Need for Understanding How Wounding Influences Educational Leadership

Leaders are wounded all the time, since wounding is an inevitable part of leadership, and all kinds of leaders experience a wounding incident at any given time when they give voice to a differing point of view (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). However, wounds can help leaders understand themselves and their leadership (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b), as vulnerabilities can be seen as opportunities for improvement (Ackerman et al., 2018). How a leader responds to being wounded can define them as a leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 8). With a shortage of educational leaders and high attrition rates for superintendents (Mahfouz, 2018), the educational field needs to find ways to support and develop educational leaders so that they can be sustained as they adapt to changing policies and societal issues (Ackerman et al., 2018). The field needs to be able to inspire future leaders with the assurance that there are ways to support them—if, and when, they fall at any time in their career.

Researchers suggest that there is a need to understand how school leaders cope with and respond to significant dilemmas in their practice, what the experience means to them, and how crises are encountered by leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b; Ackerman et al., 2018). Recently, Mahfouz (2018) made a call for researchers to

further understand educational leaders' work dynamics in various contexts and how they cope with increasingly unprecedented pressures, since many stressors affect their performance and well-being. As Mahfouz suggested, higher stress is associated with higher attrition rates for superintendents.

Extending research on the phenomenon of wounding in leadership (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman 1998, 2000a, 2000b) in an ever-changing educational context is critical in order to sustain and retain educational leaders. Although at times leadership may feel very lonely, especially when pushing through opposition, it is beneficial to understand that the notion of being good at all aspects of leadership is unrealistic and bad for mental and physical health, as well as discouraging for potential leaders (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Munby, 2019). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic issues, such as racism, being brought to light through the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, pressures have continued to increase for educational leaders. It has been over 20 years since a study has been conducted to explore the perils of leadership. The last notable studies were conducted by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski in the 1990s and concluded in the early 2000s. There is not yet a clear solution to help leaders process the wounds caused by a crisis and recover from the wounding (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). Nevertheless, according to Heifetz and Linsky (2017), most leaders carry wounds.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, as Ravitch and Riggan (2016) described, helps the researcher link all of the elements of the research process to her interests, goals, context, and setting, since it is a view that comes closest to the researcher's definition. My study focused on educational leaders to determine how they describe and understand a wounding experience in the complex context of educational leadership. Figure 1 displays

the system of concepts, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform my research (Maxwell, 2013). These surfaced in the literature as I conceptualized my intended study.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

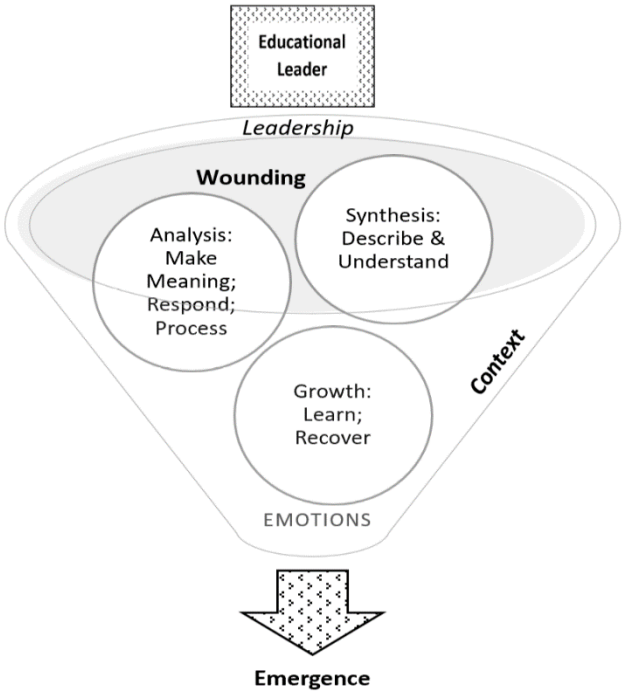


Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the conceptual framework I developed when I began my study. The funnel shown in Figure 1 represents the educational context with its complexities and challenges, which makes leadership in itself even more complex (Ackerman et al., 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). At the top is the educational leader, who emerges on the other side of the arrow after experiencing a wound. The arrow transpires through a funnel that is imbued with the wound or the wounding experience, where the leader is submerged. The head of the funnel encompasses leadership, since it is central to this study, and the work and practice of leadership are discussed in the literature review.

The three circles in the funnel represent the three-part qualitative interviews that grounded this study. Again, I sought to explore how six superintendents describe and understand a wounding crisis, how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience, and how, if at all, they describe the ways in which they have healed and recovered. These three circles are located inside what is called the shape of the funnel, which in science is used to describe the winds of a tornado (in this case, the wound).

Emotions sit at the neck of the funnel, where the leader emerges after processing the wounding crisis. Emotions surfaced as important to attend to in my literature review and in data from this study. Leaders processed the wound multiple times through the qualitative interviews, where they analyzed and synthesized the experience by describing the wound, which allowed emotional thoughts to surface as they made meaning of their lived experiences. After processing the wound, the leader emerges through the neck of the funnel. As a result of this study, I discovered how leaders emerged by exploring how leaders are influenced, learn, grow, and recover (if at all) from a wound, both professionally and personally.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004b) recommended over 15 years ago that research needs to examine educational leaders' wounding crises and learn about their subjective experiences in order to further illuminate the sustaining qualities of the work of leadership. After their five studies, they posited that the study of wounded leaders was increasingly relevant and purposeful (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b). However, since 2002, there is a gap in the literature, which led me to explore wounding experiences in educational leadership. My study sought to address this gap in educational research by exploring what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to six superintendents, the emotions that surface, and the way a wound may influence them professionally and personally.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter I, I provided an introduction and overview of my research topic: the wounded educational leader. In this chapter, I discussed the problem statement, purpose of my study, research questions, the background and context of my study, my personal interest in the topic, an overview of the literature that serves as the foundation for my study, a methodological overview, the significance of and need for this study, and my conceptual framework. Next, in Chapter II, I more fully describe the literature and theories that have informed my research.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explain in more detail the literature that informed my study. I begin by introducing the bodies of literature that contributed to the conceptual framework. The goal of my study was to build on several studies conducted by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) in order to better understand the wounding experiences of superintendents.

The purpose of my study was to explore how a group of six superintendents describe and understand what a self-identified leadership crisis or wounding experience means to them and how, if at all, the wound affects them personally and professionally. Interviewing superintendents helped me better understand and describe "how school leaders cope with and respond to significant dilemmas in their practice and what the experiences mean to them" as leaders and as individuals (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. xi). Building on Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski 's (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman,1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) studies, the research questions I sought to answer are:

1. How do six superintendents, who have been identified and who also self-identify as having been wounded, describe and understand a wounding crisis or experience prospectively (what happened at the time—then) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now—in the present time)?
2. How do these school leaders describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience?

3. How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say that they have healed? How, if at all, do they describe how they are still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?

Approach to the Literature

To the best of my knowledge, since Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's final studies in 2002, there have been no additional published research on wounded leaders in education. Although more recently published books address the emotions of leadership, which describe power, vulnerability, fear, isolation, the imperfections, the risks, nuances, and perils of leadership (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Munby, 2019), none have connected these as interrelated elements that "wound" educational leaders.

Additionally, one dissertation completed by Mears (2009) explored the dynamics of what she called "the emerging archetype of the wounded leader" through a cross-case comparison of the narrative of two leaders from the past. However, this study is not aligned with the research I conducted because it does not involve living participants. Rather, Mears's study was an analysis of the concept of a wounded leader via an examination of biographies and autobiographies. Therefore, I did not review it in this chapter but will refer to it throughout the research when applicable. Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) found that stories of wounding are stories that remain untold by educational leaders but are promising in healing and in shaping directions for leadership development and preparation, and I wonder if this is true today.

In this section, I review the literature on the only studies conducted in the sector of educational leadership on the subject of the wounded leader by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski. Since there is a paucity of literature in this area, and the concept has not been

studied by others examining participants who are educational leaders, I primarily review their studies. These studies are illustrated in Table 1 (in Chapter I) and are reviewed in more detail below. Next, I describe areas that surfaced in Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's research: the self as a leader, perspectives on the practice and work of leadership, the *Givens of Leadership*, and surviving leadership. Finally, I provide a summary and describe how I addressed the existing gaps in the current literature.

Search Methods/Databases Searched and Search Description Used

Despite multiple searches using keywords, which included: "wounded leader," "wounded education leader," "wounded superintendent," "wounded principal," and "wounded instructional leader," there were limited results that directly addressed the topic of wounded leaders in education. The literature that was directly related was dated. However, Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998) and Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b) were the top results. Most other literature containing the work "wounded' or "wounded leader" was not relevant to this study. Therefore, I exhausted the search.

In the section that follows, I discuss the relevant studies and how I extended these studies to address the gaps in the research and literature.

Empirical Studies on the Wounded Leader

In this section, I provide a cohesive summary of wounded leader study and all relevant findings. I also offer a review of subsequent articles written by the same authors.

In order to understand the essence of the wounding experience, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski conducted a series of studies (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). The seminal work on wounded leadership consists of five studies by Ackerman and Maslin-

Ostrowski. These studies were the result of previous work that inspired them as they identified trends of wounded storytelling as per Frank's (1995) original work on wounding experiences as told by patients who had experienced a crisis through medical illness. According to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004b):

> How a leader feels and the quality of that subjective experience becomes increasingly relevant and purposeful. Embedded in this purpose is the role that such research might have on illuminating the sustaining qualities of the work of leadership. (p. 312)

In this section, I discuss each of their studies in chronological sequence since it makes the most sense in explaining the development of the concept of wounding and the concept of the wounded leader. The chronology also provides a framework for extending their studies.

The First Study

The purpose of the first study (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998), "The Wounded Leader: Looking for the Good Story," was to understand how significant leadership crises created a particular context for telling stories and focused specifically on how the lives of school leaders were affected by the stories they told. As the authors later explained, they were "interested not just in the explicit content of the stories—the actions, events, and responses—but, in *how* the leaders' stories served to address the woundedness of the leaders and helped them to heal themselves" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 3).

The researchers used a case story method and interviewed seven participants who were school leaders in private and public school settings (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). The study captured the case stories of how the leaders experienced a serious conflict, dilemma, or critical event in their leadership practice that had, in some way, profoundly affected or wounded them (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998).

The authors used narrative telling, which, as they described, consisted of a combination of a chronology of events and an attempt to help the participants give meaning to events by allowing the participants to speak at great length without interruption. The result was rich narrative accounts of their wounding experience (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998).

In this first study, the authors identified common themes of *quest, restitution,* and *chaos* as the three types of narratives (Frank, 1995; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). *Quest* was defined as the leader's use of the crisis as a beneficial experience to grow and learn, where the leader took charge of their own story, regardless of the initial uninvited wound, and confronted the pain to advance their professional and personal growth (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 1998): "In this sense, he has become a hero of his own making" (pp. 24-25). What they meant by this is finding a voice in telling the story of pain in the wound led to a changed and transformed individual. *Restitution* acknowledged the interruption with a positive representation of the wounding crisis, with the hope that the crisis would end, and was seen by the leader as an opportunity to see themselves (the "self") in a new light (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). However, *chaos* narratives were distressed tellings of stories as disassociated scattered events, without sequence, coherence, or rationales for why the crisis happened as it did (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). In the *chaos* narratives, it appeared that no one was in control and that "the story traces the edges of a wound" (Frank, 1995, as cited in Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, p. 30) because it was told around events and multiple contingent factors that framed an uncertain future (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998).

Through these common themes, the authors identified four main findings. First, there was an increased understanding of how school leaders constructed stories of crisis and similarities to the narratives told about illness (Frank, 1995), which inspired their initial study on wounding. Second, the researchers were able to construct "wounding

stories," though they were hesitant to identify one typology—that is, any wounding story could weave in and out of any of the identified themes (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). Finally, they learned the importance of story and "the telling," as the participants were self-conscious and became aware of themselves as story-makers and tellers. Meaning, telling the story raised their awareness as they identified the "plot, logic, causality and narrative tensions of their own stories" and the part they had played (p. 32). This emphasis on the story in the first person was important since, in education, dilemmas are "dealt with" in the third person, which may disconnect the teller (wounded leader) from the experience (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). This disconnect, from the authors' view, did not allow stories to surface as part of the healing process of wounding and as an opportunity for growth as practitioners.

Like Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998) study, I was also interested "not just in the explicit content of the stories—the actions, the events, and responses—but, in how the leaders' stories served to address the woundedness of the leaders" (p. 3). The first part of my three-part interview series (Research Question 1) intended to focus on examining how participants described and understood their wounding experience prospectively (what happened at the time) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience).

The Second Study

The second study by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman was "On Being Wounded: Implications for School Leaders," a study published in 2000 (starting now referred to as Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a). The purpose of this study was to understand the stories that leaders were telling themselves and what the narrative meant to them. Building on the previous study (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998), the second study first presented as a paper (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1999) and later an article (2000a), added a new focus: "What are the wounds of school leaders? How do they

understand them, and what are the boundaries that prevent them from seeing their wounds?" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a, p. 3). Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000a) designed an open-ended interview guide to acquire leaders' first-person accounts of their experiences with a crisis as the primary source of information. They wanted to learn how school leaders dealt with a crisis as it had affected their professional lives, why they had decided to follow a particular course of action, and what the outcome was.

Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (2000a) sample was found through personal contacts and was purposeful in that it consisted of 20 educational leaders (principals in various levels and a few superintendents) from a variety of school contexts and regions of the United States, who had dealt with what they considered to be "a significant crisis" in their leadership practice (p. 2). The authors explained that the sample snowballed to include 65 participants after the first set of interviews, and referrals from participants and colleagues increased. Snowballing is when the number of participants expands because participants recruit other participants, and the sample increases (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011).

Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000a) used interviews as the single method of data collection, and documents were reviewed only to understand the context of the participants' educational setting. Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman discovered that the second study (2000a) yielded findings based on underlying assumptions that were generated in the first study (1998). First, they found that woundedness is likely an inevitable and necessary part of leadership; "it might even be considered part of the job" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a, p. 9). Next, they found that the wound can be a double-edged sword, either: (1) a series of small events or a sudden calamity in the career of an educational leader, or (2) an opportunity to question who one is as a leader and as a person (one's identity and self-image). A wounding crisis can be an incident that slowly builds or a big explosion, "a liberation from an unbearable situation—the juncture

between an undesirable past and a desirable future" (p. 9). Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman described these wounds as "wounds that crush the soul, distort and misdirect the energy of life" (p. 9) and described others as "those that prompt us to grow" (p. 3). Finally, similar to the previous study, they found that it was crucial for wounded leaders to tell their stories, and that narrative storytelling could be used by leaders to make sense of their crises of practice and aid the healing and growth (p. 9).

In the end, the authors recommended that "practicing leaders will understand better the complexities of the role that they are in if they acknowledge the ever-present possibility of becoming wounded" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a, p. 9). Informing educational leaders of this probability is relevant, as leaders are not always aware.

This second study was important to my research since it revealed the importance of leaders sharing their stories of crisis and wounding. Typically, the education sector tends to promote experiences with happy endings (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a), and leaders are not encouraged to admit limitations (Ackerman et al., 2018). The researchers found that individuals who aspire to become leaders would benefit from the awareness that they will most likely be wounded and the vital reciprocity of telling and listening to stories (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a). Further, they found that wounding stories could help leaders confront who they are, offer an opening for personal and professional growth, and deserve a place in the landscape of educational leadership (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a). It was useful for me to replicate their research methods in order to explore how school leaders described and understood a wounding experience. I expanded this second study by replicating this part in my second interview to address Research Question 2 about how superintendents make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience.

The Third Study

The third study (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000b), "The Wounded Leader: Implications for Educational Leadership Preparation and Professional Development," expanded previous studies to explore what school leaders learned from their wounds and how educational leadership preparation and professional development programs might better support the growth of wounded leaders. This paper was presented in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and is based on an unpublished paper titled, "A Rationale for the Wounded Leader: Implications for Educational Leadership Preparation and Professional Development" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000b). The implications of this study of educational leadership and professional development are critical to advancing the work of leaders in the complex society we live in today. The aim of the study was "to learn how the school leaders dealt with a crisis as it had affected their professional lives and to understand the stories that they were telling themselves and what the narratives meant to them" (p. 1). While the aim was the same across the studies, Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) analyzed the data to inform future training and professional development.

Similar to the previous studies, the third study had a purposeful sample of 65 participants (principals and a few superintendents across various regions), whose confidentiality was protected, and their feedback was requested to ensure internal validity (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000b). The authors used the three-part interview structure (the only method used for data collection) to capture first-person accounts as in their previous studies (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 2000a). As they later mentioned, the researchers examined the implications for leadership preparation and professional development by investigating how leaders respond to wounds, since it may define who they are as leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a). Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2002a) wrote that there is a need for "the conscious creation of a supportive environment for resolving conflict and anxiety" (p. 9). Leaders need to have

the support of their colleagues since they found that it can aid in the meaning-making process (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2002a). The authors recommended that future research continue in listening to wounded leaders since, from their view, all leaders are wounded at some point in their careers (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2002a). Since there have been no additional studies conducted with leaders in the current day and since the culminating study in 2002, I expanded the study and listened to wounded leaders in contemporary society.

Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman concluded that programs must provide challenging contexts for aspiring leaders so that they are better equipped with strategies to cope with wounding experiences. Part of the preparation included paying attention to *interpersonal* (with others) and *intrapersonal* (with self) development (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000b). I too explored the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of the wounding experience via my third research question, discussed in Chapter VII.

The Fourth Study

The fourth study in this series sought to understand the emotional dimensions of becoming a wounded leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2001). The paper, titled "The Emotional Landscape: Lessons from Wounded Leaders," was presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2001) and unfortunately could not be located via multiple search engines, but it is worthy of mentioning since it is referenced in other articles authored by the researchers (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski 2002a, 2004b). Although I could not locate the paper, I am referencing it based on the literature that followed (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski 2002a, 2004b), which stated that the authors used the same three-part narrative structure with the purposeful sample, which due to snowballing consisted of 65 educational leaders who dealt with a significant crisis in their leadership practice. The data from this study were embedded and used in the studies and literature reviewed next.

The Book: Capstone on the Wounded Leader

Before the fifth and final study, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski published *The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Times of Crisis* (2002b). The book provides an integrated summary of all the previous studies. The authors aimed to validate the stories of the research participants who lived the experience in response to two main interrelated questions: (1) "How does a reasonable, well-intentioned person, who happens to be a school leader, preserve a healthy sense of self in the face of a host of factors challenging that self in the best scenario, and leading to a wounding crisis in worst?" And (2) "What perspective toward the work of leadership might fortify the impact of these challenges, and produce a mindset that leaves the person open to learn and grow from such experience?" (p. 2).

According to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b), for too long, leadership roles did not sustain, validate, or resonate with the personal needs of becoming a leader. I wondered if this is still true today, and it is the reason I explored this in my study. By exploring how leaders used wounds in the context of their vulnerability through a lens of strength and not weakness, the researchers wanted to know what it means to be a wounded leader: Who were the leaders? What did they think and feel? Moreover, what were their reflections on an endemic characterization of leadership and wounding? Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski stated, "In the time of the heart's greatest vulnerability there is an opening to find oneself" (p. 28). The wound's ability to cause pain and heal is the paradox identified in their previous study as well (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). They cited Lave and Wenger (1991) to explain that learning is a culturally and historically situated activity that can unify personal knowledge and experience (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b).

The significance of the book, *The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Times of Crisis,* was to show how leaders responded to and made sense of their wounds (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. xiii) through the stories of self-

described wounded leaders and using the interpretations situated in the understanding of the narratives that originated from lived experiences in the context of school leadership. The method used was primarily focused on the researchers engaging in "deep abiding listening—listening for action, events, and responses" (p. xiv). This examination of the phenomena of wounding and wounded leaders in education influenced generating a new grounded theory (Maxwell, 2013) about wounding as healing through the retelling of stories.

The relevant findings from Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002b) work were that the stories that surfaced can be categorized into three major categories—*quest*, *restitution*, and *chaos* (Frank, 1995)—as initially reported in the second study (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a). They explained that *restitution* is the culturally preferred narrative with the assumption that the problem will get fixed or will go away. However, *restitution* shuts down the learning opportunity. On the other hand, according to the authors, the chaos category of the narratives told seemed to entrap the leader. Leaders retold their stories envisioning failure; the recollections were scattered and what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) called "disassociating the telling" (p. 102). The authors concluded that *quest* was the most promising in helping leaders heal since it met suffering head-on; the leaders entered the story accepting the wound and looking for meaning in their leadership reflection. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski also found that there was a growing interest in how people processed the experience by constructing a story to recover. Therefore, their findings gave voice to the need for my study; specifically, these findings assisted in exploring my third research question: How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say that they have healed? How, if at all, do they describe how they are still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?

The Fifth Study

The fifth and final Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) study is titled: "Seeking a Cure for Leadership in Our Lifetime." In this research, the authors "explored the relationship between a leader's wounding experience and the practice of school leadership. The fifth study draws on and extends the prior studies; it represents the culmination of the wounded leader studies" (p. 3). The authors investigated the leadership crisis in schools in the United States, focusing on the similarities between the stories leaders were telling about crises in practice and those of individuals confronting medical illness (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a; Frank, 1995). They continued with the 65 participants (principals and few superintendents from various regions) that participated in the previous studies, as this was the fourth stage of their series of five studies.

The purpose of the study was to explore the chronic work-life tension, including conditions and prevalent issues facing the school leader at the beginning of the century, and the resulting personal challenges (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a). The central research question that guided the final paper was the following: "To what extent does a concern with the issues of the wounded leader lead to a generative understanding of leadership work itself?" (p. 10).

The findings were difficult to decipher, the authors explained (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a). In fact, they stated that there was no single finding:

> Leadership wounding inevitably points toward issues in the personal and interpersonal realms. In some ways, it is difficult for us to highlight just a few findings, given the richness of the data provided by respondents who shared with us their leadership experiences, some painful, some joyous. (p. 11)

However, four big ideas emerged. The first is that leadership wounding points toward personal and interpersonal issues. The second is that leadership work has four essential byproducts: vulnerability, fear, isolation, and powerlessness (i.e., what they referred to as the *Givens of Leadership*). The findings also revealed a deeper understanding of the wound and the research implications for the work of leadership itself (Ackerman &

Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a). I explored these four big ideas in my study via my interview protocols (Appendices A, B, and C), where I purposefully structured the interview questions to explore these ideas.

The most essential and relevant finding to my research was Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002a) idea that leaders develop their own wounds precisely because they often believe they have to hide their fears and vulnerabilities from others. That is, leaders think they have to be fixers who cannot show vulnerability. Instead, they believe they have to be the helpers and project strength and independence. Leaders, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski added, neglect their own needs and fail even to hear them because they are so focused on others (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a).

Summary of Seminal Studies

The overall purpose of the seminal studies conducted by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 2000a, 2000b) was to understand how school leaders cope with and respond to significant dilemmas in their practice and what the experience means to them. These findings reiterated the need to explore how school and district leaders make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience (my second research question) and how, if at all, they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience (my third research question). My research expanded on these seminal studies by inviting six superintendents to explore their vulnerabilities through three qualitative interviews. In this way, my research expanded the limited existing research, and our understanding of wounded leaders within the increased complexities of educational leadership; it has been over 15 years since this type of study has taken place.

Published Articles Related to the Studies

In other articles, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a) further explored the paradox of the leader's need to be a representation of "strength, power, and competence"

and the need to acknowledge the need for a leader to “be vulnerable” (p. 28). However, this need for leaders to expose and grow from vulnerabilities is not typically allowed, even within the complexity of education in the 21st century (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a, 2004b), and this is still true in today’s “current landscape of educational leadership” (Ackerman et al., 2018, p. 36) with “pressing challenges” and new “pressures” (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018, p. 2). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a) asserted that there is a need for leaders to grow from the affirmation of both strengths and vulnerabilities, but this theory has not been expanded upon since their last study. According to these authors, there is no language yet on how leaders process the emotions of leadership wounding, and thus there remains a need for leadership development on how to help leaders grow from struggles—and the first step is acknowledging their stories and leveraging them as a source for learning (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a).

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski’s findings had implications for my research, which further explored “the emotions of leadership wounding” (2004b) and may have implications for future leadership development and growth. Through my interview protocols, my study explored the emotions that surfaced during the wounding crisis via the telling of the story of wounding (Interview 1; Appendix A) and through continued retelling, which focused on detailing the experience (Interview 2; Appendix B) and reflecting on the learning and influences of the wound (Interview 3; Appendix C).

Questions still remain about how educational leaders describe, understand, process, and make sense of their wounding and recovery (if at all). There is still a need in educational leadership for conditions that allow space for leaders to do the inner work of self-discovery that also benefits the constituents they lead. As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a) wrote, “School leaders will almost always be vulnerable to wounding because they reside at a very public intersection and are often the knowing or unknowing recipients of the public’s expectations, hopes, and fears” (p. 30). I sought to understand

how leaders describe (Research Question 1); process, respond to, and make meaning of wounding (Research Question 2); and if they have recovered, if at all (Research Question 3) from their experiences.

Next, I connect themes that emerged in the wounded leaders' studies and that were relevant to my study.

Connecting Themes that Emerged

In this section, I discuss themes that emerged across the literature that help shed light on elements that I explored within my research questions. These themes include: the self as leader, superintendents, perspectives on the work and practice of leadership (where I discuss the influence of the leader on the organization, the influence of the organization on the leader, including changing contexts and emotions of leadership), the *Givens of Leadership*, and surviving leadership. In Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2000a) investigations, they focused on:

> not just the explicit content of the stories of so-called wounded leaders, that are the actions, events, and responses, but primarily on the kinds of stories that they tell themselves and how these stories address their own "woundedness" and help them, in a sense, to heal themselves. (p. 1)

Productivity, achievement, and winning are traditional measures of leadership and the leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b), while uncertainties and vulnerabilities, and understanding individual underlying challenges are not (Ackerman et al., 2018). However, in wounding experiences, "the impotence, powerlessness, and helplessness that result, in all these forms, are worse than death to most school leaders" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 52). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002a, 2002b) research represented an emerging line of inquiry into the interpersonal and intrapersonal domains of leadership. What does this mean for the role of leaders? It is important to discuss factors that may challenge the leader as an individual, perspectives

on the work of leadership, and possible ways that leaders can learn and grow from such experiences. These include the intrapersonal emotional dimensions of wounding that often surface as participant superintendents process their experience.

I investigated these in my study in the second interview with the six participants, where I explored the barriers and boundaries that prohibited them from seeing the wounds and how they currently understand them as they look back (retrospectively). In addition, in the third interview, I explored what they learned from the wounding experience, if anything at all.

The Self as Leader

Like a physical heart attack, a wounding crisis "involves loss of control, powerlessness, fear, and vulnerability and forces the leader to confront an essential question: Who am I, really?" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a, p. 29). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) found throughout their studies that leadership affects parts of *the self*. In leadership, the self, or how one shows up as a leader (before and after wounding), plays in the intrapersonal parts of leadership, and the parts of leadership that are interpersonal (i.e., social and relational), which are integral in processing wounds (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). Understanding the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of wounding is critical because leaders have to manage their public personas, style, and appearance as well as search for their identity in their public role (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b; Munby, 2019). As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2000a) summarized:

> What we have found is that the occurrence of a disruptive conflict or critical event in the career of an educational leader can become an opportunity to question who he is as a leader and as a person. Just like when

> one is faced with a serious illness, the leader may use this occasion to question how he can maintain his current identity and self-image. (p. 2)

Chronic tensions faced in a life of leadership (e.g., the differences in managing people versus leading and the stress of resources available versus demands) set the basis for wounding to occur in educational leaders—leaders begin to question who they are at their core. According to the research (Evans, 1996; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Munby, 2019), one reason educational leaders may be vulnerable to experiencing a wounding crisis is because they are often alone and exposed. In fact, these authors maintain that leaders are isolated while on display and lonely while in public. In other words, leaders typically make very key decisions alone and then deal with the very public consequences of the decisions. Educational leaders also must deal with sustentative matters of policy and uphold rituals of symbolism that may restrict the same policies. Additionally, the higher the leader rises—the more hierarchical power—the less direct contact with constituents they have.

Thus, as Bennis (2009) explained in *On Becoming a Leader,* the need to know oneself is a primary step for a leader. The examination of self as leader resonated throughout the literature. While it is imperative to diagnose challenges at a system level and see the patterns in an organization, it is equally important to diagnose challenges at the self-level or intrapersonally (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b; Bennis, 2009; Drago-Severson, 1996, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009; Helsing & Howell, 2014; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Munby, 2019). In other words, to lead effectively, a person needs to be able to reflect on one's own attitudes and behaviors in the context of a challenge and move beyond the "what" or the identification of the problem to the interpretive—"the why" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 6). It is important to practice mindfulness and purposeful pausing, defined by Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2018c) as "the ability to take a bigger perspective on self and

others, recognizing interconnections" (p. 2) and think systemically with intentionality. One's self-concept is essential to leader identity development, which develops throughout a lifespan (Helsing & Howell, 2014).

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) explained that a unifying theme of their work was finding the story within the stories they captured—"understanding the meaning of wounding through the prism of the educational leader's experience offers a potentially remarkable path, not only to real leadership, but to being a real person in one's leadership" (p. 8). Authentic leaders are more self-aware and are able to regulate their emotions and behaviors—they have a more positive influence on their own growth and the growth of others throughout the organization (Helsing & Howell, 2014). In my study, the six participants had an opportunity to describe their understanding of the meaning of the wound and to share the emotions they felt at the time (prospectively) and when looking back (retrospectively) to discuss how they grew, if at all, from the wound.

Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000a, 2002b) used narrative storytelling to help leaders make sense of their crises of practice and aid their own healing and growth. This research found that it is crucial for wounded leaders to tell their stories. From Drago-Severson's (2016) view, "adult development is leadership development and vice versa" (p. 56). Similarly, Drago-Severson found:

> A developmental approach to learning, leadership, and advancing professional learning—one that takes into account adults' diverse meaning-making processes—is one very promising way to help educators build the internal capacities needed to meet the mounting challenges that define education today. (p. 56)

One of the deeply personal issues of leadership is the potential exposure to stress as many educational leaders face adaptive challenges (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b; Ackerman et al., 2018; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). The adaptive challenge of leadership brings about many possible wounding experiences; however, it is in the wounding experiences that one may

learn about oneself (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, 2004b). As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a) and Mears (2009) found, healing from the wound requires examining and seeing one's part in the wound. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) also surfaced the possible solution of helping wounded leaders heal when they postulated: "Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviors and that these resources can be tapped if and when a climate of facilitative attitudes can be provided" (p. 8). However, as Mears (2009) sensed, organizational systems force leaders to appear being unified (intrapersonally and interpersonally) without doing the actual work required to reach what she considered a higher developmental state. This is still true and relevant—as Munby (2019) stated, leaders are expected to be "empire builders, driven by their own ego (this is still a concern as I write this book in 2019!)" (p. 9).

Thus, exercising leadership may come at a cost (Bennis, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Munby, 2019). When exercising leadership, education leaders risk getting marginalized, diverted, and attacked (Bennis, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). For example, marginalization can happen to leaders, especially when they represent and present an idea or belief that conflicts with some constituents, or they are identified with an issue (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Initiating changes may lead to some type of resistance from followers or superiors because change challenges people's beliefs, habits, and values (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). When people resist change, their goal is to shut down the leader (p. 31). Thus, leaders are subjected to being pushed aside by surprises and betrayals, which usually come from people and places they may least expect (p. 31). As Munby (2019) summarized, "a tough year can be followed by another tougher year…" (p. 4) beyond the leaders' control.

As Bennis (2009) suggested, all experiences shape who we are as leaders, and that it is up to us to do the work on "self" that is necessary in order to learn and grow from vulnerable leadership positions. In other words, as Kegan (1982) explained, "the exercise

of leadership draws on all aspects of the self—cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal" (as cited in Howell & Helsing, 2014, p. 187). Helsing and Howell (2014) also suggested that "leaders with more complex capacities are better able to handle the most complex leadership challenges, and individuals who undertake personal development increase their capacities in effective leadership" (p. 187). Heifetz et al. (2009) also explained that "leaders have to be coolly realistic and skilled at diagnosing their own resources and constraints, and make adaptations to their own preferred behavior" (pp. 8-9).

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004b) identified a primary concern in educational leadership: leaders do not have opportunities to share the challenges they face or the emotions that surface alongside those challenges. With this study, I hope to have provided an opportunity for six superintendents to share the stories of wounding experiences as I expanded the previous studies on the wounded leader.

While the growth of leaders as individuals is critical to organizations as a whole, "schools and systems can only be as strong as the collections of individuals within" (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018, p. 126),as they must learn to rely on each other if the system, district, or school is going to be successful. In the following section, I provide an overview of leadership as a practice and the roles of education leaders, superintendents, mostly, but also principals. Although I did not interview principals in my research, one superintendent shared an experience of wounding when he was a principal. Including previous studies with principals helps foster a more robust understanding of vital educational leaders and their experiences. First, though, I speak to superintendents as leaders.

Superintendents

Superintendents, as the district leaders, must ensure that principals implement the work necessary at the school level to comply with the increased accountability measures enforced by federal, state, and local policies. Research is lacking regarding the impact and influence that superintendents make in schools, especially through their interactions with others (Chingos et al., 2014; Daly et al., 2014; Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Levin et al., 2008; Schlecty, 2000; West et al., 2010). Researchers need to study the culture of the organization as it pertains to the superintendent and principal relationships (Severson, 2013). Chingos et al. (2014) stated:

> Superintendents may well be as important to student achievement as the popular perception, their portrayal in the media, and their salaries suggest, but there is almost no quantitative research that addresses their impact [nor qualitative studies that address the challenges they face]. Existing research consists largely of journalistic case studies that tell the story of superintendents who are thought to be successful, and analyses of survey data that attempt to identify characteristics of effective district leadership [But there is no literature on superintendents in crisis who are wounded and how we can support them]. (p. 2)

Superintendents oversee key aspects of district operations, and, if they are effective, they focus on several duties, which include: execution of central management functions such as staff recruitment, financial management, the leadership of instruction, strategic planning, culture building, and improvements by creating a goal-oriented district (Chingos et al., 2014; Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kriesky, 2018; Leithwood, 2005). Superintendents in school districts are accountable for improving outcomes and for reducing achievement gaps (Peurach & Yurkofsky, 2018; Peurach et al., 2019). Superintendents face accountability pressures influenced by school reform initiatives since they are in a position to ensure that their district achievement tests are aligned with the goals or standards of district curricula (Daly et al., 2014; Leithwood, 2005). Therefore, my study also explored how a group of superintendents described and understood a wounding experience prospectively (what happened at the time—then) and

retrospectively (looking back on the experience now—in the present time) and how they make meaning of the wound.

Daly et al. (2014) found that superintendents serve as brokers to improve underperforming schools. However, there is a high turnover rate for superintendents, and retention is typically low. Research examining superintendent exits is limited in the field. A study conducted by Grissom and Andersen (2012) found that 45% of superintendents exited their district positions within three years of being hired. The few recent studies that exist suggest that the typical superintendent remains in their position an average of 3-4 years (Chingos et al., 2014; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kriesky, 2018). The limited research in this area furthers the need to conduct studies like the one I have completed; we must be able to describe and understand superintendents and how they make meaning of their leadership and wounding experiences.

Again, the importance of the district superintendent and the potential consequences of superintendent exits make understanding the factors that drive superintendent turnover a critical topic for empirical research (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Superintendent turnover still lacks a well-developed research base, and existing research has primarily taken the form of qualitative explorations of turnover motivations through case studies and interviews (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016). These findings are relevant to my research since the reasons for leaving may contain a story of wounding. There is a need to understand what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to educational leaders, and how it influences their professional and personal growth development.

As Daly et al. (2014) stated, “The politically neutral lens that is frequently used to understand accountability policies and school and district improvement may overlook important power dynamics that exist in low performing school districts” (p. 2). These dynamics impact superintendents and how they function and lead in an environment with

increased pressures. My research sought to understand how, if at all, these increased pressures play a role in the wounding experiences of school and district leaders.

Perspectives on the Work and Practice of Leadership

My study aimed to understand how six superintendents describe and understand the wounds that emerge in leadership as a practice. Understanding the roles of leaders is important. Learnings from this study may inform how the field can better meet leaders where they are, so that we can create a context that "can help hold and support us as complex, developing beings" (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018a, p. 126), especially after experiencing a wounding crisis. In addition, the field must also understand a leader's level of psychological development since leadership effectiveness correlates with higher levels of development (Helsing & Howell, 2014).

Influence of the Leader on the Organization

Evans's (1996) seminal work in his book, *The Human Side of School Change*, surfaced the paradoxes of leadership that may lead to wounding. School leaders face many obstacles that leave many administrators vulnerable and stressed instead of vigorous and stimulated. As he put it, "Leadership has always been beset by intrinsic stresses—pressures and paradoxes that are inherent in the role" (pp. 147-148). Ackerman et al. (2018), Fullan and Kirtman (2019), and Munby (2019) also reiterated the uncertainties, vulnerabilities, pressures, and challenges that still come with leading within a school context.

According to Mears (2009), organizational systems have become increasingly fragmented and divided: "We know that a house divided against itself cannot continue to stand, and we are living in a time when western culture is not accepting of anything or anyone not perceived as perfect" (p. 157). As Burke (2018) hypothesized, different styles

of leadership create different organizational climates that arise from different motives (p. 223). Climate affects motivation, since it is engrained in the core values of the organization. The high stakes and risks leaders take when leading in communities are embedded in existing philosophical concepts and are engrained in their core values (Burke, 2018).

Parents, teachers, and students see qualities in their leaders and ascribe meanings to their actions or lack of actions (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 1998). An integral element of leadership development is learning how leadership truly emerges from inner struggles, and sometimes this inner life may be projected onto others (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a, 2004b). Drago-Severson (2016) reminded us that:

> While we often intuitively understand that we need to provide children and youth with diverse supports and challenges to help them grow, the importance of differentiating our teaching and leading for adults is often overlooked. It is vital that we purposefully and intentionally ... create and nurture authentic capacity building.... We need to learn how to better help them grow—as needs for their leadership increase. (p. 57)

Currently, increased pressures with new accountability measures have made the work of school leaders more challenging, including high-stakes testing and standards-based reform (Drago-Severson, 2012). For this reason, I was interested in learning about the perspectives of educational leaders who serve as superintendents, and how, if at all, these increased pressures create the endemic conditions that lead to wounding.

Influence of the Organization/Climate on Leaders

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) posed the following question, which speaks to the perils of leadership and the experiences that may lead to wounding. The researchers wondered:

> To what extent are self-described wounded leaders being wounded by leadership itself? Can there be something in the nature of leadership that inhibits knowledgeable, skilled, decisive, and well-intentioned people from successfully realizing the mandate to lead? Simply put, what is it about leadership that, at times, gets in the way of leadership? (p. 3)

At present, in many organizational systems, researchers argue that those who were placed in leadership roles while still in a personal developmental state of disunity must utilize the majority of their energies, keeping up a persona of perfection, hero, the great man, and gatekeeper (Ackerman et al., 2019; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Mears, 2009; Munby, 2019). In order not to get wounded, being a school leader requires the need to be more than a screen on which the wishes of others are projected (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 1).

However, many school leaders become "other-centered," carrying the weight of other people's worries, problems, and desires, which leads to the development of their own wounds precisely because they often believed they had to hide their fears and vulnerabilities from others (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 1). In the current era, many scholars maintain that leaders still carry the weight of other stakeholders' worries and must be responsive to different contextual demands and emergency room-type dilemmas and adaptive challenges while being in vulnerable positions (Ackerman et al., 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Leithwood et al., 2019; Munby, 2019). As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (1998) noted, "The way leaders manage this process is, in fact, a skill of leadership" (p. 28).

Both the changing contexts of educational leadership and the emotions leaders are likely to experience further influence leaders. Additionally, the role media plays (through the accessibility of public online sources) may deepen a wounding experience. Previous studies conducted on the wounded leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) offer examples of incredibly difficult challenges for educational leaders from a variety of school contexts and regions (i.e., public and private elementary, middle, and high school principals, and heads of independent schools as well as superintendents). For example, these studies tell the story of principals who woke up to see their names on the front covers of newspapers and learned of a concern through the media, which caused their

wounding crisis (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). In this era of social media and other technological complexities, I sought to better comprehend how wounded leaders described and understood how they made sense of, responded to, processed (analyzed and synthesized), and recovered (if at all) from these wounds. In the next sections, I discuss how principals and superintendents are influenced by changing contexts and emotions. I include references to principals since one participant selected a wounding crisis that took place when he was a principal.

Changing contexts. In 2005, Jentz and Murphy explained that in their work with hundreds of new principals and superintendents, they were convinced that, no matter how well versed, "anyone who takes up a new leadership position must still confront a dauntingly complex swirl of high hopes, conflicting demands, and bewildering information" (p. 744). Similarly, Ackerman et al. (2018) posited that school leaders face challenging dilemmas and uncertainties every day, which may expose gaps between leadership practices and research-based knowledge. Nevertheless, leaders in education are incredibly responsive to the unique contexts in which they work (Ackerman et al., 2018; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Munby, 2019). These contexts include, for example, their roles, the policies framing their work, their institution, their community, socio-cultural, political, economic factors, and school improvement efforts (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2019).

In education, context can be viewed as the effects of situational variables (e.g., physical setting, psychosocial condition, and expectations) on perception, cognition, and experience (Leithwood, 2005). In essence, contextual factors influence how educational leaders respond to and understand different demands. Recent research has expanded to demonstrate how context has consequences for leaders' behaviors (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019). As the research has shown, context matters—what worked well in the past is not necessarily successful now. As context changes, new approaches from

leaders are necessary because they have extraordinarily demanding jobs that require them to alter their leadership as the context changes (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Munby, 2019). For example, studies have found that leaders often believe they have to be helpers and fixers, as well as independent and strong, which thwarts them from listening to their own needs (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

With mounting responsibilities, many leaders have become "overwhelmed with the seriousness, the weight, and importance of" their work and the idea that "[they] alone carry the responsibility to make things right" (Beech, 2005, p. 85). Ackerman et al. (2018) wrote:

> Leadership is practiced at a busy and sometimes hazardous intersection of personal and professional realms, where there is often a thundering flow of traffic. It is frequently thought of as a life of service in which personal wishes are turned toward the needs of others. (p. 38)

Changing contexts and accountability pressures for improvement continue to create major challenges for school and district leaders, who are central to the improvement of teaching and learning and who are striving to cope in response to a demanding work environment where support is often limited (Ackerman et al., 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Knapp et al., 2010). In present time, additional challenges for leaders include the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism brought to light by the Black Lives Matter movement, and a daunting 2020 election.

In the next section, I discuss how scholars and practitioners alike describe the ways in which emotions further complicate the demands of being an education leader.

Emotions in leadership. In today's society, we do not often talk about the emotions that are experienced by those in leadership positions (Beatty, 2002; Brackett, 2019; Goleman, 1995; Mears, 2009). Yet, a job in education contributes to inevitable emotionality and vulnerability in those with leadership roles, which can lead to a struggle between loneliness and belongingness (Ackerman et al., 2018; Knapp et al., 2010).

Emotions also contribute to personal struggles and influence everything we do—including leadership and the effectiveness of the leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 1998, 2002a, 2004a, 2004b; Ackerman et al., 2018; Brackett, 2019; Goens, 2005; Mears, 2009). As Kelchtermans et al. (2011) stated, "Emotionality is not just a peripheral phenomenon in educational leadership, but rather constitutes the heart of it" (p. 94). According to Brackett (2019), emotions are "the most powerful force inside the workplace—as they are in every human endeavor" (p. 222). The workplace may be an emotionally challenging environment since the stakes are high, and emotions in our life and work intertwine (Brackett, 2019). Indeed, emotions "influence everything, from leadership effectiveness to building and maintaining complex relationships" (p. 222).

The research also shows that leaders may find themselves playing down emotions when trying to meet the interests and needs of a variety of stakeholders, yet emotions reflect the way school leaders experience their job (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a; Kelchtermans et al., 2011). Brackett (2019) reiterated that "everything that happens at work is at the heart an emotional moment" (p. 222). And, according to educational leader Megan Crawford, "emotional relationships are the core of not just any school-related work but are pivotal to the concept of educational leadership" (as cited in Kelchtermans et al., 2011, p. 94).

In 2002, Beatty suggested that emotions provide essential knowledge about ourselves and our place in the world, citing Sartre to explain further that we experience emotions as an absolute reality, based on what we intuitively perceive them to be at the time. Beatty concluded, "For all of these reasons, emotion matters in educational leadership" (p. 5). Without examining our emotions as valuable sources of knowledge, we neglect to understand and appreciate their epistemological power in our lives (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a; Beatty, 2002; Bennis, 2009; Mears, 2009).

Despite the importance of understanding emotions in educational leadership, few studies have examined the emotional experiences of leaders, especially those who have

experienced wounds, and how, if at all, their wounding experiences influence leadership, organizations, or professional lives. As Boler (1999) suggested, “Institutions are inherently committed to maintaining silences (e.g., about emotion) and/or proliferating discourses that define emotion by negation” (pp. 141-142 as cited in Beatty, 2002, p. 2). Beatty (2002) also mentioned that “emotional ways of knowing remain underexplored” (p. 2). In 2004, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski stated, “The landscape of education leadership in the 21st century offers an astounding range of emotional challenges rarely acknowledged or appreciated” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004a, p. 7).

My research contributes to the field by providing more insight into how a wounding experience affects a group of six superintendents personally and professionally and how these leaders process the emotions that surface as a result of a self-described leadership crisis. By exploring how six superintendents describe and understand their wounding experiences, I sought to address a large gap in educational research. I aimed to understand what a wounding experience, or self-described leadership crisis, means to the six leaders in education, the emotions that surface as a result of the wound and the telling of the wounding experience, and the way a wound may influence these leaders professionally and personally. Through an in-depth qualitative study of six superintendents who self-identify and have been recommended as leaders who have been wounded, I explored how leaders describe and process their emotions of wounding.

The Givens of Leadership

Another theme across the literature was the emotions that surfaced for leaders who shared their wounding experiences. In this section, I discuss what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) identified as the *Givens of Leadership*. These are emotions that they identified as trends across their seven years of studying wounded leaders. They explained in their findings that leadership entails some fundamental elements that come with the job. As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) stated:

> A leader's conscious relation to the givens of leadership life—vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power—contains the seeds of wisdom and perhaps transformation in that these givens make it possible to harness their power in the service of personal change and growth. In the worst case, the givens can lead further down the path of the so-called leadership crises upon us. Either way, the impact can be profound on school leaders and leadership itself. (p. 2)

Vulnerability. A *vulnerability* was described as the beginning of the wound—to be open to self-doubt, fears, and questions (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a). However, the authors reminded us that vulnerability is inherent in school leadership since there are politics and people involved (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). Leaders cannot share anger or disappointment with subordinates. Further, leaders are often placed in vulnerable positions because their names are attached to public data and are labeled and branded with public report cards under the guise of accountability and reform (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b, 2004b; Ackerman et al., 2018; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009: Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Leithwood et al., 2019; Munby, 2019; Peurach & Yurkofsky, 2018; Peurach et al., 2019; Sampson, 2018; Young et al., 2017).

Isolation. Isolation was identified as a by-product or given of leadership, a "painful insularity" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 76). Isolation was described by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) as a necessary boundary in an emotional sense because of the system's hierarchy—human alienation is part of organizational life, and we tend to separate who we are as people from what we do. It is based on the idea that leaders are other-centered, as described above, in that the more helpful the leader, the more the leader is needed and vice versa. Since leaders have many competing demands, they get caught in the conspiracy of busyness and end up completing most of their tasks on their own and "fixing it" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b, p. 316). This means that they attempt to fix everything as they try to implement policies or changes from the top (e.g., local, state, national), which may alienate the leader. This isolation also leaves

leaders feeling guilty for wanting recognition when they make those changes, and their successes are not recognized (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b). In sum, cultural, economic, and contextual factors at times restrict leaders' actions, practices, and behavior (Leithwood et al., 2019), which may include a leader isolating themselves. With an increase in accountability via high-stakes testing, ongoing reform, and both global and local conflicts, it seems that leadership is getting lonelier at the top (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b; Ackerman et al., 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Fear. Fear is another prominent byproduct of wounding. For example, many leaders find their identity in their career; being fired is a constant fear after investing themselves in their work to get to the higher leadership position (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 30). Fear of losing the position can be overwhelming and can lead to permanent or temporary paralysis and feelings of devastation (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, 200b). As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) pointed out, schools historically have been operating through fear; yet, educators act as if fear does not exist because leaders are expected to be fearless. Vulnerability, admitting fear and loneliness, and what they don't know may be seen as weakness (Ackerman et al., 2018). Therefore, leaders often fear showing their true emotions and live with increased anxiety (Brackett, 2019; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Munby, 2019). Negating this emotion once again points to the myth of the "hero," the fearless leader who does not acknowledge or accept emotions (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 31).

Power (powerlessness). Loss of power is the foundation of wounds. Power is not always hierarchical, as others in the organization may have more power because of their influence since power is relational as well. Superintendents are impacted by the structures that exist within districts, which requires them to recognize the conception of power within the district and among various stakeholders, especially the school board (Kriesky, 2018). Power is central to the paradox the wound creates: it is constructive and

destructive. It has many faces “for good” as well as many faces “for bad” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 32). The superintendent holds a power position; there is power in their communication, access to them, their use of visibility, and the relationships they establish or influence (Chingos et al., 2014; Kiersky, 2018). *Social location* may also influence “power constructs and contextual influences” since it identifies a leader’s “unique position in society” based on their “lived experience, social identities, ideologies, context, and power” (Turman et al., 2018, pp. 65-66). Intersectionality also plays a role in relation to power since it denotes the identifiers (i.e., race, gender, and age) that construct one’s social location, particularly within the everchanging context of education and impact meaning-making of experiences (Hearn, 2012): these surfaced in my study in relation to the participants’ wounding experience. Power and powerlessness bring forth self-doubt when leaders question if they can do their job (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b; Kiersky, 2018). For example, they may feel powerless since they are expected to communicate often and with transparency (Kiersky, 2018). Then to compensate for feeling weak, they may assert their power in writing—through memos and directives to communicate their values and beliefs (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 67).

Summary: Perspective on the Work and Practice of Leadership

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) called these givens of leadership the perils of adaptive change, or assassinations that they warned leaders about in *Leadership on the Line,* where they also explained the difficulties of leadership and posed that leadership would be safe if it came with easy answers and known solutions, but it does not. Challenges place leaders in a place of disequilibrium, which in turn puts them in a place of discomfort necessary for personal change (Wagner et al., 2006). More recently, Drago-Severson et al. (2018), in close analysis of in-depth mini-case studies of principals, found that leaders felt “a feeling of solitary responsibility and weight-bearing,” and “an experience of

perpetual exhaustion and fatigue" (p. 5). In my study, I found that superintendents felt the same. These conditions are what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) considered as painful nerve roots in leadership work that present sources, circumstances, and potential openings for a wounding. The *Givens of Leadership* identified in the stories of wounding speak to the context of educational leadership where leaders, as Williams (2015) described, are perceived under the umbrella of "big man leadership—the expression of prominence, dominance, and tribalizing"; however, "big man leadership is insufficient for dealing with complex problems" (p. 4). Further, "scholars globally emphasize the importance of understanding and caring for the vital social-emotional dimensions of leadership since these are intimately related to leaders' capacities for leading and supporting others" and "self-management, which has to do with self-regulation, knowing how to harness emotions for good, and how to be resilient and manage stress" (Drago-Severson et al., 2018, p. 2).

Almost 20 years ago, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) explained that:

> Standards-based reform has inevitably led to a more vigorous public conversation about the nature of school leadership that can succeed in today's milieu. One response has been to produce an avalanche of innovation and reform that have brought their own set of victories, some would argue, and even more challenges for school leaders, including closing the achievement gap between rich and poor schools, getting accountability right for students and adults, improving teaching, as well as building district and school capacity for leadership, among others. (p. 23)

More recently, Drago-Severson (2016) named similar challenges that we still face in the current complex context of education, which include: meeting the diverse needs of students and closing the achievement gap in the age of accountability and reform.

Educational leaders face challenges that can consume them and are intensified by the tensions that exist from implementing external policies (e.g., local, state, and national) that are in conflict with leaders' own values about doing what is right for students and schools (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019; Drago-Severson &

Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018). This ongoing dissonance in the education profession makes leadership a risky business (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) and creates the potential for wounds to develop (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b).

Adaptive challenges can lead to confusion and leaders being ashamed of their own confusion, denying what they do not know, pretending to know, or blaming others (Ackerman et al., 2018). Additionally, adaptive challenges can cause nervousness, vulnerability, and uncertainty for leaders; they are "volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous in nature" (Ackerman et al., 2018, p. 37). Adaptive challenges can contribute to a leader being taken out of action because they begin to question the values of others in the organization (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Thus, as a result, a leader can become wounded. As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004b) stated:

> On the surface, wounding draws from the endemic and chronic tensions affecting leaders, all leaders—tensions, which by no means are wholly new; however, the context of schooling today certainly makes the dilemma seem new, more intense and more real. (p. 314)

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) posited that the crisis, or wounding experience, for school leaders is an adaptive process, and they cited Heifetz (1994) to explain that the leaders can learn lessons by becoming conscious of leadership experiences in a new light. As described more recently by Heifetz and Linsky (2017), many of the stories in the studies of the wounded leader demonstrated an adaptive challenge and how the leaders were sometimes "diverted by getting lost on other people's demands" (p. 39).

In a study of principals, Drago-Severson et al. (2018) recommended that future research investigates how leaders cope with challenges over an extended time and "trace the leaders' application and interconnectivity of multiple frameworks (i.e., adaptive leadership, adult development, and social-emotional frameworks)" (p. 9), which I aimed to explore in my study of wounded superintendents.

Conducting my study was the first step in better understanding the challenges a group of six superintendents face in their work. By exploring the challenges and contexts that led to the wound, I hoped to identify the types of challenges (i.e., adaptive, technical, or mixed) surfaced by leadership work, the adult development needs, and social-emotional needs of leaders to help us better understand what wounded them and how we can better support and retain them in the field. These terms (e.g., adaptive challenges, emotions, coping) are some of the codes identified in my preliminary coding scheme (see Appendix E) for my study.

Narratives, as Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) stated in their multiple studies, gave the field a way to look at how leaders respond to these stressful wounding experiences. By learning how educational leaders describe and understand their wounding experiences, we can design better ways to support leaders who are bound to get wounded at some point in their careers. Wounds can be the opening to help leaders find their own true story via storytelling, and analyzing how the leaders frame their story offers insight into how they each interpret their experience (Frank, 1995). My interviews with the participants in my study were structured so that the six leaders were able to engage in storytelling and, via reflection in the third interview (Appendix C), look at the wound retrospectively (looking back) to interpret the experience.

Surviving Leadership

In order for leaders to understand how the wounding experience can be a learnable moment, we need to find ways to help leaders survive and emerge from the wound stronger. Only then can they heal and thrive and use the experience to help others. As Drago-Severson (2016) states:

> In school systems around the world, it is becoming clear that we need to better care for … leaders and all who dedicate themselves to improving conditions. We need to learn how to better help them grow—as needs for their leadership increase. We need to do something different, something more. (p. 57)

Three valuable lessons can be learned through wounding according to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b): (1) "Learn to trust the unattended areas of your leadership-especially your feelings" (p. 107); (2) "Listen honestly and deeply for the questions that are feared or left out of your work life altogether" (p. 107); and (3) "Find folks to talk to whom you really trust" (p. 107). The researchers also explored suggestions for leadership development and the conditions necessary for the leaders to find their own path and personal and professional fulfillment (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b). I hope to have expanded the work so that we can provide ways for leaders to find their path in order to learn and grow professionally and personally.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I conducted a literature review in order to build a foundation for my research. I have reviewed the literature on wounded leaders and the themes that emerged in relation to my study. I began this chapter with an overall analysis of the bodies of literature that have contributed to the conceptual framework for the study of wounded leaders.

The purpose of my study was to understand what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to educational leaders and how it influences their professional and personal growth and development. I hope to have extended that understanding in the educational leadership sector in order to answer the questions inspired by the studies conducted by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

According to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a), “Against a background of leadership theory and practice … the voices of …’wounded leaders’ are often left out of the professional dialogue, yet are an integral part of the leadership landscape” (p. 1). In reading the multiple studies of the wounded leader conducted by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, it is clear that they discovered ways to help leaders recreate themselves through the stories of the wounding crises they told; to heal and recreate themselves as leaders and as individuals. I hope to have taken the notions learned about the wounded leaders, the study, and the methodology to expand Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski’s groundbreaking work.

Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I begin with my three research questions, which correspond to each of the three-part qualitative interviews. Next, I provide my rationale for using a qualitative method design. Then, I provide a description of the selection of participants and site, my methods for data collection, and my methods for data analysis. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the limitations to my study.

Research Questions

As I discussed in Chapter I, my research was focused on three questions:

1. How do six superintendents, who have been identified and who also self-identify as having been wounded, describe and understand a wounding crisis or experience prospectively (what happened at the time—then) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now—in the present time)?
2. How do these school leaders describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience?
3. How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say that they have healed? How, if at all, do they describe how they are still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

In order to explore my research questions, I used a qualitative research design method to honor the power of storytelling and understand how participants described their wounding in leadership, given the complexity of the education context (Ackerman, personal communication, August 2019). To identify unanticipated phenomena and generate new grounded theory, discoveries, and relationships, "qualitative researchers typically study a relatively small number of individuals … and preserve the individuality of each of these in their analysis … to understand events, actions, meanings" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). Using a qualitative research design was most appropriate for this study because I sought to preserve the individuality of a small number (6) of superintendents.

Narrative Identity and Inquiry via Qualitative Interviews

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2001, 2002a, 2002b; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) and Mears (2009) all cite Ricoeur (1984) to explain the value in using narrative identity. Narrative identity can be a way to capture who a person is, who a person became in a story, and how the story helped him/her become that person and why. Both Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski and Mears also cite Frank's (1995) use of the narrative storytelling framework to listen to leaders' accounts of their wounding experiences. Frank's framework uses a three-part narrative structure to translate the stories into *Quest*, *Restitution*, and *Chaos* to listen to the leaders' accounts of their experiences.

As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) described, our job as qualitative researchers is to listen deeply to the story the leader is telling themselves through actions, events, and their responses. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) explained that in conducting a study, and in using narrative inquiry, the story "the person is telling herself is 'how' the tale finds a way back to the emotional moment of engagement" (p. xiv). This

telling is important because, in that emotional moment, the leader is required to show up as “oneself” or the “self” (p. xiv).

I planned to conduct a qualitative study—a three-part interview—as it helped me understand how leaders come to make meaning of their wound differently over time. The story within the narrative is what brings understanding to the meaning of wounding through the eyes of the educational leader’s experience (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 7). The goal of my research was to capture a holistic view of leadership by understanding who the leaders are and what wounding meant to them. Like Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b), I took great care to use the words of the leaders, while at the same time disguising distinguishing features to protect and attend to maintaining the confidentiality of the participants (p. 3).

Selection, Recruitment, and Pilot

In this section, I discuss how I selected and recruited participants. I also discuss my site selection, and how I piloted the study before data collection began.

Selection of Participants

In this study, the participants were six superintendents. The selected educational leaders served as a purposeful sample intended to provide the best data (Maxwell, 2013). Participants were recommended by experts (i.e., educational leadership faculty and researchers at Teachers College who work with educational leaders providing coaching, professional development, or collegial support) who knew them and knew that they self-identified as having had a wounding experience. In addition, the superintendents participated on a volunteer basis, meaning: (1) they willingly volunteered to participate in my study after being recommended and invited, and (2) they agreed to participate in the three interviews (i.e., they were willing to share the time necessary for me to conduct the

interview in person, or via a telephone conference). The six participants selected were intentionally of mixed ages, race, gender, and experience (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Participants: The Six Superintendents*

Pseudonym	Demographics	Years of Experience	District
Emma	White woman; older than 70; retired	52 in education; 14 as district superintendent	Large urban school district; one of ten largest in the nation (approximately 47,000 students)
Frankie	White man; older than 30; sitting superintendent	Over 10 in education; two as district superintendent	Urban charter school district (approximately 14,000 students)
Julie	Afro-Latina woman; older than 40; sitting superintendent	20 in education; 10 as community school district superintendent	Urban public school district (approximately 12,000 students)
Francis	Black woman; older than 70; retired	Over 50 in education; 16 as superintendent in various districts	Several large public school urban districts (approximately 6,000 students in the district of wounding crisis) more broadly one of the Big Five Districts in New York State
John Black	Black man; older than 70; retired	Over 40 in education; 16 as superintendent in three urban and suburban districts	Public school (several districts)
Juanita	Black woman; older than 40; consulting	Over 20 in education; Two as superintendent	Urban school district (approximately 20,000 students)

Note. Data gathered from public information on the websites of the State Education Department of the District.

Maxwell (2013) described purposeful selection as a form that ensures that a particular setting or person is selected deliberately to provide information that is relevant to the research questions (p. 91). One selection criterion I employed was the participants having at least two years of experience as an educational leader serving as

superintendent. My rationale for this was that I wanted to learn from leaders who did not quit after their first year. Also, among the superintendents I selected, I wanted to learn from urban leaders (current or past). I wanted to ensure that I was inclusionary of ethnic, racial, and gender diversity. Next, I discuss the recruitment and selection of sites.

Recruitment of Participants

In accordance with the guidelines of the Teachers College (TC), Columbia University Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding the protection of human participants, I sent my application to the TC IRB for approval. After receiving IRB approval, participant recruitment began.

To recruit the study participants, I reached out (via email) to the recommenders for names and contact information for possible participants. I then emailed a recruitment invitation letter (see Appendix D) to each recommended participant. I also followed up with a phone call to discuss the purpose of my study. I wanted to establish a relationship and build trust. It was important to confirm that the participants were comfortable with the design of the study and the amount of time. After receiving a response of interest and selecting the participants, I emailed the informed consent agreement to each participant (see Appendix F). As Table 2 shows, participant names are disguised using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and identity. All IRB procedures were followed.

Selection of Site

For this study, selecting a site, a particular school or school district, was not as important as it is for some other qualitative research studies. Educational leaders who have experienced a wound can be from anywhere in the country. However, I tried to select participants in the eastern part of the United States for practicality and accessibility proposes.

Pilot Study

In 2009, Maxwell wrote:

> Pilot studies serve some of the same functions as prior research, but they can be focused more precisely on your own concerns and theories. You can design pilot studies specifically to test your ideas or methods and explore their implications, or to inductively develop grounded theory. One particular use that pilot studies have in qualitative research is to generate an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the people you are studying…. (p. 228)

As Maxwell (2013) later stated, "No design is ever so complete that it cannot be improved by a pilot study" (p. 66). I piloted the protocols with an educational leader and then asked a fellow researcher to interview me using the protocols as well (see Appendices A, B, and C). This pilot was important in order to surface weaknesses in the interview protocol and obtain insight into any areas of concern in the research design (e.g., timing, time allocation, questions, the order of the questions, structure, word choice). The pilot interview also confirmed the importance of setting the context (e.g., Interview 1) for this study in order to build trust with the participants and allow them to share their years of experience in education. Including setting the context in the first interview allowed me to establish rapport before the participants shared the particulars of their wounding experience. I also learned to use wait time effectively, to not ask questions one by one in a linear fashion (if they responded to the question already), to listen carefully and ask for clarification when needed, and to ask if they were okay to continue during emotional parts (building in that timing in my protocol). The pilot study provided valuable insight before interviewing the six participants.

As I discuss in the following section, I applied an in-depth approach to interviewing, since the study aimed to capture the commonality of a lived experience (wounding in this instance), within a particular group (educational leaders), in order to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013).

Methods for Data Collection

In this section, I first explain my data collection method, which was a series of three 90-minute interviews (see Appendices A, B, and C). Then, I provide a full description of the data collection process I followed in order to complete my study.

Interviews

Data collection for this study proceeded over a three-month period. Eighteen interviews were held with six participants. Following the multiple interview structure with each participant was essential as the structure of the study aimed to replicate and expand portions of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2001, 2002a; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, 2000a, 2000b) studies. However, I modified the three-part structure and utilized a carefully constructed three-part interview protocol as part of my process, instead of three open-ended prompts.

The semi-structured qualitative interviews (see Appendices A, B, and C) took place via a telephone conference for five participants and in-person for one participant who selected a time that was convenient for them and a place where they felt most comfortable (see Table 3). The in-person interview was held in a private room at Teachers College. When the interviews were conducted over the phone and in-person, I let each participant know when I started recording, and when I stopped recording (see Table 3).

As Table 3 shows, one participant was able to conduct each interview on three separate occasions. Four participants conducted interview 1 and then asked that we conduct interviews 2 and 3 on the same day. In one instance, after the first interview, one participant asked to continue with the next two interviews on the same day. This participant also agreed to meet me and to be interviewed in person. Due to the participants' preference and convenience, five out of the six interviews were conducted by phone and tape-recorded. I decided that since the participants made these requests, I

would honor them because I knew that was what they wanted. My preference would have been to go with what I had planned and discussed as the format with my advisor, but I did not do this for fear that the participants would not want to come back.

Table 3. *Data Collection: Participants and Interviews*

Pseudonym	**Length of Interview (Minutes)**			**# of Days for Interviews**	**Phone or In-Person**
	Interview 1	**Interview 2**	**Interview 3**		
Emma	90	75	80	2	Phone
Frankie	90	80	75	1	In-Person
Julie	95	80	75	3	Phone
Francis	90	85	65	2	Phone
John Black	90	65	55	3	Phone
Juanita	80	90	75	2	Phone

Table 3 shows the interview time with each participant for three in-depth qualitative interviews. Times fluctuated depending on the participants' accounts of their stories and reflections. Although two interviews may have taken place in one day, considering the busy lives of leaders, sometimes they had to call back when they needed to attend to an emergency or other matters. It was each participant's decision when they were available to speak. The time allotted was 90 minutes for each interview. However, to be respectful of the participants' preference, some interviews were shorter than expected. Interviews were ended when the interview protocol was completed, and the participant felt that they answered to the best of their ability. Therefore, some of the interviews ended before the 90 minutes. Next, I provide more details regarding each of the three interviews.

First interview: Getting to know each other, context of the participant's experience, and telling of the story of wounding (see Appendix A). During the first

interview, I invited participants to share their background as an educator up to the point of the crisis. Then, I invited them to begin to share the story of the wounding experience—thus, the interview topic was "telling" of the story of wounding. The goal of this was to learn how the six educational leaders describe and understand a wounding crisis prospectively and retrospectively (Research Question 1). Like Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998) study, I was also interested "not just in the explicit content of the stories—the actions, the events, and responses—but, in how the leaders' stories served to address the woundedness of the leaders" (p. 3).

Second interview: The details of the experience—Learning more about the wound (see Appendix B). The topic for the second interview was telling of the experience of being wounded and the barriers or "boundaries" that prohibited leaders from seeing their wounds. Interview 2 was an expansion of the second study conducted by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2002a), where they asked, "What are the wounds of the school leaders? How do they understand them, and what are the boundaries that prevent them from seeing their wounds?" (p. 3). I structured this interview to address many of the research questions, specifically Research Question 2, about how participants made meaning of, responded to, and processed their wounding experience.

I asked participants to reflect on their experiences in the second and third interviews. For example, I asked leaders to answer questions about their feelings at the time of the wounding experience and talk about how they felt at the time of the interview (in present time). Asking them to think retrospectively (looking back on the experience) invited participants to engage in reflective practice, as described in Chapter II.

Third interview: How wounding influenced leadership then and now (see Appendix C). Finally, in the third interview, I asked participants to retrospectively (looking back on the experience now) reflect on what was said in the first two interviews and to talk about what that meant in terms of who they are today as a leader and as a person. The topic for the third interview had two parts: (1) learning, and if at all, from

being wounded; and (2) implications for learning from wounds for education leadership development. I wanted to know if leaders learned from their wounds, including the subtopic of the emotional parts of wounding and how leaders felt—at the time of the crisis and at the time of the interview. Interview 3 is an expansion of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2000b) third and fifth studies (2002a), which explored the relationship between a leader's wounding experience and the practice of school leadership (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a). I structured the third interview to address Research Question 3: How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say they have healed? How, if at all, do they describe how they are still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?

Additional Sources of Data

In addition to the interviews, I sought to collect data from any documents that aided in better understanding the participants' background, district, setting, and context. I also created a background narrative for each district through the use of public data and additional demographic information revealed during the interviews with participants as one way to triangulate the data; however, the names of places were changed to protect confidentiality. In the current context, we have an abundance of public data, including social media outlets. In a conversation with Professor Maslin-Ostrowski (personal communication, September 3, 2019), she encouraged me to consider this source, which is more widely available in today's current educational context. Therefore, I analyzed media and literature that is public (e.g., articles in the newspaper, school and district websites, informational brochures, social media posts) just for general information when necessary, but not for referencing, as citing any references may disclose the participants identify. Since the data in this study are very personal, the context of their educational

experience, background, and work settings primarily came from data gathered during the first interview and other details shared by the participants.

Data Analysis

In this section, I discuss my methods for data analysis. For my research study, I used general patterns of analysis, as suggested by Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011), Maxwell (2013), and Creswell (2013), to analyze data. As I discuss in this section, my data analysis was a multistep process. In order to conduct a full data analysis, I hired a third party to transcribe the interviews, and then I reviewed and checked the transcripts, coded the interview data, categorized the data across themes, and conducted narrative inquiry analysis. In the following section, I also discuss how I responded to validity threats.

Transcribing and Reviewing Interview Data

I digitally recorded each interview and hired a professional to transcribe the recordings. In order to attend to descriptive validity, interviews were transcribed verbatim. I also shared the interview transcripts with each participant so that they could verify the accuracy of their words. In order to attend to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2005), every participant received all transcripts via email and was offered an opportunity to clarify any of the parts of the transcript via email or via a phone call if they chose to do so. One participant offered written clarifications, while the other five participants found the transcripts accurate.

Coding and Categorizing Interview Data

Using Schreiber and Asner-Self's (2011) coding recommendations, I read the interview transcripts multiple times and coded for repeated words or phrases to identify emerging patterns. After I identified themes that emerged, I organized overlapping into

categories. I then conducted a descriptive analysis of each interview for each participant. I engaged in open or eclectic coding and looked at emerging themes within and across cases and coded only for first impressions of data that rose to the surface, as Saldaña (2016) suggested. I did not use my interview questions or prompts as codes to ensure that I did not begin with preconceived theories that may have limited my findings and in order to attend to bias (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016; Seidman, 2019).

For each set of interviews (i.e., interviews 1, 2, and 3), I began the coding process to identify main themes and patterns that emerged from the transcripts (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2019). I generated codes based on my interpretations of what seemed important in the participants' experiences. I paid specific attention to moments when they shared the telling of the wound prospectively (what happened at the time—then) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now—in the present time).

I divided the data into stanzas, bolded, and highlighted moments that captured my attention (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). These included "key moments," which became "relevant text" or significant passages of data (Saldaña, 2016, p. 18). In short, I aimed to create data about the data collected in forms of codes, categories, graphic summaries, and analytic memos, as Saldaña suggested. This included coding human actions, values, and beliefs that the participants described since they provided social meanings representative of my data (Saldana, 2016, p. 18).

Narrative Summaries

Once I had analyzed the three qualitative interviews, I conducted narrative analysis and cross-case analysis in order to write narrative summaries. A narrative summary is the selection and ordering of evidence to produce an account describing the findings (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005), which I crafted by categorizing and connecting the data during narrative analysis (Maxwell, 2013). This entailed exploring "intrapersonal connections and interpersonal participant experiences" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 154) and using

“rich descriptive detail” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 157). Through this process, I tried to preserve the sequence of the interviews while maintaining the coherence of the narratives when I coded, categorized, and themed statements (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). I also engaged in connecting steps during cross-case analysis within-case and cross-case (Saldaña, 2016) to illustrate a range of observations and to connect different categories and themes in order to arrive at overarching assertions. According to Maxwell (2013), identifying connections among different categories and themes across cases in each interview protocol (see Appendix A, B, and C) can also be considered a connecting step in the analysis (p. 113).

After I coded, categorized, and themed statements, I storied the data, meaning I tried to link themes so that connections were more natural. Recall that narrative inquiry is a qualitative representation and presentation of the participants’ lives through the use of story (Seidman, 2019). I employed the participants’ own words via the use of what Saldaña (2016) described as In Vivo codes (i.e., using the participants’ own words) and Emotion codes (i.e., emotions recalled by the participants to explore intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences). Then I used NVivo 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS). CAQDAS allowed me to reconfigure my data for analytic reflection and to cross-check my manual coding (see Appendices H for examples and I-M for specific claims).

Although I fractured and categorized the data for each interview conducted for each participant to arrive at common themes, I was inspired to create narrative summaries to capture the findings in response to research questions. According to Maxwell (2013), “categorizing as an analytic strategy has one significant limitation: It replaces the original set of contextual relationships within an interview transcript” (p. 112). Therefore, I employed connecting strategies. Connecting strategies are a holistic approach to understand interview data in a context that “connect[s] statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (pp. 112-113). By identifying the relationships within

different parts of each individual interview transcript for each participant (i.e., all transcripts for interview 1, all transcripts for interview 2, and all transcripts for interview 3), I was able to (1) form narrative summaries of each participant shared in Chapter IV, and (2) craft narrative summaries in response to research questions, which I present in Chapters IV, V, VI, and VII. These allowed me to display coherence in the events of the participants' experience and to link the wounding experience to the organizational context within which each superintendent operates (Seidman, 2019). By using the participants' words to reflect their consciousness, I was able to clarify intentions to convey a sense of their processing and time (Seidman, 2019, p. 128).

Validity

Since I hoped to expand the studies on the wounded leader, I attended to validity by trying to closely follow the methods used by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998), as described in the context of their methods.

Research bias. I did my best to attend to researcher bias by crafting questions free of assumptions and examining data carefully, as Maxwell (2013) suggested. For example, I asked a group of fellow doctoral students who are trained in qualitative research (at Teachers College, Columbia University) to review my interview protocol, research questions, and the design of the study in order to attend to this validity threat and to address any possible bias as a result of my own experiences.

Reactivity. Reactivity is the influence I bring as a researcher on the participants in the study. And, as Maxwell (2013) suggested, I named that possibility upfront in my introduction email, informed consent, during the initial conversation inviting them to the study, and before each interview. In cases where I knew the participants, I made sure to explain that it was entirely voluntary to participate and attended to maintaining the confidentiality of the participants in the study. I was careful to attend to my procedures to

safeguard the interviewees' identities using pseudonyms, password-protected computers, and locked files.

Descriptive validity. According to Maxwell (2013), descriptive validity is the accuracy of the researcher's recordings and trying to represent what they hear and observe with accuracy. I digitally recorded all interviews and took notes so that I could capture nuances in behavior and emotions. I had the transcripts professionally transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy before sharing them with the participants for accuracy and to ask if they wanted to add or delete anything from the transcript (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). I emailed the transcriptions and offered to discuss any questions, clarifications, or concerns after the interviews. Before the second and third interviews, I also gave each participant an opportunity to share their thoughts regarding the transcripts (except for one participant, who requested to conduct all three interviews in one day and received the transcripts within 48 hours after the day of interviews; he also received an invitation to clarify any parts of the transcripts received).

Interpretive validity. Interpretive validity is the accuracy of the interpretations—meaning the accurate representation of the participants' viewpoints, experiences, and thoughts to the best of the researcher's ability (Maxwell, 2013). I checked for accuracy of interpretation through member checking—meaning that I shared my interpretations during the second and third interviews to check if my preliminary interpretations were true (Maxwell, 2013). I also attended to interpretative validity threats through memoing, writing narrative summaries after each interview, and capturing on-time data. I reviewed all information gathered with the participants to certify the accuracy of interpretation. In addition, I shared my codes and interpretations with two expert qualitative researchers on my committee and another research student.

Theoretical validity. Theoretical validity is when I allow my own theoretical lens to influence my analysis of how wounded leaders reconstruct their stories of wounding

(Maxwell, 2005). I attended to this also by analyzing data to look for discrepant data, incorporating concrete evidence, and keeping detailed notes of my coding and interpretation process (Maxwell, 2013). Theoretical validity was achieved through a regular presentation to trusted colleagues, participants, and advisors. I discuss the conclusions drawn through analysis (Maxwell, 2013).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of my study was to describe and understand how a group of six educational leaders describe and understand what a self-identified leadership crisis or wounding experience means to them and how, if at all, they believe their wounding experience influenced them professionally and personally.

In this chapter, I presented my research questions and my rationale for conducting qualitative interviews. Then I explained research methods and how I selected the site and the participants. I described my data collection methods and detailed how I conducted the three 90-minute qualitative interviews. Next, I discussed the data analysis methods that I employed. Finally, I explained the steps that I took to attend to validity threats and the limitations in my study.

Chapter IV

INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to the six participants, with both contextual and demographic information and descriptions to set the premise of their wounding experiences. Then, I provide a brief overview to the chapters that follow. I end the chapter with a summary.

The Participants

In this section, I introduce each participant in order to set the context for the findings that I share in subsequent chapters. My goal is to share some of the participants' experiences and some details of their stories in order to help readers understand important information about each of them (Kanarek, 2020). First, I provide contextual and demographic information. Then, using thick descriptions, I provide the background and contextual knowledge that each superintendent shared in the first part of interview 1 (Appendix A). Before introducing the participants through narrative summaries, I provide an overview of each in Table 4, which I first presented in Chapter III. In Table 4, I have offered summaries of important contextual and demographic information. A narrative summary is the selection, chronicling, and ordering of evidence to produce an account recounting and describing the findings (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005), which I crafted by categorizing and connecting the data during narrative analysis (Maxwell, 2013).

Table 4. *Participants: The Six Superintendents*

Pseudonym	Demographics	Years of Experience	District
Emma	White woman; older than 70; retired; working as a consultant	52 in education; 14 as district superintendent	Large urban school district; one of ten largest in the nation (approximately 47,000 students)
Frankie	White man; older than 30; sitting superintendent	Over 10 in education; two as district superintendent	Urban charter school district (approximately 14,000 students)
Julie	Afro-Latina woman; older than 40; sitting superintendent	20 in education; 10 as community school district superintendent	Urban public school district (approximately 12,000 students)
Francis	Black woman; older than 70; retired and working as a consultant and professor	Over 50 in education; 16 as superintendent in various districts	Several large public school urban districts (approximately 6,000 students in the district of wounding crisis) more broadly one of the Big Five Districts in New York State
John Black	Black man; older than 70; retired and working in consulting	Over 40 in education; 16 as superintendent in three urban and suburban districts	Public school (several districts)
Juanita	Black woman; older than 40; consulting	Over 20 in education; Two as superintendent	Urban school district (approximately 20,000 students)

Note. Data gathered from public information on the websites of the State Education Department of the District.

The Participants: Contextual and Demographic Information

As is shown in Table 4, I use a pseudonym for each participant throughout the dissertation in order to protect their identity. Each of the six participants worked in urban school districts with mixed demographics and some of the largest districts in the nation. Participants range from 33 to 76 years of age. Three are retired from the superintendency now but still work as consultants, coaches, and mentors in the field. Two participants

were active superintendents at the time of this study. Frankie was a sitting superintendent in a charter school district. Julie was in transition to new career opportunities and became the superintendent of a district in another state by the time this dissertation was completed. Juanita worked in her own consulting business at the time of the study.

Next, I share a narrative summary about each superintendent, and finally, I describe their professional experience and history, the context of the district they worked in when the wounding crisis occurred, and a synopsis of the beginning of their wounding experience. I wrote these narrative summaries and included the descriptions so that readers would be able to get a sense of the participants' voices. This is a stylistic approach inspired by other researchers who bring participants and their lived experiences to life (e.g., Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b; Broderick, 1996; Ekert, 2000; Frank, 1995; Kanarek, 2020).

The Participants

Superintendent Emma. Emma is a retired White woman in her 70s who served as a superintendent on the Southeast coast of the United States. Before retiring, Emma was in education for over 50 years and worked as a superintendent for 14 years. She started as a teacher in the sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, microbiology, and marine biology) before serving as a department chairman, director of professional development (in various districts), deputy superintendent (assistant to the superintendent), interim superintendent, and superintendent (in two districts).

Emma worked in a large urban school district that was being desegregated at the time of her wounding experience. Two years after she was hired as deputy superintendent, Emma became interim superintendent after the acting superintendent had a tragic incident. Emma experienced the wounding crises as a result of a series of events, one being a man on the district cabinet who did not approve of her being appointed interim superintendent or, eventually, superintendent.

Prior to her wounding experience, Emma was serving as a deputy superintendent in the district for the superintendent that was hired "because he had worked in desegregation for years, and he had a lot of experience." When the superintendent hired Emma [to work in the district where she was wounded], he asked her to come out of a leave of absence to return to her home community—where she had grown up and worked all her life. He said, as Emma recalled:

> "You need to come home [Emma was on a leave from the district] because I need you to work with me. I need a person that knows the community because we are going to do hard things. And I think you have a lot of respect in the community, and I'm going to need you to be my buffer, and I am going to need you to be my right hand."

Emma said that she took the position and described the state of the school district when she first became deputy superintendent:

> Believe it or not, we were a segregated district in the eighties and the nineties, and I mean segregated, not just geographically but racially. And we had African American schools and White schools, and we were under a federal court order to desegregate schools, or we would lose our national funding…. And besides, it was the right thing to do.

In addition to the school being segregated, according to Emma, the district cabinet of all White men was very shocked when she was hired as deputy superintendent. However, the members of the cabinet knew her because she had grown up and worked in the community. "A lot of them knew me because I'd been there since I was a kid," Emma shared emphatically. "They were White [men]. I had known them, and they were all much older."

The superintendent that hired Emma at the time made Emma the second person in command; "he let [the cabinet] know that if he wasn't there, I was in charge, and that didn't sit well with several of the men who dreamed about becoming the superintendent." Emma's journey to becoming deputy superintendent is important since it is the precursor to the challenges she faced later as both an interim superintendent and superintendent.

Emma shared that she had a lot of responsibility as deputy superintendent. As she explained, “We started actually beginning to tell the community that we were going to change the community—that we would be bussing children all over.” In her words:

> So, can you imagine that wasn’t the happiest message to send the community. And especially because I was local, [the community, including my own parents], couldn’t believe … that I would ever do this to children, to put them on a bus for one or two hours to take them from a White community to a Black community, African American. So, it started out pretty hard because I believed in what I was doing, and it didn’t matter. We were really in a fight with the community.

As Emma mentioned, she was concerned about her role and work at the time since members of the community, which included her parents, didn’t believe in desegregation. She reiterated, “Unfortunately, we were a very segregated community…. So, it was a horrible time for our school district because people just went crazy…. They were entitled. So, there was a lot of tension.” She shared that the leaders in the district were under protection since they often received threats: “I mean, [the community] did lots of things to us personally.”

Emma shared that she believed she was hired because it would be helpful to the community and the superintendent—especially since she knew everybody and grew up in the town. However, as she remembered, the members of the community “weren’t happy with him [the superintendent that hired her], and they weren’t happy with me, or anybody that was on his staff because we were going to disrupt the lives of children.”

One day, Emma’s hiring superintendent, her boss, died tragically. Emma stated, “I was by his side when he was murdered by a teacher,” and Emma suddenly became interim superintendent. As she recalled:

> I became the interim acting superintendent, and of course, the men [on the cabinet] just went nuts…. I mean, I never thought about that…. The men, especially one of the men, were absolutely beside themselves. They couldn’t believe I had become the superintendent, even interim.

After five months of planning to conduct a national search for a superintendent, Emma said that the school board (the governing body in the districts) told her that they were not going to search since she was doing a fabulous job. They officially hired her as the superintendent of the district—even the community seemed supportive. Emma shared:

> I think the community was very happy because I feel they felt they [finally] knew me. Especially with [the superintendent's] murder, I had been the person who helped them heal that loss. We had a lot to do after his murder, [it] was really tragic, and I think I was a strong person. I was the right person for the job at that time. And because I knew his plan backward and forward, I was darn sure that plan was going to get accepted if I was superintendent or not.

Emma explained that she also had to have the loyalty of the cabinet since they were dealing with "huge situations [e.g., implementing the desegregation plan, investing in technology] in the community." She spoke to the cabinet and managed to get all of them on her side except for "the one man" on the cabinet who resented her the most. As Emma stated:

> All of them came around except the one man who really was upset, but he was angry…. [I was] just so angry with him 'cause he couldn't release his desire for power to come and help me. I think my journey of being *wounded* [emphasis added] started with him.

As Emma shared, her wounding experience started after a tremendously difficult situation when tensions rose between her and a man on the cabinet. I provide more details of Emma's wounding experience in Chapters V, VI, and VII as I tie in my findings to the research questions.

Superintendent Frankie. Frankie is a White male in his 30s who had been a principal in other charter networks. At the time of this study, Frankie had been a superintendent of a charter district with approximately 14,000 students for over a year and a half. Frankie started his career as a teacher in a rural area of the United States. Later, he worked as a teacher, coach, and principal in an urban area in the Northeast. He

loved his job as a principal in both a middle school and a high school and shared, “I was totally happy. I loved it!” Yet, Frankie’s story of his wounding experience took place during his role as a principal before becoming the superintendent of another charter organization.

Frankie felt that he was an effective high school principal. He inherited a school that was “a disaster” in the design that was meant to be a progressive school; the school “was in poor shape” and needed a “total transformative experience.” He said, “I went up on a limb and fell in love with the high school, fell in love with the project, and worked really hard alongside that community. We turned the culture pretty quickly.” Frankie explained that he engaged the students in conversation, as he was trying to create a new identity for the school. He didn’t want to be “hyper strict” or for 15- and 16-year-olds to be unhappy; “we want[ed] it to be awesome…. In dialogue with [the students] and as a faculty, [we] just went at it and tried to figure it out. It definitely wasn’t easy, but for me, it didn’t feel hard either.”

In terms of school culture, the building was safe and functional “and happy on a daily basis.” Frankie added that in terms of “higher levels of engagement and deep joy and motivation, that was a much longer and ongoing project.” He further explained that “there was a lot to take care of in terms of how we were going to think about credit acquisition,” as well as regents’ diplomas and AP classes. He recalled, “there was a lot going on … a lot of struggles, a lot of victories.” While shifting the student culture happened relatively easily, shifting the culture with adults took longer. Frankie explained:

> I wasn’t as effective as I’d been in middle school, which is a smaller, more familiar thing. My first year, I retained 80 percent of teachers, which had been down from 95 [percent]. I was doing [that] as a middle school principal, [the] second year was down to 70 [percent], and the third year was the year of the wound.

Being a high school principal in an urban charter district is the context of Frankie’s wound. I explain his wounding crisis in more detail within the context of research

questions in the chapters that follow. I note that Frankie decided to share a wounding experience that took place when he was a principal, and that experience, he explained, led him to seek a position as a superintendent in another charter network.

Superintendent Julie. Julie, an Afro-Latina woman older than 40, was—at the time of the research—a superintendent of a large urban district in the Northeast. Julie had been a teacher, a coach, and a principal before becoming a superintendent for over six years in the same school district. Unlike the other superintendents who served under a school board, Julie's district was one of many within a larger district considered one of the Big Five, according to the Council for Great City Schools. Therefore, she did not report directly to a governing school board like the other participants, who worked in traditional school districts. More specific details are intentionally excluded to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

At the time of the wounding experience, Julie served as a community school district superintendent in a district that is predominantly composed of Black and Latino students. According to New York State's Education Department website, Julie's district's enrollment was over 12,000 students, with a population made up of 5% White, 10% Other, 24% Black, and 61% Latino students. The demographics in the district are important details for the context of the wound, as Julie pointed out when she began to describe where the wound happened. Julie shared that the wound occurred:

> as a result of me engaging in practices that serve the best interest of the district but made individuals within a particular school uncomfortable because they had developed [a] status quo that was exclusionary of Black and brown kids. They had created this elitist institution … as a result of that, they created illegal enrollment practices that specifically excluded the kids that had rights to the school.

Julie recalled that she knew of the "questionable patterns of enrollment" because of the "conversations that were happening in the community and concerns that parents brought." In particular, Julie described, "I had several Black and Hispanic parents come and express that they weren't given a seat in the school … because they didn't meet the

school's criteria"—criteria, as Julie further explained, that did not meet the expectations of the enrollment process or the expectations that had been established by the overarching district policy. According to Julie, the issues in the school were "multi-faceted and multi-layered," and this was one example of the level of complexity that exists "when you are trying to do the right thing for children." She added:

> When the new leadership went in, part of what I asked of the leader [a new principal] is to look at these patterns and trends, figure out how true these patterns and trends were, and as a result of the findings, we were going to work collaboratively together to find a way to mitigate the concerns. I didn't want to be part of such practices, and I [wasn't] open to allowing that kind of behavior to happen under my leadership.

What the principal and Julie found when they looked at the patterns and trends, Superintendent Julie explained, was that given the demographics of the area (61% Latino, 24% Black, 5% White, and 10% other), the school in question was predominantly White. The enrollment data demonstrated that some White students were legally zoned to attend other neighboring districts. White students enrolling in this particular school reduced seats for Latino and Black students who resided within the district and zoned for that school.

The demographic began to shift when the new principal, hired by Julie, began to adhere to the formal policy and "stopped engaging in those practices that were inhibiting children up from the community from having access to the school." However, Superintendent Julie made clear that the White parents felt negatively toward the change because they could no longer enroll their out-of-district children. The White parents, according to Julie:

> had a significant amount of access to the press because they were parents of affluence. So, they were able to tell their story while the [Black and Latino] parents that were deeply impacted and scarred from a lot of the experience in the school—their story was never told. For instance, [the affluent parents] tried to make it seem like I was being a racist, that the principal was a racist, mind you, [we are] people of color. I don't understand … how could it be?—that whole concept of being racist when you yourself are a person of color.

> But they [the White affluent parents] knew that their behaviors were racist. In order not to be pointed out, they flipped the narrative and tried to project us [the superintendent and the new principal] as racist individuals that were targeting teachers, not looking at the underlying issue that they were targeting families and preventing families from having access to the school if they were brown or Black.

As Julie explained, the media was utilized by White parents that had access and influence. To divert the community's attention away from their actions of sending their children to an out-of-district school, as Julie stated, the White affluent parents "turned the narrative around" and accused Julie and the new principal of engaging in the behavior that they (as the leaders of the school and district) were trying to correct. Thus, began a very public and political fight that left Superintendent Julie open for a series of wounding experiences.

I further explore how Julie described and understood this series of wounding experiences prospectively (what happened at the time—then) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now—in the present time) in the chapters that follow.

Superintendent Francis. Superintendent Francis (name intentionally spelled with an "i") is an African American woman in her 70s who had recently retired from an urban school district in the Northeast at the time of my study. During the interview, I discovered that Francis also grew up in Harlem, like me, and attended the same schools and their honors programs for gifted and talented students.

Before retiring, Francis was a high school teacher, an assistant principal, and a high school principal before becoming a deputy superintendent, superintendent, a Local Instructional Superintendent, Regional Superintendent (for several districts within the Big Five), and Deputy Chancellor. The district Francis served in at the time of her wounding experience is a smaller community school district in one of the Big Five named as such by the Council for Great City Schools. Based on the public data on the New York State website, this district served approximately 6,000 students at the time of Francis's

wounding experience. (Please note that I am not citing the exact website to protect the participant's confidentiality.)

Like Julie, Francis did not report directly to a governing school board like the other participants, who worked in traditional school districts. Still, at the time of Francis's wounding experience—years before Julie's—there were school boards that had some governing power before the city underwent mayoral control. Francis said that when she first became a superintendent in the district where her wounding took place, she had been the third superintendent in the district in the past five years. In addition, "they had just reinstituted the school board that had been suspended" due to criminal activity. Here as well, more specific details are intentionally excluded to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

During her interview, Francis recalled wanting to be a teacher all her life. She said, "I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was five years old. I always wanted to be a teacher. I taught my dolls, gave them tests. Some of them passed, some of them failed." She laughed, reminisced, and shared:

> I guess when I was very young, the teacher was the most attractive job for me. I think I wanted to give orders and boss people around or something [*she laughs jokingly*]. By the time I went through the [public school system] myself, and by the time I was in high school, I was able to see the inequities, and I was just driven…. I had all of these things about how I was going to make it right for others…. I had a challenging childhood…. Education was the thing that saved me. I knew the power of that, so I was truly driven…. I had a lot of different jobs before I actually got my first job in teaching, but it was always a dream I held onto.

Before going into detail about the wounding experience she told for this study, one that took place in a Big Five District 15 years ago, Francis explained that she had many wounding crises in her extensive career as an educational leader. Her deepest wound happened recently (about a year prior to my study). Francis mentioned that that wound is still "hard to talk about." She revealed that she thought "part of this [interview study] should be about how I was able to rebound from [multiple] incidents." Francis added that

she had "rebounded mentally, spiritually, and emotionally." She said, "[Since] it was my second retirement or third retirement … leaving [after the most recent wounding experience] was not as catastrophic to me because, after 40 years [in education], it was okay for it to be that [way]."

Recall that the district in which Francis's wounding took place had had three superintendents in five years. As Francis explained, the school board had just been reinstated after being suspended for criminal activity. The district was also historically low-performing. As Francis summarized, "It was truly in disarray, and they invited me to take the job. And so, I said yes, obviously." She remembered that the cabinet was taking bets during her first cabinet meeting, and "they had a pool as to how long I would last." Francis lasted in the position for five years and explained:

> We opened new schools; we had middle school fairs, instituted choice in a district where it didn't exist. We concentrated, we got schools off the [lowest-performing] list. We built a team of people that celebrated children, high expectations, we had leaders, and we had walkthroughs with principals … the seeds of the whole instructional rounds and equities…. People were believing in the children, we were doing things, we were addressing cultural needs, social, emotional needs, but always keeping our eye on the instructional core. We were really working with principals, that's always been for me so important to work with principals.

Francis said that she knew that the progress the district was making was really strong, but like Emma, the cabinet didn't want her. In her view, "they [stakeholders—members of the board, parents, principals, staff] had a favorite daughter they wanted as their superintendent, and the community would say, 'No, we don't want her [Francis]. She is not from here.'" Francis continued, "I had to have security from downtown drive me everywhere and stay with me because there were threats." However, Francis stated that five years into her position, "the very parents who were against me, and some of the principals [who were initially against her too], were now working together," and then [when things were going well at the district] the district's [and citywide mayoral] reorganization happened, and her wounding experience began.

At the time of the district's reorganization, Francis's supervision capacity included the oversight of the district, where she experienced the wounding crisis during the transition of governance structures and new policies. She had more than 40 years of experience in public education and had lived through many restructuring efforts in multiple cities and districts. As Francis's district was "becoming a choice district, transforming the schools," she lost her job. She recalled, "So that's, I think, why this being overlooked [for a job in the district's first reorganization] was so hard to me." I discuss her wounding story, her response and processing of the wound, and how, if at all, she recovered in the following chapters.

Superintendent John Black. Unlike the other participants, John Black selected his pseudonym—a first and last name. John Black—an African American man in his 70s—has worked as a superintendent in urban and suburban school districts for over 16 years and has over 40 years of experience as an educational leader. His career had been primarily in one Northeastern state. Yet, his last assignment as a superintendent was in another district (in another state) in the Northeast. Both were in districts governed by school boards. At the time of the interviews, John was retired as a superintendent but worked as a program manager for a professional learning community that focused on advancing educational equity in urban, suburban, and rural schools. He also engaged in consulting work supporting educational leaders and districts.

At the time of his wounding experience, John worked in the state education department. John wanted to share this wounding crisis as one of the most significant experiences in his career since he felt that it impacted his role as a superintendent. As he stated, "The wounding experience inspired me to be the absolute best leader I could become to fight back against conditions that impaired the ability to provide access and opportunity for all students. All means all!!!" According to the state education department, there were over 1.2 million students enrolled in the state at the time of John's

wounding experience. There were over 2,500 schools within 50+ school districts. (I am intentionally not citing the state to attend to confidentiality.)

John Black jumped right into the interview and explained that "getting clipped in a war is pretty regular out here, given the politics and concerns around race, concerns around gender. So, if you are a superintendent, then you're going to accumulate wounds over time." At the time of the wound, there was a new governor elected, and a court made the decision to pass a prominent new law in the state. A report by EdLaw [case left out to protect confidentiality] described the decision as a law that required rulings that directed the implementation of a comprehensive set of remedial measures. It required that school districts provide a high-quality early childhood education, supplemental programs and reforms, and school facilities improvements to ensure an adequate and equal education for low-income schoolchildren. (I have left potentially identifying details out of this narrative.)

The court-mandated remedies were strikingly detailed and comprehensive (EdLaw, May 2020). The mandates "broke new ground in school finance and education policy in the United States since no other state had equalized—or assured 'parity'—in the education resources provided to children in its lowest-wealth communities at the level spent in more affluent ones" (EdLaw, May 2020, p. 1). John Black was working as an educational leader implementing the law. As he explained, "We were following the law, and we were doing what was required to address issues of equity in historically underfunded school districts that serve primarily Black, brown, and poor kids; decades and decades of underfunding." He passionately recalled:

> There was as much support in [the court's decision] as there was resistance coming from most of the suburban districts.... When a governor implements an income tax and is committed to advancing decades of underfunding of urban school children and limited opportunities, limited access to high-quality education, there's going to be pushback from White suburban high-end communities, typically.

Coupled with the pushback and resistance, as John Black explained, he—like Julie—also felt that those with affluence knew how to play to the media. John Black shared the role the media played in influencing education policies and the implementation of those policies. He expressed, "The media is an important player in framing public opinion and can interpret events wildly different depending upon the outcome of the politics that they are supportive of." Additionally, John Black believed that the same issues that prevailed at the time of his wounds still prevail today. He explained that "income inequality is as unequal as it ever has been since war times. Since WWII, income inequality continues to grow and grow and grow." He added:

> Like every Black man, you know, I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. Enough. I'm sick and tired of delaying equitable treatment to all learners regardless of race, color, creed, socio-economic status, capability. We have a responsibility to educate all children. So, any actions, organized, intentional, or unintentional that do harm to children that have been historically underserved pissed me off.

He emphasized that I should quote him on that and added, "Yes. P-I-S-S-E-S me off." I will explore John Black's wounding crisis more deeply in the chapters that follow.

Superintendent Juanita. Superintendent Juanita, an African American woman in her 40s, had been a superintendent for almost two years at the time of the interview. She had over 20 years of experience in education and almost 10 in education leadership. Juanita had recently served as a superintendent for a large urban district (where she was wounded) in the Northeastern region of the United States with over 20,000 students. Prior to becoming a superintendent, she served as an assistant superintendent and chief of staff supporting a superintendent in a nearby district. She said she was second in command and was able to manage all the operational aspects of the district successfully. As Juanita explained, "I was happy that I was able to learn everything about running a school district, leading a school district."

However, Juanita understood that she accepted the position in which she was wounded, as superintendent, "under some controversy." She said, "I came in with a four-

three vote, which they say you should never do, but I knew the board was going to change at the end of December before I started." In addition, the mayor of the city sits on the board and appoints four seats. Four other seats include two elected voting members and two non-voting members according to the bylaws for that district (which I cannot disclose or cite to protect the participant's confidentiality).

Juanita also explained that she was appointed when the district was under major fiscal constraints. "When I started in March, I realized we had a budget deficit for the current year … but for the next year, we were proposing a $20 million [budget cut]." Therefore, she said that the board wanted her to look at the retired staff that returned to the district and worked "as a substitute administrator or any other role." Juanita said that they wanted her to make the budget cuts. Therefore, she had "to tell them [the retired substitute administrators] that their part-time status would change." Juanita said that she had to fire them "because it seemed that they were 'double-dipping'" (i.e., retired and working). According to Juanita:

> There was no accountability or tracking of part-time employees. HR [Human Resources] did not know who worked there [since] the payroll went through the city. There were no systems and structures. They told me to reduce retired people [not to renew their consulting contracts], so I did. I guess [this was] the initial wounded experience that led to some later things.

I will discuss Juanita's series of wounding experiences further in the chapters that follow.

Summary

In this section, I introduced the six participants (Emma, Frankie, Julie, Francis, John Black, and Juanita). First, I provided contextual and demographic information (see Table 4). As is shown in Table 4, I provided the participants' pseudonym, race and age, job status (e.g., retired or working), years of experience, and a description of the district in which they served at the time of their wounding experience. Then, I provided a narrative summary for each participant to serve as a framework for the beginning of each

participant's wounding experience. In the next section, I provide an overview of chapters to follow.

Overview of Chapters to Follow

In this section, I provide a brief overview of chapters to follow, which I discuss in detail in Chapters V through VIII as they align to my first, second, and third research questions. In Chapter V, I capture the findings of my first research question, which focused on how participants told their wounding story. In Chapter VI, I discuss findings for my second research question, which focused on how the participants processed and made meaning of their wounding crisis. In Chapter VII, I illuminate the findings in response to my third research question, which explored how the participants recovered, if at all, and what they learned, if anything, from the wounding experience. Finally, in Chapter VIII, I discuss the implications and recommendations based on the data gathered across the three sets of interviews and the most common learning.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a review of my research, followed by a thorough introduction of the six participants. Then, I provided a brief overview of the chapters that follow. As I have previously mentioned, my research aims to provide insight into how we can better support superintendents after a wounding experience and during their tenure. My hope is that retention rates can be improved for educational leaders, but especially for superintendents, since the typical superintendent remains on the job for only three to four years (Chingos et al., 2014; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kriesky, 2018). I hope this study aids in raising awareness of the need for professional and personal training and

development before, during, and after a superintendent risks taking on such an important role in education.

By using thick descriptions of the participants' background in education and the context of where their wound took place, my introduction to the participants aims to serve as a background in order to contextualize the findings that follow from the data the participants provided. I begin my discussion of the data analysis in the next chapter (Chapter V), where I provide more detailed findings that resulted from Interview 1 and RQ I as participants described how they understood a wounding experience.

Chapter V

TELLING THE STORY OF WOUNDING

In this chapter, I discuss the first interview where I invited each of the six participants to share their background as an educational leader and to begin to describe their wounding experience (see Appendix A). Thus, the interview topic was "telling" the story of wounding. The goal of Interview 1 was to learn how the six participants *describe and understand* a wounding crisis prospectively (what happened at the time) and retrospectively (looking back on the experience now).

I set the structure of Interview 1 to align with my first research question, which asked participants to *describe and understand* the wounding experience. In this chapter, I provide a brief orientation to RQ 1 findings as they relate to the literature, the participants' story of wounding (in their own words), a discussion on the interview, and what I learned throughout my data analysis. Throughout the chapter, I highlight common findings through an adaptive leadership framework (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017), which I discuss in more detail at the end of the chapter. Findings include people, power, politics, changes to value and belief structures, and racial and gender biases. I conclude this chapter with a summary.

Orientation to Findings

Throughout my study, I explored how participants described and understood the challenges. Their wounding crises, as I detail in the following sections, are examples of how overarching adaptive challenges (which may include elements of technical

challenges—challenges with clear solutions) can contribute to wounding and affect leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). For example, I found that Emma, Frankie, Julie, John Black, Francis, and Juanita described much of their work prior to getting wounded as involving implementing and leading adaptations and changes in their professional roles.

Translating policy into practice can be experienced as a demand for educational leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2018). These types of demands are discussed throughout Emma's, Julie's, and John Black's stories. For example, Julie worked toward remedying unfair zoning practices, and Emma and John Black implemented a desegregation law/policy into practice (i.e., they worked to integrate schools) in part by engaging inequitable hiring practices. As I believe the research shows, these challenges could only be overcome through adaptive leadership or "through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 24).

In the next section, I share each participant's story of how they describe and understand the wounding experience that each opted to share with me during the interviews.

Stories of Wounding

I crafted the headings in this section to capture each participant's interpretations of their wounding experience (Saldaña, 2016). Note, four out of the six participants (4/6) experienced a series of smaller events that created a wounding crisis. Two participants (2/6; i.e., John Black and Francis) shared one single moment that hurt them at their core. After sharing each participant's wounding crisis, I briefly reflect on the interview, and then discuss commonalities in the findings via an adaptive leadership frame (Heifetz

et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). I start with Emma's story before moving on to Frankie's, Julie's, Francis's, John Black's, and Juanita's stories.

Emma: "The Agony and Ecstasy of the Superintendency"

Emma's story of wounding began, as she said, when she "abruptly" became the interim superintendent of a large urban school district on the southeast coast of the United States. Recall, as I shared in Chapter IV, Emma is a White woman between the ages of 70 and 80 who had been in education for over 40 years before her retirement. Emma worked as a superintendent for 14 years during her educational career—four years in her first superintendency, where her wounding experienced happened, and ten years in another district after the wounding crisis. Emma assumed her role as interim superintendent after a teacher tragically murdered her boss. If she were to write a book, Emma said it would be titled, "*The Agony and Ecstasy of the Superintendency*, because it is the best and the worst job you'll ever have."

Describing and understanding the wound: Resistance and resilience. Emma lived through a series of events that culminated in her wounding experience. As I mentioned in Chapter IV, Emma spearheaded the implementation of a plan to desegregate the school district, working with a cabinet made up of White men. One man, in particular, disapproved of her becoming interim superintendent or superintendent after the tragic death of the educational leader that hired Emma. In Interview 1, Emma discussed her challenges with the cabinet but primarily focused on what happened after she became the superintendent, when a new board was elected.

Emma told me that the work she was tasked to do, including integrating the district, "challenged stakeholders' longstanding belief in keeping communities divided by race." Further complicating her work with her cabinet and mission to integrate the school district, she shared, was an "angry" a new board that governed the school district. In the interview, Emma explained:

> A new board was elected, and they were Christian coalition people. And the Christian coalition was very powerful…. They absolutely were against integration, but we [the district lawyer and Emma, as superintendent] hung tough. And so, they [the White men that comprised the cabinet] were constantly pushing me to try to get us to change some of the things we were doing, and we just weren't going to do that because quite honestly [it] was against federal law. And second of all, [it was] not doing the right thing for children…. Besides causing issues, they would ask me to ban computers and teach the Bible.

According to Emma, the new board, part of the Christian Coalition, wanted her to implement a curriculum "teaching the Bible and to get rid of computers in schools," which she believed was illegal (as per the law—separation of church and state) and "ethically not right." As a result of what Emma referred to as her "unpopular work" to do "what is best for the students" by integrating the school and upholding values that clashed with the board's recommendations, I learned that Emma's community of stakeholders mounted personal and professional attacks against her.

"The attacks," as Emma explained, led to her "deepest wounds." Emma shared that the new board would often attack her "behind closed doors" by trying to push her to implement Bible teaching, get rid of computers, and not abide by the court mandate to integrate schools. However, she explained that what hurt her the most was "being ridiculed in public." With resentment in her voice, she said, "I was shocked that [the people on the board were] trying to defame my leadership…. They accused me of not bringing forth the correct information, skewing the information that I brought forward." During the interview, Emma summarized the tumultuous relationship she had with the board, who knew her and were supposed to support her:

> When I got my new board, it was very hard because the chairman of the new board had been my friend since I was in high school. I had a very close relationship with her, like a mom or daughter would be. And then, when she became the chair, she felt like she was still in charge. And she would want me to do these favors for her because of old times. And she put me in all kinds of binds. That was very hard for me. She actually did a lot of evil things.

I learned that because of the increased tension with board relations, including with the chair who had once been a motherly figure to Emma, she began to question if she should stay in the role of superintendent. Emma told me, “I worked hard with that board to build trust…. They were terrible to me at the table, but I just wasn’t terrible to them.” She recalled, at the time, “I just modeled respect, and I think that angered them too,” as she reflected, her “resilience” continued as more issues arose.

For example, the board members would visit schools and try to speak with principals privately. Emma found out from the principals, who told her that it “made them uncomfortable” because “the members wanted special favors.” She told me that she ended up not allowing the board members to visit her schools “without permission,” as she did not want them to continue trying to talk to her principals to “ask for special favors or violate some policies [that she, as superintendent, had put in place].”

Emma let me know that it wasn’t long before she began publicly challenging the school board and chair since the attacks against her motivated her to continue to “do the right thing for students” because she felt it was her moral purpose. Some of the decisions she made while in her position attracted the media’s scrutiny, since media was influenced by the community of affluent White parents. She said:

> So, there was all this national attention, and it’s a wounding experience in that you are so sad about what happened [the tragic murder of a superintendent], but you have to keep the district rolling, give the students the help they need. As we [Emma and the lawyer implementing a court mandate] got into the real throws of [desegregation], people were critical, very critical. And you know, there’s new newspaper stories and the ways in which they [affluent white parents] talk with you, and the anger they feel [about] you personally because you are getting ready to do something with their children.

As she described, Emma had to “keep the district rolling” and “give the students the help they need” while doing what she had earlier described as “unpopular work.” For example, for the first time in the district, she hired African Americans, Hispanics, and an

openly gay staff member "to work in the district in positions of authority (e.g., principal, district leader)."

However, finally, according to Emma, when the wounds felt too deep for her, she said to herself:

> "You know, maybe, maybe I'm just not the right person." I might've been the good person to heal and to get things moving, but maybe it's time for me to step down because I'm not going to do this stuff, they're asking me to do. I mean, I wouldn't have. Just wouldn't have. I wasn't going to go against [everything I believed in]. Legally, I was with the attorney. We talked, and he said, "I'm leaving when you leave because I'm not doing anything illegal."

Despite her uncertainty in regard to whether or not she was the right person for the job, Emma shared that she was proud of the work she did to unite organizations in order "to come together for equity and understanding." Although she shared that she "stayed strong with the help of a lot of people," Emma explained that she felt deeply wounded amidst the series of challenges that I believe led her to question her integrity as a leader while she experienced a series of wounding crises.

Discussion: Emma's telling of the wound. When Emma described her wounding crisis retrospectively (looking back at the experience—now in the present time), I interpreted her description of the wounding experience as an adaptive challenge that stemmed from resistance from the community as she took over the role of racially integrating her school district. In response to the resistance, I believe she had to be resilient throughout the series of challenges that culminated in her wounding experience. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) would describe some of Emma's wounding experience as adaptive leadership challenges that surfaced when she initiated changes that challenged people's beliefs, habits, and values (e.g., desegregation, not teaching the Bible, belief in students' right to computers, and power dynamics). These pursuits led to resistance from followers (e.g., stakeholders in the community, members of the cabinet, and the school

board), which in my view eventually shut down Emma as a leader, as Heifetz and Linsky (2017) would describe.

Additionally, Emma explained, “the betrayal” she experienced from the board chair, with whom she had a personal relationship, contributed to her wounding experience—in her words, it was “a blindsiding experience.” Like the other participants in this study, Emma shared that it was her connection to the students and her ability to work on behalf of the children that sustained her spirit while she experienced the wounding crisis, which I call a *moral purpose.*

In many ways, I feel that Emma took control of the narrative by resigning before being fired. She shared that she remained steadfast in following federal laws and “always doing what is right for children.” Emma shared that she had some really big wounds that arose after the murder of her superintendent, taking over as interim superintendent, confronting a cabinet and new board, her name being plastered in the media, being told terrible things behind closed doors, and so on. Yet, she told me that she continues to be able to celebrate the “resilience” she showed throughout her experience, even when, based on what she described, it led to her feelings of anger, isolation, and powerlessness.

Frankie: Ideological Warfare

Frankie shared that his wounding crisis came as a result of working with an immediate supervisor who did not share the same personal values or approaches to leadership. As I mentioned in Chapter IV, Frankie is a White male between the ages of 30 and 40. At the time of this interview, he had been a superintendent for over a year and a half at a different charter organization than the one in which his wound occurred. Frankie’s career in education started as a teacher in a rural area of the United States. Later he worked as a teacher, coach, and principal in an urban area in the Northeast, which is where the wounding experience he selected to share took place. He loved his job

as a principal in both a middle school and a high school and shared, “I was totally happy. I loved it!” Yet, his wound occurred when he was serving as a high school principal.

Describing and Understanding the wound: “The floor just fell out from beneath me.” Frankie’s narrative is compiled of portions of text from the first interview during which he described his wounding experience. I offer some of what Frankie shared about when he became the principal of a new high school—the year of his wounding experience—for context. Before Frankie took over as principal, the high school he became a part of had well-documented challenges. Recall, from Chapter IV, Frankie helped reform the culture. He recounted the success of his reformation by describing:

> Immediately before [the wounding experience] ... the founding class [of] seniors [from the new high school] … were applying to college. And that was the biggest thing happening for the school and for me…, It [was] super hard, super intense, a lot of late nights. But, really good…. [I]n December, we got back the first round of the early admission results, and it went so well. Almost everybody … had their first-choice schools with amazing financial packages. And really “elite” schools ... Tufts, Barnard, USC, MIT, that was huge.... The fact that it went so well, it was such a joy at so many levels. Professionally, obviously I felt super accomplished at it. But personally, I felt like each kid had gotten into a campus that was great for that kid, to the extent that I knew about those campuses…. I felt like we had done right by them in this situation….

As is evident in Frankie’s description, and as he mentioned throughout the interview, Frankie spoke of the success he experienced right before the wounding crisis—the students he cared about were getting into colleges that fit them well. As Frankie described, he was able to get a school community together and focus on ensuring that underserved students were able to attend universities. He said he felt that although transforming the school culture “was intense,” it was worth the effort because he was doing what was right for children, a belief shared by all (6/6) of the participants in this study.

Despite his success, Frankie told me that he had to overcome cultural challenges within a school that had very structured beliefs, ways of operating, and expectations on

how children and adults behaved. He recalled that by the end of his first year at that school:

> The culture was broken, the [students'] work habits were terrible, and there was a lot of mistrust between them and the organization…. In December… my operational left hand [the person in charge of all operations at the school] left the position. And that was hard, but I understood why…. [A]s a result, my boss decided, 'I will help out by filling this function for you.' I sort of knew; this doesn't seem like a great idea. I appreciated the help, but ... now I'm managing my boss while my boss manages me….

Because of a deterioration in student performance and trust, and an educational leader leaving the school, Frankie's supervisor decided to step in to help. Frankie described his hesitancy about his boss's assistance with the school's daily operations as not "a great an idea," and later, as a move that precipitated parts of his wounding experience. He shared:

> I don't know if I will ever understand why things actually happened the way they did. But certainly, it was the case that at a high level, she [Frankie's boss] and I shared a vision. I think we had different perspectives about how to go about it, and until then, she wasn't really close enough to it to worry about those differences, per se.

Despite sharing a vision, the dynamics between Frankie and his boss ended up contributing to his wounding crisis. They had the same vision but different philosophies on how to accomplish it. Frankie described more details of some of the issues:

> She … basically perceived my leadership to be very relational, both with adults and kids, which is a fair assessment, particularly given my approach to the project, and especially the culture turn around. She would say to this day, I was committed and charismatic, and that was good for the community. But there wasn't a strong operational or codifying system going on…. As it played out … [his boss became] increasingly involved in the day-to-day operations [of the school].

One of the ways in which Frankie's boss got "involved" in the daily operations of the school, as Frankie said, was "implementing policies and procedures that I myself would not have implemented that were a bit of a *values rub* [emphasis his] in terms of

particularly culture-facing things like tardy policies, uniform policies." This sort of involvement, as Frankie shared later, eventually led to his wounding crisis.

As time went on, Frankie shared that he began to worry about some conflicting messages that were sent to the community by his boss, taking over some control of school operations. The daily presence of his supervisor in his building, sitting directly within his view, created tension, he explained. Frankie emphasized (with hand gestures, voice intonation, and body language) how "within three weeks [of her arrival], it had gotten extremely intense." He continued:

> The kids perceived it ... [like] this person is a very visible figurehead in the organization and is changing the tone and the experience of the building. Things that weren't rules are now rules. These policies that weren't in place are now in place. The feeling used to be lighter and happier, and now it's feeling really clinical or cold. I think for the adults, too, it was really intense because they didn't know who[m] to listen to, per se. I was totally lost.

As his boss changed the "tone and experience" of the building, and the students began protesting some of her new policies, Frankie shared that he felt "totally lost." He went on to explain a pivotal moment in the wounding experience:

> The thing that sticks with me, I remember where I was too, I was on my sectional, I was looking out the window, it was a late at night call. She [the boss] had re-written a tardy policy ... and I thought, philosophy aside, the logistics of it were poor. It would result in a lot of kids bunched outside the main office with no backup plan. And so, I just said, "We can't run this, this way, it's not going to work." So, I called her to tell her that, "Hey, I looked at the plan, I don't think it's ready to go yet, I don't think it's going to work."

During the phone call to discuss a tardy policy in which Frankie and his supervisor did not see eye-to-eye, Frankie said, she "just started yelling." He elaborated on why this moment felt so different:

> She had always been tough but ... never in a way that I thought was personal ... she was really obviously relationally angry. She said something... And I just felt like, "Oh my God that's it." It was so ludicrous to me … in addition to being like "I don't have to put up with this," it was also this thing of like, "something has changed." Something has really passed resolution

> here because I've never gotten it like this. It was just very raw…. I just felt like, "that's it, I'm out." ... but … [at that moment] I was like, "oh, as people we're not going to get past this."

As Frankie explained, he became wounded when his boss started making changes that were out of his control, policies in opposition with his values, and spoke to him in a way that made him realize "as people we're not going to get past this." At that time, he remembers doing everything he could to make it work out. However, Frankie shared that the dynamic threatened his "legacy" as a principal who got along well with his students and improved their education. He described the complexity of the aftermath of the experience:

> The other dimension of the wound, I guess, was the loss of that community, that role, that project into which I had poured so much. I [was in] the network for years, and I had put in a lot of work that I was really proud of and felt so secure in my good standing…. [But] the floor just fell out from beneath me. It felt like overnight. I'd become persona non grata; I heard things that my boss was saying about me, in meetings to other principals, whereas I had been the golden boy for a long time.

As Frankie mentioned, he experienced conflicting emotions over a short period of time—first considering himself "the golden boy" working on a campus that he felt proud of, then feeling as if he had lost power and momentum as a leader. He elaborated:

> I was proud of what we had done, and I felt very good about the first [graduating] class, but there was a lot more that I wanted to do. Even as much as there were problems to bear, disappointments, I just knew I was in the right place, and I felt really good about the project, and I was just on fire. I wasn't even going to entertain the idea of leaving. So, it was very sudden, it was very quick, and it really rattled me…. There were things I had stopped doing with conviction that I would never have been that way before. There was some shame along with it too. It was very multi-dimensional.

As a result of the wounding crisis, one that involved a clash between Frankie and his boss, Frankie felt like he lost his community and his role as the principal "overnight." Although he felt "proud" of what he had done, he left feeling like there was still work he wanted to do. In Chapter VI, I discuss more of the complex emotions that I found resulted from the wounding crisis shared in this study and the multiple dimensions of a wounding

experience that Frankie and other participants (6/6) expressed while making meaning of and responding to the crisis. Next, I provide a brief reflection of Frankie's telling of the wound.

Discussion: Frankie's telling of the wound. Like the other participants (5/6), Frankie shared a story that involved a volatile relationship that emerged with a change in the hierarchy of power and supervision. Much like John Black, Frankie's story demonstrated the fine line that exists between having a trusting relationship with others that adheres to mandates and guidelines while maintaining one's own sense of values. During the interview, Frankie discussed the "values rub" that he experienced with his boss. Describing the "values rub" was a *critical* moment for Frankie during the interview. I noticed that his face changed as he shared details of these defining moments. He turned red, paused, and sometimes became teary-eyed.

The story Frankie shared, I believe, was a series of wounding experiences that affected him personally and professionally. At the time, I believe Frankie was confronting adaptive leadership changes because much of the policies and practices that contributed to the wounding experience were based on differences in beliefs. Frankie's supervisor made changes to the school and culture based on her beliefs about how students and adults should act, while Frankie found success operating on his own "more relational" style. Although he noticed a difference in approaches to running the school, I believe that Frankie, like the other participants (6/6), felt *blindsided* by how personal the attack on him was from someone whom he tried to get along with professionally—he said that he felt hurt during the phone call in which his boss started yelling at him. I would categorize this as a moment of powerlessness as well, since his decisions were questioned and undermined.

I believe that Frankie's "values rub" with his boss and the expectations for the operation and culture of the organization (which contradicted his own) required what Heifetz and Linsky (2004, 2017) deem an adaptation across education context (i.e., the

district, the school, the classroom, and Frankie—as the leader). In some ways, what Frankie's boss requested (i.e., a new tardy policy, schedule changes, uniform policy enforcement) could be seen as *technical challenges* solved via the knowledge of experts (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). As Heifetz and Linsky (2004) stated, "Technical problems reside in the head; solving them requires an appeal to the mind, logic, and to the intellect" (p. 35). Yet, the values rub, the differences in belief structures, and the complex issues that arose between Frankie and his boss while trying to transform the culture of the school, I believe, are better described as adaptive challenges. Since these challenges, according to Heifetz and Linsky (2004), "lie in the stomach and the heart[, to] solve them, we must change people's values, beliefs, habits, ways of working, or ways of life" (p. 35). During the first interview, Frankie said that he believed that you should not "work for an organization that does not represent who you are." In this case, Frankie's "solution" to the adaptive challenges he faced throughout his wounding crises was deciding to leave his role as principal.

Julie: "They Don't Have the Internal Gut"

Julie had been a teacher, a coach, and a principal before becoming a superintendent. At the time of the interviews, Julie had been a superintendent for over six years in a large urban school district in the Northeast, the same school district in which her wounding experience occurred. As a reminder, Julie is an Afro-Latina woman older than 40 and younger than 50. Unlike some of the other participants who serve under a school board, Julie's district was one of many within a larger district. Therefore, she did not report directly to a governing school board like the other participants who worked in traditional districts. Specific details are intentionally excluded to protect confidentiality.

As discussed in Chapter IV, superintendent Julie's wounding crisis started when she hired a new principal, who began "challenging the status quo [with Julie's permission], pushing the thinking of the people in the [school] building … to see things

in [an] alternative way." For example, Julie recalled that there were teachers that wanted to maintain unfair enrollment practices. She said, "Certain students were being excluded, and I knew this because of conversations that were happening in the community and concerns that [the excluded] parents brought [to my attention]."

Describing and understanding the wound: It wasn't one thing. Julie's wounds developed as a result of a series of events. She shared her story of wounding, which centered around her intention to better integrate a school community in a district divided by racial lines. Julie explained what had happened right before the crisis:

> The real core of the problem was racist, and very apparent behavior, of being exclusionary of kids within the community. There are documents where the privileged parents said, "We need to ensure that our kids are not mixed with those kids."

Like the stories told by Emma and John Black, "racial privilege was a central factor" that led to an opening of Julie's wound. In an effort to serve community stakeholders (i.e., parents, teachers, students, politicians, and central supervisors), Julie said that she challenged historical practices within the school district and community. In Julie's case, as she described, a group of teachers and White affluent parents had established a community school that was anchored on progressive values. Students had many choices within their daily schedule, and parents were granted an open-door policy. As Julie explained, under the guise of keeping the community close, teachers at the school were known to enroll their own children. She reported that this occurred (illegally) within a district that had to follow central enrollment and zoning policies, which were meant to prevent segregated communities.

Julie mentioned, "[The school] community always saw themselves as very elitist. They never saw themselves as part of the district … for years they were allowed to see themselves as separate and apart…." But, as she took over as superintendent, "I would… challenge the leadership and challenge them…." As a result, "they would utilize those opportunities to try to sabotage and negatively make comments about my leadership or

the work that was happening in the district." As she shared, Julie's efforts to integrate the community came with repercussions.

While the school had been established for well over 40 years, Julie had only been a superintendent for four years at the time of the wounding crisis. She explained that she experienced resistance from relatively hostile stakeholders as she tried to make changes to a school where parents had access to media and power. She mentioned how the news covered only part of the story as her crisis unfolded:

> [T]he people telling the narrative were not the people that were impacted by the racist act[s].... They [stakeholders in a position of privilege] were very creative, right. They … used a Black and brown person to tell their narrative so that they could hide behind them and pretend that [the enrollment practices were] not a race and socioeconomic class issue.

Julie explained that she felt as if the media did not to tell the whole story. Her work to increase efforts to make the district more equitable in terms of resources, services, and student achievement did not "hit the press" because affluent stakeholders, parents, and teachers had more access to the media. She described it in this way:

> I had a number of [meetings] at the time, because there were some transitions happening at different schools. They [parents in the community incited by teachers] will come, they will write my name in white sheets and use … blood like ink … they were calling me a liar. They were calling me a whole bunch of names. You're there for a particular meeting, and these people are chanting your name and making comments on your work and your integrity around the work that are false. At one point, I had five of them surround me….

These incidents were displayed in the media, and Julie said it was very hurtful and traumatizing. Julie recalled that during that time:

> The central team pretended to support me and the principal. They claimed that we were "doing the right thing." Yet out of the blue one day, they call me and tell me, "Oh, you need to pull the principal out [of the school]." And I told them, I said, "With what cause?" [It was political, and details are omitted to attend to confidentiality.]

Julie expressed disappointment and anger in receiving contradictory messages in public compared to the support she thought she was receiving behind closed doors. She said:

> I passed everything through the [omitted for confidentiality] team, and everybody kept saying how I was doing the right thing, but it was only the right thing until it became uncomfortable for [local politicians]. Then they wound up pulling the plug, making us look … incompetent. But in reality, we were always doing the right thing because at the end of the day, we were doing what was best for *all* children, not *some* [emphasis hers].

Julie felt that she was supported all along in making the right decisions for students but found that her decisions were still not upheld in public due to fear of political repercussions. Local politicians and the media made Julie feel like she was being portrayed as "incompetent" during her wounding crisis. Julie described some of the other dimensions of her experience:

> No one speaks up for you … you are fending for yourself, although people pretend that they are in support of you. Like the [omitted for confidentiality] kept talking about how they were supportive of me, how I was right in terms of what I was doing. Yet, they never really supported me or provided me any emotional guidance through the experiences that I was going through. I feel like they just expected me to take it and move on, which I did, right. At the end of the day, we're leaders, and we do what we have to do, but I don't think that the system thinks about the social-emotional damage that a lot of this stuff causes, and they don't provide any support in that area.

In short, Julie summarized the wounding experience as "the series of events of being scalded publicly, embarrassed publicly, lied on" and not being supported at each juncture of the wounding crisis. She emphatically repeated, "The system messed up [in] saying they're supporting [me when they were not]." As Julie shared, during the wounding crisis, she felt like she was on her own—fending for herself—powerless and without any meaningful guidance.

Before completion of this dissertation, Julie resigned from her role and was offered an opportunity she felt was better aligned to her vision for helping children of color. As

she mentioned during the interview, “The way I see it, what doesn’t break you makes you stronger.” She shared that reflecting on her wounds “just fortified my tenacity around what I believe in, not allowing my moral core to shift based on the corrupt and unfocused system.” She shared that participating in my study:

> guided me to think outside of the current bubble that I’m in, which is moving away from [this school system] and seeing other possibilities that I wasn’t really considering until this experience [of being interviewed about the wounding]…. I’m clear that this system is not the place to do that work because the system itself is not built to enhance and develop Black and brown children. It’s developed to suppress them, and anyone that tries to do otherwise is going to be wounded.

Julie’s quote illuminates the systemic inequalities that she felt she witnessed as a part of being a leader in the district that wounded her. Although she felt like she did what she had to do as a leader, Julie highlighted the need for a more in-depth discussion of the “socio-emotional damage” that can occur in educational leadership without the proper supports. I discuss more about the need for supports throughout the dissertation, especially in my recommendations in Chapter VIII. Next, I provide a brief reflection from Julie’s interview before providing Francis’s story.

Discussion: Julie’s telling of the wound. Throughout her interview, I found that Julie explained typical demands of adaptive leadership where “most people would rather have the person in authority take the work off their shoulders and protect them from disorienting change, and meet challenges on their behalf” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 35; 2017). Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state that leadership often entails finding ways to enable people to face up to frustrating realities, which is “personally difficult and professional dangerous” (p. 34).

I believe elements of adaptive leadership challenges emerged in the story Julie shared as she discussed redesigning zoning policies, issues of race and gender, and acting on behalf of the students. Enacting a new policy required the community that thrived under the status quo (i.e., out-of-district White parents and teachers using their affluence

to enroll their own children in the school to maintain an insular progressive school) to change their ways of working and doing business (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). In addition, Julie seemed to exemplify through adhering to legal zoning policies, as Heifetz and Linsky (2017) described, an individual who was exercising leadership by challenging people "to live up to their words, to close the gap between their espoused values and actual behavior" (p. 33). That is, Julie was asking the community, central office, and politicians to support a revision of an enrollment policy to better provide for underserved students in the community.

During the first interview, Julie also brought up *race* and *gender* as having a role in how she was treated throughout her wounding experience. Interestingly, all four (Julie, Francis, Emma, and Juanita) female participants in this study mentioned their gender as having contributed to their wounding crises. Julie reflected:

> A lot of it has been because I am a Latina, right? I'll say it like it is because being a woman and being Latina is a bubble target. I feel in our system, they only recognize being Black as being a minority, unfortunately … I feel like being a minority, we're prone to that reality from micro-aggressions, from being targeted around the work.

Julie's quote drives home the finding that surfaced in the data across participants in relation to race and gender. Julie specifically highlights how in the system (the large urban district where she worked at time of the wound)—she believed— brown Latino/a voices are left unheard since the focus, as she stated, has been on Black minority at the neglect of other minorities.

It is important to note that the female participants in this study were from a variety of racial backgrounds (self-identified), which include Black (Francis and Juanita), White (Emma), and Afro-Latina (Julie), but each said that the series of wounding events would not have transpired as they did if they were men. Similarly, they explained that the challenges they faced built their resiliency and strengthened their ability to persevere

when faced with pressing challenges bigger than themselves. Julie's words captured this sentiment, echoed in the stories shared by Emma, Francis, and Juanita. Julie stated:

> What I don't allow [microaggressions] to do is diminish my own self-worth and knowing what I'm capable of doing and what I can do. I know very clearly as somebody that came from a science background, that as a woman, every time I walked into the room, and not only as a woman, as a Latina woman going into the room, I always have to prove myself five times as much as anyone in the room. And in order for me to get the respect of the room, I have to be ten times more prepared than any person in that room.

Like the other participants (i.e., Emma, Frankie, Francis), I believe Julie took control over her wounding experience by changing the narrative for herself. Julie, like the other participants (6/6), felt a strong sense of purpose and commitment to the students she served–she explained that she used her dedication to serve "all students."

Although Julie explained that she felt unsupported by the [omitted for confidentiality] team, she felt as if she was still "doing the right thing" for the students in the district. Advocating for and *acting on behalf of students* was a common sentiment among participants (6/6) in this study. When I identified *people* as a common category within the theme of *adaptive leadership challenges*, improving racial equality was a common theme for all participants (6/6). Each superintendent aimed to improve the education for students they felt were underserved. Three participants (Emma, Julie, and John Black) shared a similar wounding story when they discussed their adaptive challenge of making schools more equitable for Black and brown children. It is important to note that participants were of different races and genders; yet they all fought gender issues and racial tensions that were so apparent at the time of their wounding experience and prominent at the time of this discussion as the Black Lives Matter movement gains momentum. For example, Emma is a White woman who told me that she understood the core value of the changes she was trying to implement in a split community. Similarly, John Black (who selected his pseudonym), a Black man, also told me that he understood

the "value and mission" of desegregating schools, while Julie, who identifies as Afro-Latina, said she was dedicated to integrating schools.

Additionally, in varying ways, all participants felt that their decisions were less personally advantageous and more of an effort to provide the best education for the students in their communities—their moral purpose. But, much like Emma, John Black, Frankie, and Juanita, I believe that Julie recognized that "doing the right thing" does not necessarily align with other people's values or interests, especially in educational leadership without supports. She said:

> [Thinking about the experience of being without support] brought me back to believing that you can't really [trust].... You have to be very cautious of who[m] you trust and who you put your faith on. And it really reinforced for me that this system is very brutal. It reinforced for me that this system preaches what it doesn't believe…. [It] is very hard to do the kind of work that I believe in. I have to rethink about what my priorities are and if I want to be part of a system that is not interested in repairing its wounds and making itself better for the best interest of children. I need to find ways or opportunities that will allow me to do things that are really targeted around building students, especially Black and brown children, and helping them get out of current potential situations that might not be productive for them.

Feeling unsupported by local politicians and supervisors contributed to Julie's and all (5/6) of the other participants' *lasting anxiety* as a result of the wounding experience—as Julie said, "I'm part of the system, standing alone." I call it a *lasting* anxiety, since a feeling of uncertainty and lack of control over the future persisted over time and participants described that they were always on alert, anticipating if they would be wounded again. As she tried to implement practices that benefited all children, "especially brown and Black"—as she emphasized, Julie said that it was hard to do the work when she did not feel supported and when she felt she could not trust anyone. Julie subsequently accepted a position in another district [omitted for confidentiality] in another state since this study.

While Julie was sharing how she felt that she had no one that she could "trust," I thought that her wounding story affirms what Drago-Severson and Maslin-Ostrowski

(2018) found in their research with school leaders—namely, the need for educational leaders to develop their emotional capacities in order to manage challenges and receive support, as Julie noted. She expressed, "I feel like I have PTSD from [the] experience…. [T]he worst part was that I felt like I did the right thing … but politics always supersedes doing what's right for our community, unfortunately." Participants described the feelings of anger and anxiety from not having what they explained as the right set of supports, which surfaced across interviews with all six participants. I discuss this in more detail in the chapters that follow. Next, I provide Francis's story of wounding.

Francis: "I Didn't Feel Sorry for Myself"

Recall, that Francis (spelled intentionally with an "i") is an African American woman between 70 and 80 years old. Shortly before this study, Francis had retired from an urban school district in the Northeast. She was wounded many times in her career, but Francis decided to share one of the most profound crises that prepared her for subsequent wounding experiences. She stated, "I wasn't the only one [wounded at the time], but … as an educational leader, it was my first major setback." The story she shared took place during the reorganization of one of the Big Five Districts in New York State. She selected this one wound because "it was an affirming wound … [it] helped me learn some things about myself."

Describing and understanding the wound: "I was stunned, it was unbelievable." Francis's wounding experience reads like a storybook—meaning that the way that she shared it with me had a clear beginning, middle, end, conflict, climax, and resolution. I chose to highlight Francis's use of vivid descriptions in this chapter, because they were most representative of the telling of the wound part of the three-interview series I conducted. In Francis's own words:

> [Before the wounding experience] I was a fairly successful superintendent [the district had started at the bottom of the 32 districts and had moved up to sixth on the city and state publicized accountability lists].

> We were doing wonderful things. So, on Martin Luther King's birthday … the night before, the Chancellor sent out this [message that said] all of the superintendents, et cetera, all of these people, had to report to [a meeting] … the next day. And we all came … we knew that there were these plans and thoughts about reorganizing, but we didn't know what they were going to be…. [T]here were a lot of rumors. [We were told,] "Listen, the mayor's going to say some things. Don't take it personally. He's just making a point…."

Shortly after arriving at the meeting, Francis discovered that the reorganizing plan involved naming ten superintendents and eliminating other positions. She recalled that the mayor "laid out this grand plan…. [He] named the … superintendents. And you sat there stunned, and you didn't know what to do. I mean, especially if your name wasn't called." Francis continued:

> I got back on the train and went back to the district office and went into my office and just went into a deep funk…. I was overlooked for a job. And this was quite frankly stunning for me. I thought that I had done a good job … and I was passed over. And I had to then shop around for a job; they were eliminating my position. I didn't get a promotion. I didn't have a job.

Although Francis felt as if she had devoted herself to working hard, she was "overlooked for a job" during a reorganization. Francis described the experience: "I've had many [wounding] times … you don't give in, especially when you believe so passionately that what you're doing is the right thing for kids." Like John Black, where one moment shaped how he responded to subsequent wounding experiences, Francis, too, felt that it was this one moment in time that helped her prepare for other wounding crises. She let me know that she kept the lessons the crisis taught her in mind as she continued in her career.

Francis explained that she was stunned that the new political hierarchy did not consider her prior experience and success as the mayor announced who would be chosen as one of 10 superintendents. In her case, she wondered how she was not even considered: "There was no interview process, or if there was, I was not even interviewed. And so, it was devastating to me. And I wasn't the only one, obviously…." She described this moment, where her name was not called, and said, "I felt overlooked and that I

wasn't respected by the system…. [The Regional Superintendent] respected me, but I felt that the system didn't appreciate the work that I had done, my beliefs, [or] who I was." At the time—then, as if she were looking at what was coming in the future (prospectively)—Francis said that she remembers telling herself:

> This is not over. This is not the end of [Francis]…. I can never just sit back. I am going to demonstrate how important I am to this organization.... I am going to say, "Folks, this was truly your loss. And [look at] what you're missing."

Francis reiterated her belief that she "can never just sit back" by saying, "I felt like I had to pursue something that would make me more [of a] master of who I was, my work." Following the wounding experience, Francis considered moving: "I applied for other positions, outside of New York. I was really ready to leave New York." However, she recalled, "When I look back now, and I think about that, it … was like I'm not going to let people define me and change who I am and how I approach life." The critical anger caused by these events motivated her to continue doing what she believed was "in the best interest of students." I term this as *critical anger* since it is a result of social injustices and systemic biases. It is also an anger that propelled the participant superintendents to continue executing their moral purpose in "doing the right thing for students and communities they served." Francis decided not to leave and said, "I'm just going to do what I need to do." She explained:

> [I worked hard] to be supportive of [new] leadership [the Regional Superintendents] and to demonstrate to [them] that I wanted to, I've always thought it important, in no matter what capacity, to add value to the organization that I'm in. And I wanted to make sure [they] knew that I was adding value, that [they] had nothing to resent.

Francis said she worked hard to be supportive of the leadership and continue to add value to the organization she was a part of—even despite the wounding experience. As a result, she said that she developed trust and relationships within the system. As Francis explained:

> Two newly appointed Regional Superintendents both asked me to interview with them for a Local Instructional Superintendent's division [a new role under the Regional Superintendent]. [I selected to work for one who] really supported me [and] supported my hurt feelings. She supported my wounded feelings.

After being wounded, Francis found support during her transition to a new position. Currently, Francis is retired due to a more recent wound in her last role as a superintendent (about a year ago). She said that this most recent wound was much more traumatic and hurtful than the wound that she selected to share in this study—a wound from many years ago. However, she was better prepared to respond to the crisis after having processed her first wound, which she shared in this study.

Discussion: Francis's telling of the wound. Francis's story was different from Emma's, John Black's, Julie's, Frankie's, and Juanita's because she was not trying to implement change. Instead, change surrounded her as the entire city was "preparing for the new order, the new world order" with the new mayor and a reassignment of roles. As she described, Francis experienced change being done to her—her school system as she knew it, her role as a superintendent, and her role as a leader all shifted. Francis's experiences were similar to those of Frankie, who had to navigate new changes implemented by his superior. In both cases, I interpreted that the changes were driven by the people in politics who had power, and their positionality or social location in the community that situates leaders within shifting levels of power (Hearn, 2012; Turman et al., 2018).

Although Francis's wounding crisis differed from those of the other participants (5/6) who led changes that influenced their wounds, I believe Francis's wounding crisis can also be considered adaptive in nature. It was, I believe, what Heifetz and Linsky (2017) described as an "unanticipated and unwelcome[d] new" reality in a leader's professional life (p. 186). Her challenge was the result of "a new and complex" reality (i.e., the first system under mayoral control that led to a complete overhaul and reorganization of superintendent positions) not "within" her "competence"— meaning it

was not within her purview to influence the citywide structural decision (p. 174). The adaptive challenge was a host of the wound rather than the cause of the wound.

As Francis's role was eliminated and her understanding of the position changed, it left her, as I interpreted, confused, questioning, and hiding her own confusion—elements that Ackerman et al. (2018) cited as indicators of *adaptive challenges* and part of a "wicked problem," (p. 37; i.e., there is no easily identifiable cause, no easy way to find a solution, or there are too many solutions with no clear choices). As Francis described:

> So, I look [back on the experience as] two parts. One, I look at it as a true learning experience about myself…. Like okay [Francis], this is the real world; this is what goes on. But the most important thing is [asking yourself], "How do you come back?" … And I learned…. I can come back. And not that I doubted it, but when these things happen … there is some self-doubt that starts to creep in. And it's not only, "Am I worthy?" But it's like, "Will I ever get a shot in this organization that has rejected me? What's my future? They've rejected me. What's going to happen to me now? If I've been overlooked, am I overlooked for life?" So, I look at it as learning … you don't give into that [feeling].

As she shared, Francis viewed the wounding crisis as a learning opportunity. Yet, as I interpreted her telling, Francis's adaptive leadership challenges were not easy to tease out from the broader context, and there were no readily available solutions at the initial moment (Ackerman et al., 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2012).

Additionally, I believe that Francis explained unforeseen circumstances that impacted her personally and professionally. In her interview, she did acknowledge the depth of feelings that emerged from the experience. She revealed:

> I was depressed, actually. It was interesting, somebody asked me when I got back to my office, "Well, did you cry?" If I were a person who cried, I would've been moved to tears. But that was not what I do. I don't cry … but I was certainly moved enough; the disappointment was so deep.…God, I was so disappointed. But if it hadn't happened that way, or more if I had responded differently, I could've ended up retiring years ago in a very different capacity with very different options ahead of me. Having overcome that helped me [make it] to the next level, to the next level, to the next level. [Francis later became the Regional Superintendent, then Deputy Chancellor in less than two years.]

As I discuss more in Chapter VI, all other participants (6/6) also surfaced a range of emotions resulting from the wounding. As Francis explained, this quote speaks to the importance of being thoughtful in how we respond when we are wounded as leaders. As Francis highlighted:

> When I was in it, I don't think I thought so clearly. And one of the hardest things about when you have that kind of a wounding experience is dealing with other people's reactions to you. I actually feel fairly proud of my response. I feel it was understandable to be deeply disappointed, but that I didn't let that disappointment drag me down. I'm fairly proud of how I handled it. Nobody knew [the] depths of my disappointment because that was not the face I put in front of people. I didn't feel sorry for myself. I didn't say, "Woe is me." I didn't have a pity party or anything else like that. I wasn't even bitter.

I believe Francis' reaction—both her deep "disappointment" and the "face" she put in front of people—describes what was reiterated by multiple authors (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b; Brackett, 2019; Goens, 2005; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Kelchtermans et al., 2011), in that many leaders feel expected to play down their feelings despite of the social-emotional demands they encounter in their challenging roles. Thus, emotional capacities are important to develop in order to manage change and challenges (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2008). One of those emotions includes being able to adapt to the challenges presented, which Francis explained:

> I'm always driven by the African proverb that says when the music changes, so does the dance. And I will learn all of the new dance steps. And that's been my motto everywhere I've gone. It doesn't mean that I don't have a core central belief, but I understand that things change. And that if I'm going to be rigid and be who I was, I'm going to be stuck with where I was. And I had to be able to *adapt or die* [emphasis hers]. That was my survival of the fittest realization. It was like "adapt or die," and so I [adapted].

In my opinion, Francis embodies the incredible amount of resiliency, the *lasting anxiety*, *critical anger* (which motivated them), and dedication to their moral purpose that all of the participants displayed throughout their wounding experiences and in the telling

of these stories. In the next section, I share John Black's wounding crisis, in his own words.

John Black: "Tired of Being Sick and Tired; It P-I-S-S-E-S Me OFF"

John Black said that he was wounded many times in his career. "Getting clipped in a war is pretty regular out here given the politics, concerns around race, [and] concerns around gender….," John Black said. He continued, "If you are [a] superintendent, then you're going to accumulate wounds. I've been wounded … my head is bloodied but unbowed." As I mentioned in Chapter IV, John Black is an African American man between the ages of 70 and 80. He is retired now but worked as a superintendent in urban and suburban school districts for over 16 years, primarily in one northeastern state.

Describing and understanding the wound: "Despicable." One memorable wounding moment in John Black's almost 40-year career as an educational leader came, as he recalled, when the governor of his state implemented an income tax. John Black exclaimed that it was "a courageous decision to fund urban school districts at levels that have been historically denied!" John Black shared that as a result of many years of court battles regarding the case, "suburban White people were very, very, very angry and organized groups, and pickets." As John Black recalled:

> There [was] lying and cheating and misrepresentation and public protests and senators stalling funding…. [When] advancing decades of underfunding of urban school children [with] limited opportunities [and] limited access to high-quality education, there's going to be pushback from White suburban high-end communities, typically … you're going to kick up some dust; you're going to create some anger in all this.

In addition to experiencing "pushback" and creating "some anger," as I learned, during John Black's wounding crisis, he experienced what he described as a "slam [to] the educational improvement program in [the state] for urban school districts." He explained, "I was called 'despicable' by the chair of the state senate education committee. *Despicable* [emphasis his], not privately, but in a public venue." At that time, John Black

said he wanted to beat up the senator when he heard him yell and call him "despicable." Looking back, he said that he is very proud that he did not demonstrate physical aggression. In retrospect, John Black said, he views the experience as pivotal in helping him harness his emotions.

However, the experience wounded John, as he shared. The "public excoriation" of a senator calling him "despicable," he stated, was picked up by the press and plastered in the media and newspaper, making the incident even more public. John Black recalled the media being "an important player in framing public opinion," which, in his case, portrayed "events wildly different depending upon the outcome of the politics that they [were] supportive of." Similar to other participants in my study, John Black mentioned numerous times that media and politics played a key role in his experience. He explained:

> Depending on which side of the aisle, whether you're Republican and Democrat or suburban or urban or of color or in a position of White privilege, a lot of people were moving…. There were many, many moving parts to the politics of implementing equity-based finance....

Political division mixed with equity-based finance, as John Black explained, "was then, and it is now, and it will forever be a contentious area of public education policy." In his words, he said:

> It's hard enough to get a state education department to move [forward] with full cooperation, but when you have partisan politics actively at play along with a social policy that is counter to the prevailing power structures, you're going to get wounded.

John Black shared that the deep emotional turmoil and anger that he explained his wound caused is still a motivating factor that still drives him to fight for an equitable system for Black and brown underserved students of low social-economic levels. Since the wound, the state passed a law that required the system to address "issues of equity in historically underfunded school districts that serve primarily Black, brown, and poor kids, and decades and decades of underfunding." As much as there was support for a new

governor implementing the court decision, there was also resistance from most of the suburban districts in the state.

Discussion: John Black's telling of the wound. As John Black was trying to implement a law that required equitable distribution of resources and funds in urban and suburban school districts, he justified that he "became rightly angered and hurt" both personally and professionally. Recall that I term this *critical anger* since it is a result of social injustices and systemic biases. It is also an anger that I do not consider a negative emotion since it propelled the participant superintendents to continue executing their moral purpose in "doing the right thing for students and communities they served." Similar to Emma, John Black was wounded as he was obeying an order by "providing leadership on the implementation of the court-mandated solutions" based on desegregation laws.

When asked to enlighten me on what he experienced during the wounding crisis, John Black replied, "May the work I do speak for me." He said that during the incident, he felt proud that his "credibility remained intact with the community." John Black affirmed with excitement that "despite the bad media, he did not have to do anything"; he had already invested time in building trust across the communities he served. As John Black reiterated, "When you have trusting relationships that go two ways, when you engage people … when you create a culture of investment … the community reciprocates with respect for you." He advised:

> You have to build up some capital in the bank … [with] the people that you are responsible to—parents, taxpayers, business people, corporate entities, sororities of paternal organizations, churches … you have to be *a part* of a community, not *apart* from the community. If you are apart from the community, you can get wounded and stay wounded forever.

Indeed, John Black saw his role as "a responsibility to the people," and he worked "always in the best interest of students," similar to Emma's and other participants' (4/6) description and understanding. John Black elaborated, "The community doesn't owe you

anything if you are not working on their behalf. You have to establish your integrity and moral purpose, and your core values need not only give direction to an organization, but the core values—you must live them." Nevertheless, as John Black was sure to explain, having the support of the community ("their loyalty") "doesn't mean you win."

I believe the challenges that contributed to John Black's wound are adaptive in nature because he was trying to implement changes that required a shift in the community's priorities, beliefs, habits, ways of working, and competition for scarce resources (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009). As Heifetz and Linsky (2004; 2017) considered, mobilizing school communities to deal with a difficult issue, like desegregation and equitable funding in John Black's case, is a dangerous leadership move and an adaptive leadership challenge. Yet, translating policy—like a law mandate—into practice is still a demand for educational leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2018).

Juanita: "Crevil" People as the Source of the Wounding

To share Juanita's story, I wove several different parts of the narrative together to create coherence. Considering Juanita's wounding experience occurred most recently (about a year before this study), it is not a surprise to me that she was not able to tell as linear a story as other participants, as she may have still been on the edge of processing the wound. As I presented in Chapter IV, Juanita is an African American woman between the ages of 40 and 50 and had five years of great success before accepting a new role in a new district that led her to become wounded. As she accepted a job as superintendent in a new community, she conveyed to me that she came in with some hesitation. Juanita explained, "I knew that I wanted [older] board members to leave and … [I also] realized we had a budget deficit." As she described, Juanita was wounded as a result of several events—the first being a press conference held about her without her prior knowledge

and the second being mounting tensions between the board and, ultimately, a decision to close one of the schools in her district.

Describing and understanding the wound: "I have no recourse." After accepting the position as superintendent, Juanita was asked by her school board to eliminate semi-retired administrators who were also working part-time as substitutes or filling other roles—an attempt to combat the district's budget deficit. As Juanita took a look at the data, she explained:

> I realized that there were no systems and structures around … part-time hiring and staffing. HR didn't even know you worked there. [Only] the payroll did, and payroll went through the city. You couldn't get a clear report because there was no accountability or tracking of the part-time employees. They [school board] told me to reduce … retired people [as part time staff], so I did.

In order to comply with the school board's request to get rid of certain positions, Juanita sent letters to the semi-retired employees to say that their positions would be ending in the coming year. Then, as Juanita explained, people complained, and a press conference was held without her. Juanita described, "I was totally shocked." She said, "My board, the mayor, and everyone went and had this press conference saying that I made a mistake, a misstep, and that I basically didn't know what I was doing." She exclaimed, "I just felt like a ton of bricks was put on my heart, because here they're having this press conference about me, and I'm not present." In fact, Juanita learned about the press conference via an email she received at the beginning of a previously scheduled meeting. She emphasized that there was no way she could have made it to the conference.

Juanita described that she felt that going behind her back in the way the board did is not "something that most practical, normal, logical people" would do and that the conference was just the beginning of several issues that became her wounding crisis. Juanita's experience is similar to Julie's, Emma's, and Frankie's, whose wounding experiences were also compounded by a series of events, which—from their

perspectives—caused anxiety and kept the participants wondering what others would do next in an effort to cause them harm in the future.

Given ongoing fiscal constraints, Juanita continued, a second event in the wounding series ensued—this experience had two parts for Juanita. First, the school district received a $200,000 sanction from the state for not following a school mandate. As a result, "The board wanted to close schools," Juanita said. She explained:

> I didn't think they should have closed the schools so quickly because we didn't have a criterion set. [In most] districts, you have a school closure protocol. [In my previous district there] was a protocol, but there were no criteria released [in this one, where the wounding happened] … as to why a school would be a school for closure…. [T]here was no clarity around on that…. [T]hese schools weren't low-performing, alternative schools.

As Juanita explained, she felt there were no clear criteria released regarding how the district could go about closing schools and choosing which ones to close. As it turned out, there was one particular school that caused a lot of controversy because the board decided to close it—and Juanita described the anxiety and stress of the situation: "I had just started the job in March and then by May, I'm closing schools," she recalled. The second part of this event in Juanita's wounding experience involved the students at the school who were really upset by the idea of the school closing. They planned a walkout. Juanita described:

> [T]he police went, and … I was in my office, and all I could envision was "Here are all these Black and brown children, this is a suburban town, these kids are angry, and they're going to get arrested or … [there's] going to be a riot out there." So, I sent my chief of security, and we sent additional security to that site.

During the walkout, one upset student, according to Juanita, started "cursing." She described in further detail that the student:

> refused to go through the metal detector. And then she pushed the security officer…. So, she was suspended, but of course, the prom was coming up…. [T]he board brought [the prom] to my attention. I told [the board] I was going to uphold the principal's decision to suspend [the student] because she could've incited a riot, she hit a staff member, she should be recommended

> for expulsion and not even graduate, or walk, [or] be able to finish her courses because that behavior was so terrible.

After telling the board that she was going to uphold the principal's decision to suspend the student, Juanita said:

> [The board] …went, had an illegal meeting, because you cannot meet without being in public, and they called the girl and her mother and told her she could go to the prom. And that was not within their rights to do that.

In addition to the board meeting behind closed doors and overriding Juanita's decision regarding the student's suspension, a series of other wounding crises occurred, which Juanita said angered her since and she could not have anticipated them. I name this emotion *critical anger*, since it is caused by injustices and systemic biases, which wounded the participant and motivated her to make the right decisions for students since, as she shared with me, her moral purpose was to ensure that all students achieved at higher levels and to advance the community. Eventually, Juanita shared that she felt like no matter what she did, the board wanted to give her a "bad evaluation" so that they could fire her. Juanita explained that in order to protect her career and the professional life she had created for herself, she initiated a separation agreement after she consulted with her lawyer and trusted advisees. In the end, Juanita requested and accepted a separation agreement from the board.

Discussion: Juanita's wounding experience. When asked how this series of wounding experiences felt at the time, Juanita said:

> These people had so much control over your life…. I felt … really naive [in] thinking that people would do what was just right…. This pain … I've never seen people behave so inhumanely…. I was devastated; I was hurt. I couldn't believe that there are these people who …worked really hard to ruin my reputation. I have no recourse.

While it felt to Juanita like she had "no recourse" at the time, looking back on the experience now, Juanita said, "I could've done some things differently…." She continued to describe her understanding of the experience using a word that her mentor used to describe people who caused the wounding. Her mentor told Juanita that, as a

superintendent, one has to learn that they will encounter some people that are just crazy and evil— "crevil." Juanita shared:

> I can't go around saying all these "crevil things"—you know evil, crazy things like … [the board did], because I'm supposed to be a role model…. And so that was really painful. Just [for them to] say that my work, all the things I had put into place was nothing, in a place that had no structures and no systems. I had worked really hard, sacrificed a lot, sleepless days, and nights, for the district.... I couldn't believe this was happening to me. And it happened to me so publicly.

As Juanita described, the wounding experience happened "so publicly." I learned that Juanita believes the media played a negative role in her wounding experience, as was shared by other (4/6) participants. Similar to Emma, Julie, and John Black, Juanita felt that the media capitalized on the politics and moved too quickly to "any story—real or not." John Black, when referring to his wound, which happened many years ago, described a similar understanding of the role of the media: "The media is an important player [people] in framing public [people] opinions and can interpret events wildly different depending on the politics they are supportive of." Years after John Black's experience, in Juanita's more recent wounding experience, she said she could not "defend herself" against the public's scrutiny. In Juanita's case, she shared that the politicians and the board invited the media to every event, including when they held secret meetings in which she was unable to comment on the record.

Juanita explained that racial tensions and gender biases also added salt to the wound (i.e., made it hurt more for Juanita). Recall that her series of wounds was initiated because she was closing a budget deficit by eliminating certain positions. Like Julie, she further explained how racism, gender biases, and her social location (i.e., where a leader stands in position in relation to power) (Al-Faham et al., 2019; Hearn, 2012; Turman et al., 2018) played a major role in the crisis:

> I was the first African American female superintendent they had ever had. And the mayor was [a] Black female mayor. So, there was lots of sexism from people.... I say all this to say to see Black people behave the

> way they were behaving and not care about kids; it was very, very painful for me.… Yes, a Black woman [publicly] attacked me … [for wearing] these shiny suits. Yeah, that hurt me; I think of all the insults I received in my career, that one was the most painful. It was the most painful because there was a Black woman, ... a Black woman would hate so hard on another Black woman. And I am … [also a] woman of color.

Juanita explained her wound as multi-dimensional in that she felt she was wounded by a diverse group within the community where she lived and worked. Juanita thought she would have public supporters to speak up on her behalf, considering that people in the community (i.e., pastors, sorority sisters, friends in the local salon, etc.) always shared their support in private and said they were praying for her. In retelling her story, Juanita repeated her painful experiences in multiple interviews, noting that the intersectionality of race and gender were front and center for her. She said that strangers in the community, "of all races" [with emphasis], would stop and say, "I'm praying for you and my mother's praying for you." She added, "People, and of all races, mind you. That's how bad [the public situation] was. 'Cause it was just insane and illogical."

Given what Juanita shared about the series of challenges that caused her wounding experience, I believe that her challenges were adaptive in nature. When Heifetz and Linsky (2004, 2007) describe why leadership is dangerous, they illuminate that we often confuse leadership with authority. They explain that leaders operate within a scope of authority based on the contract for service (as the school board provides for superintendents). They state, "If you deliver those services … you will be rewarded … [but if you] challenge your authorization … [it leads to] resistance … social isolation or personal attacks … [since] people will go extremes to silence the frustrating voices of reality" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004, p. 34). Juanita was also participating in what Heifetz and Linsky (2017) call an adaptive change, which they say often demands some disloyalty to our roots. Recall, in her case, Juanita had to make decisions to solve adaptive challenges that required her to appear disloyal to some people she believed were

her closes friends (i.e., the mayor, a member of the board who was her sorority sister, and the African-American community that she believed would support her).

Summary of Interview 1 Findings

Adaptive challenges include clashes with values and beliefs (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). This includes participants' values and beliefs, as well as questioning the communities they served. In my study, I explored how, if at all, adaptive challenges influenced the wounding experiences of the participants. I found that for Emma, Francis, John Black, Julie, Frankie, and Juanita, much of the work grew from adaptations and changes that were led by each participant (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Their wounding crises are excellent examples of how adaptive challenges affect leadership and how they can lead to wounding or serve as a host for the wound, as in Francis's case.

Recall that translating policy into practice is a demand for educational leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004b; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2018). These demands are discussed throughout Julie's, John's, and Emma's stories. For example, Julie worked toward remedying unfair zoning practices, and John Black and Emma implemented a desegregation law/policy into practice (i.e., they worked to integrate schools) in part by engaging inequitable hiring practices. These challenges could only be overcome "through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 24).

Interestingly, through my analysis of the interview data, I found that the wounding crises—in these cases, which I have classified as adaptive challenges—centered around *people, power, politics, changes to value and belief structures, racial and gender biases*, and were all exacerbated by the media. I describe these cross-case findings in more detail in the sections that follow.

People, power, and politics. Through examining participants' descriptions and understanding of their individual wounding experience (RQ 1), I learned that each participant was wounded from a combination of people, power, and politics. Power exercised by people in hierarchical supervisory positions initiated all wounding experiences. For example, Emma, Juanita, and Francis felt personally assaulted and harmed by members of the school board. John's wounding experience came as he was publicly demeaned by a state senator. Francis and Julie lost their positions and confidence based on mayoral control—they did not have the power to make any final decisions. I think that these "power constructs and contextual influences (e.g., compositional diversity of a group, locality)," as described by Turman et al. (2018, p. 65) shaped the participants' wounding experiences. Their "social identities, social location," i.e., their "unique position in society such as … lived experience, social identities, ideologies, context, and power" and "their abilities to practice leadership" contributed to their feelings of powerlessness, critical anger (caused by system biases), and lasting anxiety (Turman et al., 2018, p. 65).

All six participants discussed how politics propelled the wounding experience into a crisis. In fact, each participant mentioned politics as an underlying cause for the wounding. Juanita, Julie, Emma, and Francis felt they were naïve to the politics that exist in their positions. Francis embodied these beliefs when she said, "I believed so much in what we had done and accomplished. But I also recognized that … I was, among other things, a political non-entity. I had no political backing; no one knew me." Julie, like Francis, shared that politics undercut her work. Julie explained:

> There were all these great things that I did in my district that were overshadowed by that [the politics that directed her to make decisions she did not agree with due to pending elections]. I basically moved my district from being on the state list to being out of the state list…. I feel the narrative of the great work that was happening in the district got masked by that [the wounding crisis], and that was a very difficult pill to swallow.

In many ways, all of the participants (6/6) in my study explained that they sought to implement change in the community to increase equity (e.g., in funding, resources, and opportunity) for all students, and students of color in particular. The stories these participants told demonstrate the pervasiveness of adaptive leadership challenges when confronting issues of people, politics, and power as they tried to fulfill their moral purpose and do what they believed to be in the "best interest of students and communities," as 6/6 participants stated.

Beliefs, habits, loyalties, and values. Some adaptive challenges—called mixed—can be partially addressed and solved through technical solutions, since they may contain some elements that are both technical and adaptive in nature. For example, John Black and Emma sought to desegregate schools and implement laws that adhered to both federal and state policies. They cultivated solutions that challenged traditional community beliefs, habits, and values. In Emma's case, busing children to different schools was one technical solution to desegregation—she experienced a mixed challenge. In addition, purchasing resources like computers was another technical way to solve a bigger adaptive issue. Emma said, "My own parents [said] why would I ever do this to children, to put them on a bus for one to two hours to take them from a White community to a Black community—African American community." While simply transporting students and providing technology can begin to address the technical side of the problem, Emma could not solve the underlying adaptive challenges that required the shift in the community's beliefs and values.

Other values-driven challenges "hit you at your core," as John Black and most other participants (5/6) described. John, Julie, and Emma put in question people's beliefs and loyalties in maintaining separate schools for different races as they worked to convince their districts to share resources more equitably for all children. Adaptive challenges such as these were difficult and did not have clear solutions (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018). Creating a unitary school district in Emma's case, for

example, cost her a job she loved and never wanted to leave. As John Black continued addressing the adaptive challenge of improving the educational programs in an urban school district, he built capacity to continue to engage in battles for equality. Frankie, on the other hand, resigned when he realized that, despite his respect for the organization, the values that were driving the transformation of his schools were no longer aligned to his moral purpose and deep beliefs about students and communities.

Frankie was not the only one to take charge of his destiny. As many participants (5/6) revealed throughout Interview 1, the values that led them to succeed in the first place, even if they were wounded, led them to find a new path. For example, Emma started an organization to support women superintendents when she found that there was limited guidance for female leaders. In instances like Emma's, participants exercised "self-management, which has to do with self-regulation, knowing how to harness emotions for good, and how to be resilient and manage stress" (Drago-Severson et al., 2018, p. 2), which are described as the vital social-emotional dimensions of leadership. I will transition into the emotional dimensions that surfaced in response to Research Question 2 in Chapter VI.

Race and gender. John Black, Julie, and Juanita emphasized race, in particular, as a contributor to the wounding experience. All of the female participants in this study (4/6) said that gender contributed to their wounds—meaning, they believed they would have been treated differently throughout the experience had they been male leaders. These four women are part of three different races and ethnicities (Emma identifies as White; Julie as Afro-Latina; and Juanita and Francis as Black). Each female participant mentioned that they confronted gender bias in different ways. Julie said she had to prove herself and work harder because she was a female that started her teaching career in science, which is dominated by males. Julie added, "Being a woman, you're always seen as either less than, less capable of. So those are wounds that I am constantly expecting and mentally prepared to engage in." Therefore, for these participants, social identifiers

such as gender and race situated them in relation to others (Hearn 2012; Turman et al., 2018) since—as they explained—they felt they were not only "seen simply as racial beings; neither are they gendered beings. They concurrently are both of these and more, and thus are privileged or disadvantaged by the intersections" (Hearn, 2012, p. 43). This also raised issues of intersectionality, which refers to attending to the ways in which class, race, and gender hierarchies collectively interlock and shape one another (Crenshaw, 1991, as cited in Al-Faham et al., 2019, p. 252) and influence these leaders' social location, i.e., their position in relation to others (Al-Faham et al., 2019; Hearn, 2012; Turman et al., 2018).

Similarly, Emma highlighted that one major challenge that contributed to the wounding experiences was leading an all-male (and also White) cabinet. She said they could not believe that "a woman" became the superintendent. Juanita shared that she was deeply disturbed by the attacks on her dressing style and even the height of her shoes. She said one of the most hurtful things said in a public meeting was: "The higher the heels, the lower the IQ." They judged her for "her shiny suits and high heels."

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I focused on the findings for Research Question 1, namely, how the six participants described and understood a wounding crisis or experience prospectively (what happened at the time) and retrospectively (looking back now). In this chapter, I first provided an orientation to the findings by describing the framework of adaptive challenges and adaptive leadership. Then, I shared how each participant told their stories of wounding using narrative summaries, with an added reflection of the interview. Finally, I provided a summary of Interview 1 findings, more specifically, the adaptive leadership challenges that can be categorized by the intersection of *people, power, and politic*s, as well as *beliefs, habits, loyalties, and values*, and *race and gender*.

In the next chapter, I focus on Interview 2, how participants made meaning via the typologies of *Quest, Restitution, and Chaos* based on Frank's (1995) framework and how the participants responded to and processed their wounding crisis. I specifically discuss the emotional parts of wounding.

Chapter VI

MAKING MEANING, RESPONDING TO AND PROCESSESING WOUNDING EXPERIENCES

In this chapter, I discuss findings that emerged in relation to my second Research Question (RQ2): How do educational leaders describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience? I have divided this chapter into two different sections. I first discuss how the participants made meaning of their wounding crises by sharing their stories using different *narratives*. I found that these narratives, more specifically Frank's (1995) *Quest, Restitution*, and *Chaos* narratives, helped me structure the participants' experiences as they shared their wounding crises and revealed how they interpreted their stories.

After providing examples of each type of narrative, I share the emotions that surfaced while the participants discussed their wounding crises. In so doing, I highlight the participants' emotional journeys through a discussion of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's framework of their four *Givens of Leadership* (i.e., vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness). My research builds upon these four "givens" by adding a fifth and sixth—*critical anger* and *lasting anxiety*—which I found to be present in the participants' narratives. Recall, I define *critical anger* as anger that emerged from the wound and as a result of social injustices and systemic biases. It is also an anger that participants felt propelled them to continue executing their moral purpose in "doing the right thing for students and communities they served." I also deemed the anxiety as *lasting* since, after the wounding crisis, participants felt they were on alert in every

subsequent role and always prepared for any future attacks on them as leaders and as individuals since they felt a sense of uncertainty. I refer to this expanded version of Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's work as the *Givens of Leadership 2.0*. I conclude this chapter with a summary.

Making Meaning Using Frank's (1995) *Quest, Restitution*, and *Chaos* Framework

As Maxwell (2013) stated, understanding the *meaning* of the wounding crisis centers on the participants' perspective—their cognition, affect, intentions, and other important aspects that surface in telling their experience. Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman used Frank's (1995) *Quest, Restitution*, and *Chaos* framework to explore how wounded leaders made meaning of their experiences (1998, 2000a, 2000b; Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b). In this section, I too, use Frank's (1995) framework to illuminate how the participants made meaning of their wounds.

As I mentioned in Chapter II, Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) found that most leaders in their study used a *restitution* narrative to share their stories, while a few used a *chaos* narrative or a quest narrative. Recall that a *quest* narrative is a telling of "being transformed" (Frank, 1995, p. 118). Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) found that leaders telling *quest* narratives envisioned a brighter future after their wounding experiences. Frank (1995) shared that *quest* narratives involve the storyteller viewing and using the experiences for some sort of gain or insight (Frank, 1995).

A *restitution* narrative, on the other hand, is a story of hope. The stories are told by those who look at their situation as "yesterday I was healthy, today I'm sick, but tomorrow I'll be healthy again" (Frank, 1995, p. 77). Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) found that leaders telling *restitution* narratives acknowledged the crisis but saw the experiencing ending while they returned to life as it used to be.

Finally, wounding experiences told through a *chaos* narrative show little resolution, as the narrator displays less control over the telling and meaning of their story. In my analysis, I coded a participant sharing that they "did not understand" what happened as part of a *chaos* narrative. Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) found that *chaos* narratives were disoriented versions of the crisis with a limited view of learning from the experience or hope that life would return to normal.

As Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998) summarized,

> storytellers chose a *restitution* story of how the problem was fixed, which echoes the myth of principal as a hero; a *chaos* story of a near disaster that was notable by what was absent, that is a distressed telling without order or coherence and an uncertain future; or a story of *quest,* one that leads to a new or evolved story. All themes, however, are apt to be present at different times in each of the stories. (p. 2)

In the following sections, I provide examples from the participants in my research using different narratives that highlight how each made meaning of their wounding experiences. I begin with the *quest* narratives of Emma and Francis.

***Quest*: A Telling of "Being Transformed"** (Frank, 1995, p. 118)

Frank's (1995) *Quest* narrative can be described as the storyteller being "given something by the experience, usually some insight that must be passed on to others" (p. 118). I categorized Emma's and Francis's stories as *quest narratives* because I saw their wounding crisis as an experience from which they said they learned valuable lessons. Next, I provide supporting examples from Interview 2 with Emma and Francis as each gave thick, rich descriptions that illuminate the quest narrative.

"Being determined" and "taking charge"—Emma. In her interview, Emma, a retired White woman in her 70s who had become interim superintendent after the murder of her district's acting superintendent, said that the wounding experience actually "made me stronger." As she looked back on the events, she said that she was thankful for the experience, because it made her the leader she is today. Toward the end of her second

interview, Emma paused and then affirmed, “That wounding experience helped me become a very strong leader for my next position, because I had faced adversity, and I faced conflict, and I faced hurtfulness and downright blasphemy really. But it helped me.”

Although Emma told me that she would have loved to stay in her home district, the district in which she was wounded, to see her work come to fruition, she also conveyed that she knew she had made the right decision to leave. I interpreted her viewing the experience as one that shaped her into becoming “a very strong leader for my next position” as an important element of her “being transformed” (Frank, 1995, p. 118).

Emma also shared that she used the wounding experience to inspire her to support other women who would be wounded like her. Emma said, “I dedicated my life … [to] working with young women in education to be sure that they were prepared for leadership.” She continued, “I was determined ... I was not going to let anybody else get in a situation where they were unprepared. So, I became a superintendent in [another state]. There were only a few women superintendents.” I chose these quotes from Emma because they exemplify what Frank posited in 1995 when he discussed *quest* narratives as the teller gaining “insight [from the experience] that must be passed on to others” (p. 118). As she recalled, Emma did not want other women to experience leadership challenges alone. Instead, she sought to share with others what she had learned from her wounding crisis. Next, I discuss a similar quest narrative from Francis.

“Cream rises to the top. You can’t keep a good woman down.”—Francis. Francis, a recently retired African American woman in her 70s, also used a *quest* narrative in her interviews. She too described her wounding crisis, losing her job as a result of not being selected as one of the superintendents in a newly established region, as a “true learning experience” about herself. In her interview, Francis said that she told herself, “‘Okay [Francis], this is the real world, this is what goes on. But the most important thing is, how do you come back?’” Francis emphasized that even at the time of

the wound, she thought, “I have to define myself, and I have to let others know what my definition of who I am is.”

In describing *quest* as a “self-story,” Frank (1995) explained that it is an “occasion requiring the person to be more than she has been, and the purpose is becoming one who has risen to that occasion” (p. 128). I believe Francis spoke to *rising to the occasion* during a challenge and rising, more specifically, to the top. Francis exclaimed, “I said this, and I really do mean it, cream rises to the top.” She explained that “the experience gives me perspective because I always think about, well, did I rise out of that or not? And I did.” This “perspective,” as Francis stated, is what I believe Frank may call gaining “insight” (p. 118), which is evident in *quest* narratives.

Discussion of *quest* narratives. I noted that both Emma and Francis viewed their crisis as an opportunity to learn and gain insight or perspective. And, I found that both participants made sense of the wounding experience by viewing the experience as a lesson that subsequently aided them. For example, Francis recalled that she also said to herself, “You can’t keep a good woman down, that’s what I tell you. They can’t keep a good woman down.”

While analyzing the data from their interviews, I wondered if age, experience, and distance from the wound contributed to Emma’s and Francis’s perspective, interpretation, and narrative. Both participants are older women and further removed from the experiences they shared. Emma and Francis are retired and told me that they enjoy consulting with younger leaders. Both emphasized that they use their lived experiences to help more students in other districts, leaders, and women, in particular. It seems like it was Francis’s and Emma’s moral purpose to support students as well as other leaders in the districts they served and in subsequent roles. On the other hand, Juanita and Frankie are both younger and had less time to process their wounds. As I discuss later, both Juanita and Frankie shared their stories by depicting elements that fit a *chaos* narrative.

Next, I share what I learned from Julie—who made meaning of her wounding experience through a *restitution* narrative (Frank, 1995).

***Restitution*: A Story of Hoping the Crisis Will End**

A *restitution* narrative acknowledges the hope that *the crisis will end* (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a; Frank, 1995; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). I found that Julie's narrative demonstrated evidence of this retelling. Additionally, her narrative of the wounding experience "affirm[s] that breakdowns can be fixed" (Frank, 1995, p. 90). In this section, I provide a detailed example from Julie's interview.

"Seeing a new light … empowered to seek [for a superintendency] outside the system"—Julie. Julie, an Afro-Latina woman older than 40 who became wounded due to trying to change unlawful enrollment policies, demonstrated a hope for the future beyond the wounding crisis. During her interview, Julie stepped back and analyzed the series of events that led to her wounding crisis, which had seemingly come to a conclusion, while she looked toward the future (Frank, 1995). I marked Julie's telling of the story as a *restitution* narrative because it demonstrated Julie's ability to see the wounding crisis as an interruption and name the sequence clearly, since she interpreted the wounding experiences as events that had come to an end (Frank, 1995). Julie described her experience in this way:

> [This wounding experience] just fortifies my tenacity around what I believe in, not allowing my moral core to shift based on the corrupt and unfocused system, and basically guided me to thinking outside of the current bubble that I'm in, which is moving away from [the current education she worked in at the time of the interview and the wounding] and seeing other possibilities that I wasn't really considering until this experience.

Along with fortifying her "tenacity," Julie explained how "looking back" helped her make meaning of the experience and consider her next steps. She said that reflecting retrospectively (looking back now) gave her "hindsight of how to manage the political arena moving forward because the system is not equipped, ready or able to tackle the

kind of work it claims it is doing." Julie told me that she was considering leaving the system where she was wounded because she felt there "needs to shift to build more equitable practices." She said she did not feel supported and committed to stay because "a lot of what I engaged in was the real equity work of ensuring that all my children have access to the same resources and opportunities in schools." Julie reiterated that she was deeply wounded because she knew she was doing the work based on the theory the system espoused; however, they did not support her when she had to make tough decisions and "real equity work" that would ensure equitable enrollment practices.

Julie reiterated, "I feel like [the experience of feeling powerless and frustrated] has empowered me to really think outside the box, think outside the system that I am in now … people like myself [an Afro-Latina woman] need to position ourselves to be able to be the voice of the voiceless…." As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998) found, a *restitution* narrative demonstrates the participant's ability to see the crisis, learn from it, and see herself and her ability to lead in a new light. I learned that Julie began seeking other opportunities outside the district where she was wounded, as she felt empowered to see herself and her role differently and "think outside the box."

Next, I discuss examples from Juanita's interview, as her retelling fit Frank's (1995) *chaos* narrative.

Chaos: A Distressed Telling

Chaos narratives are distressed tellings of stories with dissociated scattered events, without sequence, coherence, or rationales for why the crisis happened as it did—the storytellers frame an uncertain future (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a; Frank, 1995; Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). *Chaos* narratives are the opposite of *restitution* narratives in that the teller imagines life as never getting better (Frank, 1995, p. 97).

Frank (1995) described the teller of a *chaos* narrative as having a "voice that might express the deepest *chaos* … interrupting itself as it seeks to tell. This self-interruption is the core of the 'and then' style of speech, cutting off each clause with the next" (p. 104). In Gammelgaard's (2019) analysis of Frank's seminal work, he claimed that *chaos* narratives are hard to hear and understand. However, Gammelgaard argued that "the syntactic structure of 'and then and then and then,'" which results in a "staccato pacing of words," as Frank (1995, p. 99) articulated, does not make it less of a narrative.

In Juanita's case, there were many instances where the narrative, as Frank (1995) described, was "hard to hear" (p. 97). That is, her telling of the wounding crisis was not in sequence and contained many flashbacks that started with the phrase "and then" or "let me tell you about that part, and then I will come back to the question." This phrase "and then" was repeated over and over in her narrative. Scholars (e.g., Frank, 1995; Gammelgaard, 2019) suggest that this way of telling the story is indicative of someone who is still in the midst of the wounding experience.

"It's going to be lose-lose every chance"—Juanita. Recall that Juanita is an African American woman in her 40s who became wounded as she worked to reduce the number of employees in the district in order to address some financial issues. Below, I share, in list form, quotations from Juanita that I believe illuminate the desperation that Frank (1995) and Gammelgaard (2019) emphasized as being prevalent in the *chaos* narrative. For example, Juanita shared in close succession:

- "And then [emphasis hers] I didn't really pick my team so certain positions I had to hire people because they wanted me to. So, that was another whole dynamic."
  "And then, then, I moved to another community."
  "And then I had this other dynamic that went on here."
  "And then there are some days I feel sad."
  "And then feeling like this can't be happening like having an out of body experience."

As Frank (1995) wrote, “All the ‘and then’ contingencies fragment [the] story” (p. 104). I learned, too, that Juanita still “does not understand how” this crisis happened to her. She said in her interview, “This is not happening. This can’t be happening” and mentioned that she still “cannot believe it,” even now, at the time of the interview, that she has been away from the crisis. Although Juanita shared that she is able to distinguish contributing factors to her wounding experience, she is still surprised by what she saw and learned during her crisis.

Discussion of the *chaos* narrative. I observed that both Juanita and Frankie became clearer storytellers after the first interview, meaning the telling of the story appeared to be easier for them to narrate in the second interview. Like Juanita, Frankie processed his story via a *chaos* narrative. During the second interview, Frankie mentioned, “I don’t remember those six months being super emotional at the time. I just remember them being intense and busy and pure survival and kind of chaos and stuff like that.” I observed that as Frankie made meaning of his story, it appeared that no one was in control and that “the story traces the edges of a wound” (Frank, 1995, as cited in Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998, p. 30), because it was told around events and multiple contingent factors.

For Frankie and Juanita, having participated in my inviting them to share in response to three interview protocols over the course of several hours allowed me to weave together a temporal story. I speculate that for Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000), this is not surprising, since they noted, “As a leader tells and retells the story of a significant crisis in his professional life, he is providing structure and giving an order to what has happened and what still may be happening, and the *chaos* of crisis can eventually be translated into a recognizable form” (p. 2).

Summary

In this section of the chapter, I discussed how the participants began to make meaning of and process their wounding crisis. More specifically, I discussed how each narrative fit into Frank's (1995) *Quest*, *Restitution*, and *Chaos* framework, which Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000b) also adapted to frame wounded leaders' stories in their research.

In my descriptions of how Emma and Francis shared their stories, I suggest that they emulated what Frank (1995) and Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (1998) found when they discussed how some leaders had become the *heroes* of their own stories in *quest* narratives. Thus, participants in my research made meaning of their wound by finding a voice in the story. I think that finding meaning and processing the wound, as Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998) posited, may lead to changed and transformed individuals (pp. 24-25). I also found that Julie's and John Black's telling of their wounding crises met the description of a *restitution* narrative, in that they explained that they found hope and a new light after the crises had come to an end. I used several quotes from Julie's interview to demonstrate these findings. Lastly, I discussed Juanita's *chaos* narrative—a disjointed telling of events. I shared how the series of interviews with Juanita and Frankie helped me piece together their stories, which were much more fragmented than the stories told by other participants.

In the next section, I transition to discussing the participants' emotions as they aligned with Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's *Givens of Leadership.* I extend the "givens" to include *critical* anger, which is an emotion that five participants (5/6) in my study discussed when they recalled their experiences of being wounded.

The Givens of Leadership 2.0: Emotional Dimensions of a Wound

In this section, I use examples from the participants' interviews to discuss the "given" emotions (i.e., vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness) that arose as the participants told their stories of wounding. In addition, as mentioned, I also discuss another major emotion—anger—not identified as a "given" in earlier research conducted by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman, but which was prevalent in my study and which I refer to as *critical anger,* since it is anger that developed as a result of systemic biases. As Brackett (2019) described, anger is a pure emotion that is very important for processing. Anger is an emotion that occurs if a person experiences an injustice or something unfair (Brackett, 2019).

Given today's context, amidst a renewed interest in the Black Lives Matter movement and the social crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to acknowledge anger that surfaces due to various types of wounding. In my study, five of the six (5/6) participants described their anger as being caused by underlying racial tensions, whether the wound happened over 20 years ago or more recently (i.e., less than two years ago). I refer to vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness, along with *critical anger* and *a lasting anxiety,* as the *Givens of Leadership 2.0*. I begin my discussion of the *Givens of Leadership 2.0* with an overview of my coding process, which focused on "emotion," followed by examples of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness. I end with a brief discussion on *critical anger, lasting anxiety,* and a summary.

First, I discuss examples of vulnerability that emerged from Frankie's interview before discussing Emma's feelings of isolation and fear.

Vulnerability: "Confidence Shattered … Deeply Hurt"—Frankie

Professor and author Brené Brown defined "vulnerability" as *uncertainty*, risk, and *emotional exposure* (Brown, 2015, p. 34; 2017). In Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's

first study of the wounded leader (1998), the researchers explained that a wound left the participants feeling vulnerable—questioning who they were as leaders, what they were doing, and how others perceived them.

I found that all participants (6/6) in my study expressed vulnerability. For example, John Black, an African American man in his 70s, who was called "despicable" in a public meeting, expressed vulnerability when he described wounding as a "hurt" that occurs "when someone personalizes it." He described that he believed wounding experiences, like his, happen when someone has the "intent to do harm to a person, to embarrass the person, to discredit a person, to disavow, to influence the opinion of others to [lose] trust and power." John Black mentioned of his crisis, "It was hard to take … it hurt deeply." Other participants voiced their vulnerabilities by sharing feelings of doubt and insecurity. Frankie, for instance, said, "I felt very fragile," and "[m]y confidence was shattered, and I didn't know what I was going to do."

I learned that this feeling of uncertainty was a sentiment shared by Emma, Juanita, Francis, and Julie. Like Frankie, Julie described elements of vulnerability with her own words. Julie, an Afro-Latina woman who was wounded as she attempted to uphold equitable zoning policies, shared that she felt "attacked" and open to injury during public meetings "with her name plastered in red ink to look like blood" and which the media "made worse." According to Julie, the media caused her wounding experience to "hurt more" because she felt defenseless. She described this as having "no one to support her" and expressed that during the wounding experience, she "felt helpless."

Good leadership, as Heifetz and Linsky (2017) contend, requires vulnerability (p. 3). Other scholars maintain that leaders must be responsive to different contextual demands and adaptive challenges they face, which can put them in vulnerable positions (Ackerman et al., 2018; Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Leithwood et al., 2019; Munby, 2019). In my study, each participant mentioned what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) described as leadership in

vulnerable spaces—that is, they described a wounding crisis that occurred as they tried to keep their job while facing competing demands from different stakeholders (school boards, the mayor, etc.). Next, I discuss another prevalent emotion that emerged throughout the interviews—isolation.

Isolation: "It's Lonely at the Top."—Juanita

Isolation can be described in a hierarchical sense (where a superintendent sits on top of the pyramid of leadership) and also as an "aloneness" or solitude where a superintendent's isolation is described as being "in a fishbowl" that "creates chronic tensions" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 14; 2004a).

I found that all of the participants in my study (6/6) spoke to the loneliness of their work as superintendents and as educational leaders. Throughout the interviews, I felt that the participants described their experience as if they were living in the metaphor "it's lonely at the top." For example, Emma, a White woman in her 70s who was wounded in the community she grew up in by her school board and cabinet members, said that she, as a superintendent, had "no one to call, no one to understand, no one to say it is going to be okay. No one is defending me. No one saying, 'You are valuable.'" She summarized her feelings by saying, "It's lonely [at the top]—is the bottom line."

Similar to Emma, Juanita's feelings of isolation stemmed from feeling betrayed by people she thought were her friends and colleagues and served on the board and as her supervisors. Juanita, an African American woman in her 40s, was wounded as she worked to mitigate budget concerns. Juanita said, "I was shocked" and felt betrayed by the people who were supposed to provide her the most support—for example, the mayor whom she considered a friend and sorority sister. Like Emma, Juanita also said, "It is lonely at the top."

Similarly, I found that Julie stated that she felt alone. Recall, Julie is an Afro-Latina woman older than 40 who stood up against a group of parents and teachers trying

to circumvent enrollment policies that excluded students of color zoned for an affluent, progressive school. During her interviews, Julie shared that:

> members of the district wanted me to perceive [the situation] as if they were acting in a supportive lens. But when you deeply look and analyze what was happening at the core, they were just trying to create a façade … my voice was not heard … I felt alone and like no one was standing up for me.

I believe this quote describes Julie's perceived isolation as she felt betrayed by people she thought were supposed to be supportive, much like in Juanita's experience. Next, I describe the fear experienced by the participants in my study—as evidenced during the meaning making and processing of their wounding experiences.

Fear: "Nothing Around This Work is Guaranteed"—Francis

Fear was another emotion that surfaced in my findings. Brackett (2019) explains that fear is an unpleasant, low-energy feeling. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (n.d.) describes fear as an unpleasant and strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger. I found that during the interviews, most participants (5/6) expressed a fear of losing their job during or after the wounding experience. Most (5/6) also feared, they explained, losing their self-confidence as leaders, which also created a *lasting anxiety* as they lived through the wounding crisis.

My findings are similar to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002a) research, which revealed that being fired is a constant fear for wounded leaders. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski added that fear of losing the position can be overwhelming for a leader and can lead to permanent or temporary paralysis and feelings of devastation (p. 30). Thus, I coded a "loss of confidence," "self-doubt," and worry of "getting fired" as fear and some elements that continue to surface today as *lasting anxiety*—meaning they said they felt that after their wounding crises, they had to be constantly prepared to be attacked in future meetings, in public, or by the media.

Francis, for example, expressed her fear as she said, “One of the things I realized was, I knew it, but it really hit home, but nothing around this work is guaranteed…. The other part of it was whether or not this was signaling an end to my career or my leadership.” As Francis, an African American woman in her 70s who was wounded during a major reorganization, described, she felt fear as she was “threatened with not having a job.”

Frankie, a man in his 30s who chose to tell a wounding story that happened when he was a principal and had a “values rub [clash]” with his boss that led him to resign, shared that he also worried about losing his job. He explained this fear:

> Oh my God, after all these years, how dare she [details omitted to protect confidentiality]. It’s kind of like that fight or flight mode just kicked in. I think it’s a pretty scary. Right? To imagine that ... I think at the time it seemed so fatal. Not like death, but this is fated. Do you know what I mean? This is how it’s got to be, and I’m just going to leave—the strategy, because it was that super drama. I didn’t have a lot of leftover time or energy to really play out multiple opportunities…. I also had a lot of voices around me that were affirming me and saying, “Yes you have to go. This is crazy, you’re too good for this.” It’s a big deal to leave the principal’s seat…. I thought I was going to do it forever…. I do think that the conditions under which I sought the escape from the wounds have made the present rocky and hard to accept. It was fleeing something, right? You kind of don’t care that much where you end up, you just want to be away from it. I didn’t really look inward and say, “What do you want to do next? It was just like, what am I going to do?”

Frankie’s words show that losing the job made him think that he would rather “lose it [but] on my own terms.” Similarly, Emma, a retired White woman in her 70s who was hired as interim superintendent after a tragic incident, was also very afraid of getting fired due to her wounding experience. Emma said she felt that she was constantly judging herself and asking herself, “‘Am I good enough to do the job? Am I the right person?’” She added, “I had to resign before they fired me. I couldn’t let that happen.” Although Frankie and Emma did not mention “fear” explicitly, I coded their self-doubt and worry about being fired as a fearful emotional reaction to the situation. As Brackett (2019)

explained, sometimes we may not be able to distinguish between anxiety and fear—two high-energy emotions—but that we begin to see the difference only when we look at the causes. In today's current context, I can see how the participants' stories, their uneasiness about something that may happen in the future (e.g., getting fired by the board or central offices) can be labeled as more of what Brackett considers an *anxiety* and which I call *lasting anxiety*. However, Brackett distinguishes fear from anxiety by fear having a feeling of impending danger. Based on the participants' recounting of their wounding crises, I believe five out of the six experienced fear because they felt they were in danger of getting fired and being left without a job in reaction to a situation. However, since anxiety is a feeling of impending danger—meaning you are on alert—and as the participants shared, ready with a response just in case you are wounded again, calling it *lasting anxiety* seems appropriate. In the next section, I discuss the fourth "given" of leadership—power/powerlessness.

Powerlessness: "Power Really Ruins People."—Emma

Power is defined as the possession of control, authority, or influence over others: the ability to act or produce an effect (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d.). According to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a), loss of power is the foundation of wounds. I noted that all participants (6/6) mentioned powerlessness in similar ways. Julie, for example, summarized feeling powerless when she said:

> The voices in power got to tell a narrative that was not necessarily true. Right? I don't, and we don't [get to tell our version of the narrative] … [she said] the picture that comes to my head it's like the King and all these other people wanted something done [and they] … suppress [others'] voices [and prevent them from] being heard.

Recall that Julie is an Afro-Latina woman older than 40 who was wounded as she tried to uphold fair school zoning laws. As she shared, she was in a position of power but felt powerless as the district was gentrifying, and voices of affluence and privilege (i.e., primarily White parents) had more control than she actually had as the superintendent. In

other words, their social location—meaning social position and power in relation to others in society (Al-Faham et al., 2019; Hearn, 2012; Turman et al., 2018)—placed them in a position of privilege and access to the media. She said that political interests consistently led to her opinions and decisions being overlooked, even when they were acknowledged or agreed upon "behind closed doors."

Like Julie, John Black also shared his feelings of how powerless he felt when he expressed that "I am angered and outraged by the irresponsible use of positions and power to deny children opportunities." Recall that John Black is an African American man in his 70s who was called "despicable" by a state senator. He became "frustrated" by "those in power" who were "using their power to, again … suppress opportunity for poor urban narratives." As John Black fought for equity and integration of schools, he vocalized his powerlessness by sharing how those who did have power crippled the steps he was taking to implement court mandates.

I found that each participant in my study experienced, to varying degrees, a sense of powerlessness. During their wounding experiences, it seems they did not imagine a scenario in which power could be exercised over them so clearly given that they were hierarchically at the top themselves. In her interview, Emma painted a picture of this kind of power dynamic. "Power really ruins people," she repeated. "I never understood power until [being wounded by a powerful person with many political ties and connections]." The perceived powerlessness of all participants (6/6) in my study aligns with Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2001, 2002a, 2002b) findings that powerless appears to be a "given" of leadership.

The Givens of Leadership 2.0

In this section, I describe "lasting anxiety" and "critical anger," which surfaced during the interviews for five out of the six participants. Because "anger" and "anxiety" were not captured in the traditional givens of leadership, defined, and explained by

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, I use Brackett's (2019) Mood Meter to frame these emotions. The Mood Meter is a map of emotions that attempts to "cover all the bases" of emotional categories with one hundred words divided into four quadrants (p. 113). These include a red quadrant with emotions that range from "enraged" to "panicked"; a green quadrant with emotions that range from "ease" to "serene" and from "calm" to "balanced"; a blue quadrant with emotions that range from "down" to "despair" and from "lonely" to "alienated"; and a yellow quadrant with emotions that range from "joyful" to "ecstatic" and from "hopeful" to "optimistic" (see Appendix N). According to Brackett, anger and anxiety are usually considered negative emotions that can signal a deep reaction, may have an enduring effect, and may damage health. Interestingly, in my study, anger and anxiety were prominent emotions—as Julie, Frankie, Juanita, Emma, and John Black described—but ones that were not discussed in previous studies on the wounded leaders (see Figure 2). Although anger is typically considered a negative emotion, in this study, *critical anger* was positive in a sense. More specifically, it was positive in the sense that the participants said they harnessed it for a greater good and it mobilized them to continue to fulfill their moral purpose and serve as positive change agents for students. Furthermore, the *critical anger* participants experienced, in the context of the stories of wounding, was a result of racism (5/6). They said they were angered by injustices as a result of race (5/6) and gender biases (3/6). Critical anger was a propelling emotion and a motivating factor that helped leaders continue to focus on the work and doing what is right for students. Most (5/6) used anger as a propellant as opposed to feeling defeated, and they worked in other districts.

Figure 2. *Data Analysis of Interview 2 Transcripts for Anger as an Emotion*

As shown in Figure 2, when manually coded transcripts were cross-checked with NVivo 12, anger was a prominent theme. These are stemmed phrases in the participants' own words that show connections such as anger being "managed" and "masqueraded" or anger "never dealt with," to name a few, as shown above.

Next, I provide additional examples of anger, which emerged from John Black's and Julie's interviews.

Critical anger: "Raging mad … I was an angry Black man then, and i am an angry Black man now."—John Black. Most participants (5/6) expressed anger in their reactions, responses, and tones when they shared how they processed the wounding experience during the time of the crisis. For example, John Black expressed it explicitly when he stated:

> I said that once, I can say it again. But I was dismayed, I was fuming, I was raging mad, because when you are driven internally by a value structure, and you prepare yourself … you become angered and frustrated that those in power were using their power to, again, to suppress opportunity for poor urban narratives.

I chose John Black's words to show that anger surfaced beneath the pain that was expressed throughout the second interview. With his words came many pauses with gulps and sighs, followed by what I considered a rush of passion to explain the anger he felt. At the time his wounding happened (when he was called "despicable" in a public setting), John Black said that at age 39, "My mouth, my tongue, was quite as assertive." He said he would respond by, "So like cussing somebody out or taking them down or attacking them with excavating language exchanges." However, looking back at the time of the wound, he says that experience taught him to "become a lot better in terms of the use of my tongue to say what needs to be said." John Black shared that he learned to remain

aligned with his values and to work to do so in a way that opened up the possibility of finding common ground with his resistors.

Similarly, Julie's experience was as follows:

> So, as I continue to reflect, it has not beaten me in the sense that I feel helpless. Although there's times that I do [feel helpless], it created a fire, in some cases, anger. That [anger] propels me to continue to try and reach for opportunities that [are] going to allow me to be that voice of the voiceless.

This reflection shows that Julie, like other participants (5/6), used anger to rekindle her passion for her work in the best interest of children. Julie was so angered that she said she decided to seek another superintendent position outside of the state where her wounding occurred. When I finished my dissertation, Julie accepted a position in another district that she felt was more aligned to her core values and where she could do the "real equity work and not just pay lip service to it."

Lasting Anxiety: "I Feel Unsettled in My Professional Identity…"—Anonymous (to protect confidentiality)

Most participants (4/6) also expressed what I termed as a *lasting anxiety*, which surfaced in the way (i.e., emotions displayed via their telling of the story in voice, reactions, and prosody—tone, stress, and rhythm in participants' descriptions) they told their stories as a result of their wounding crises and in relation to leading in subsequent roles. I wanted to attend to confidentiality and in this section did not name the participants due to the sensitivity of this finding and initially hesitated to include it. One participant explained, "[It] makes me feel both like I've moved on and haven't or I'm settled, and I haven't. I'm sad but I'm not. I would say there's [still] a lot of contradictory feelings about it." One participant shared that the wound is not consistently or "consciously" present, but "like I mentioned, it comes up sometimes. It came up in therapy." It was best described as "the happiness and the overcast." Another participant expressed that there is a sense of not having "figured it out totally" in terms of the cause or the events that led to the crisis.

These participants explained how the wound recurs in their consciousness when they least expect it. One participant explained, “When you have these setbacks … you start to question, you have somehow, and not intentionally and not even through your consciousness, let people sort of define you, define what success is for you, define what you’re capable of.” For example, another participant vulnerably shared that “I find myself negotiating,” and as they consider other career options since the wound. In fact, they felt an “inability to really immerse” themselves in any new role since the wounding experience. As stated by another participant, the first role taken after the wound happened felt like “I took it as a refugee from the old job and I was in a really weird place.” Recall, 5/6 would have preferred to remain in their districts. As shared by one participant, “There are still times that I think that I wish that wouldn’t have happened, or, boy, I would have loved to have stayed [t]here longer.”

The anxiety was also expressed in what was described as a feeling that:

> I haven’t been able to do that inner work, or [that] the inner work has not paid off. I don’t know how much of that is the wound per se … but there’s something about the relationship [between the wounding and subsequent roles] that feel relevant. So, to the extent that right now I feel *unsettled* [emphasis mine] in my professional identity and what I want to do with my career, I do attribute part of that to what happened to me that [time]. A wounding experience allowed me to think more about that and it’s been sort of tough. It left me questioning, “Am I doing this right? Is this really how I want to embrace life overall?”

This quote reflects a feeling of guilt for “not getting over it” or “recovering.” Many felt and said, during the interview, that they “remember the pre-wound as a time [when] it felt so different.” They said [5/6] that they had always felt “so confident and secure” in what they were doing as leaders. However, after processing the wound now—during the interview, one stated, “I think the wounding chapter represented a loss of that [confidence], and I feel like it took it away from me.” These are indicative of a *lasting anxiety* in my view, and, as one summarized the wounding experience in the last

interview, “It happened to me. When I think of it the latter way, it does bother me, to feel like, to have something taken from me.”

Discussion

I found that the six participants in my study were emotional about being wounded, even long after the event. All six participants expressed some type of emotion other than the *Givens of Leadership 2.0*. For example, each expressed some form of sadness or shock. I found that for many (4/6) participants, their wounds contributed to lasting anxiety.

All participants (6/6) shared that they experienced predominantly “negative” emotions as their wounding crisis unfolded. In fact, when I conducted an *NVivo 12 Auto Code sentiment query* (i.e., coding for positive or negative emotions) to find out the general tone of the content in the transcripts for Interview 2 across cases for all six participants, and also within and across cases for all 18 interviews, I found a predominance of negative and moderately negative emotions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. *NVivo Query of Sentiments for Interview 2 (RQ 2)*

1 : Very negative	48.1%
2 : Moderately negative	32.07%
3 : Moderately positive	14.35%
4 : Very positive	5.49%

Figure 3 represents an analysis of the transcripts that addressed RQ 2. I engaged in "emotion coding," which, according to Saldaña (2016), "simply labels the feelings participants may have experienced" (p. 124). As Saldaña explained, hundreds of words exist to describe human emotion, and thus the repertoire of potential codes is vast (p. 124). By utilizing an emotion coding method, I was able to better investigate the subjective qualities (i.e., the positive and negative emotions) of a human experience—in this case, a wounding crisis.

Summary

As Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000a) wrote, "When outer realities conflict with the inner truth of school leadership (and they often do) a great wound of the soul is often the result" (p. 6). In Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's series of studies (1998-2002), they highlighted the four major emotions that surfaced during a wound and named them the *Givens of Leadership*. These emotions include vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness. I found that all six of the superintendents in my study displayed a range of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness as they experienced and recounted the experience of their wounding crisis.

In 2019, Brackett explained that emotions influence leadership effectiveness and building and maintaining complex relationships (p. 222). While Goleman (1995), in his seminal work, described emotions as important codes that capture feelings or distinctive thoughts. I used Brackett's (2019) Mood Meter to frame the fifth and sixth emotions that I found prevalent throughout the participants' meaning making of the wounded experience—*critical anger* and an underlying *lasting anxiety*. As I shared through the

stories of John Black and Julie, anger surfaced in the interviews of five out of the six participants in my study. I believe, like Brackett, anger is an important emotion to recognize in the field of educational leadership as leaders experience wounding crises. Understanding anger as perhaps another "given" of leadership allows for a better understanding of how leaders make sense of, respond to, and process their experiences. In addition, *lasting anxiety* surfaced in 4/6 stories—anxiety that Brackett described as an emotion that originates from an underlying fear or worry of what could happen in the future.

Chapter Summary

In the second interview, I addressed RQ 2 (i.e., How do educational leaders describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience?). As the participants shared their stories, I found that they recounted the events using a *quest*, *restitution*, and *chaos* framework, as first articulated by Frank (1995). Like Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (1998), I found that participants in my study shared their experiences as either a *quest*, *restitution*, or *chaos* narrative. I believe that the participants in my study show some hope of the possibility that recovering from a wound can be accomplished with the right supports, which I will discuss in Chapter VII.

I also discovered that during the meaning making process of telling their story of wounding, several emotions surfaced for each of the six participants. These included vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness (i.e., the traditional *Givens of Leadership* identified by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman) as well as *critical anger* and a *lasting anxiety*, which are appropriate emotions that I believe can be readily found in the current educational climate.

In the next chapter, I discuss learning, recovery, and healing in response to RQ 3, which I explored in the third interview.

Chapter VII

LEARNING THROUGH HEALING AND RECOVERY

In Chapters V and VI, I focused on how six superintendents told their stories and made meaning of their wounding experiences. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of Research Question 3 (RQ 3): How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say that they have healed? How, if at all, did they describe how they are still healing? What supported them in healing? What challenged them in healing?

I found that the six participants in my study (6/6) described different ways in which they healed and recovered. Although the terms *healing* and *recovery* are closely related, and are sometimes used interchangeably, I used the distinction that *healing* is an important component to *recovery* (Ardolino, 2006; Koltai, 2018). *Healing* from difficult circumstances is emotional work (https://www.strivecares.com/how-can-old-wounds-heal-in-recovery/), while, in medical terms, *recovery* is a return to pre-injury status—a return to normal function or a former state. In other words, it is doing what you used to before the injury (Ardolino, 2006; Koltai, 2018).

My goal for this chapter is to focus on what the participants learned throughout their healing and recovery processes. I organize this chapter by two subcategories of healing and recovery. First, I discuss how the participants described *intrapersonal* healing and recovery (what they learned about themselves as individuals after their wounding experience). Second, I discuss how the participants described *interpersonal* healing and recovery (what they learned about how they related to others as leaders after

their wounding experience). I found that participants shared many examples of what they had learned through *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* healing and recovery after the wounding crisis. All six participants (6/6) described what they learned through *intrapersonal* (within themselves) healing and recovery. They each learned about themselves as individuals in some way. However, I found that half (3/6) of the participants affirmed they have healed and recovered from their wounding experience. Frankie and Juanita are in the process (2/6). On the other hand, John Black interpreted recovery differently. Some of the learning they shared included: developing resiliency(5/6), a higher emotional intelligence (4/6), an increase in caring capacity (4/6), a better awareness of the need for self-care (5/6), personal relationship development (6/6), and a greater understanding of oneself (5/6). I discuss examples that show what the participants learned about being resilient, increasing emotional intelligence, caring for self, and the need for personal relationships. Three of the six participants (3/6) also described what they learned through *interpersonal* healing and recovery. These lessons included: finding peace and no longer being bothered by the past (2/6) and learning to recover more quickly from subsequent wounding experiences (1/6).

Intrapersonal Healing and Recovery

In this section, I explore how the participants described their own intrapersonal healing and recovery from a wounding crisis. Recall that a wound is a serious conflict, dilemma, or critical event in a school leader's practice that has in some way profoundly affected them, which Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000a) compared to an illness, because leadership wounds reflect some of the same characteristics (e.g., loss of control, predictability, and functioning). I found that all participants (6/6) described what they had learned interpersonally (about themselves) in their healing and recovery processes, even though they were at different stages. Intrapersonal gains occur within oneself, as

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) stated, “Within the existence of each individual there is a vast potential for self-understanding and change” (p. 6).

In the following sections, I provide examples of how each of the participants explained that they healed and/or recovered from a wound that affected them personally and professionally and how Emma, Francis, and Julie (3/6) stated that they have healed and recovered, Frankie and Juanita (2/6) are still in the process, and John Black (1/6) said that he healed but has not yet fully recovered. I start by discussing how participants (5/6) noted an increase in resiliency. I then discuss how they conveyed that recovering from the wounding experience led to what I determined to be a higher emotional intelligence, i.e., the ability to identify one’s emotions and the emotions of others to regulate and guide thinking, executive functioning, and decisions (4/6) (Brackett, 2019), a better awareness of the need for self-care (5/6) and personal relationship development (6/6), as well as a greater caring capacity (4/6) and a greater personal understanding of oneself (5/6).

Learning to be Resilient

In his seminal work, Frank (1995) posited that *sharing* stories of wounding experiences helped participants (wounded storytellers) develop as resilient and enlightened leaders. According to Ledesma (2014), “resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune and is essential for the effective leader” (p. 1). I found that all six superintendents in my study (6/6) described how they learned to be resilient throughout and after their wounding crisis. Next, I share insights from Francis’s, Emma’s, and John Black’s stories that reflect my findings.

Francis: “You’re going to have to draw on certain things within yourself.” Superintendent Francis, an African American woman between 70 and 80 years old who was wounded as a result of reorganization efforts in a large district under mayoral control, embodied Frank’s (1995) sentiment about resiliency when she explained what she learned as a result of her wounding crisis:

> Yeah. I mean, as I said, one of the things that I learned about myself, and I knew it because as a leader on every level, in a classroom, as a leader of children from assistant principal, principal, whatever…. If you are in a leadership position, you know that you're going to have to draw on certain things within yourself. And the higher you go, the greater the challenge. I think the more you have to draw on because the arrows are really pointed at you. And so, I learned about being resilient.

In this quote, Francis is referring to the challenges that come with leadership and facing adversity. She explained the need to be resilient and how she learned about her own resilience by living and surviving the wounding crisis. Like Heifetz and Linsky (2017) posited, leadership means sometimes falling on the sword, which is what I think Francis was saying when she stated that "arrows are really pointed at you." Francis also explained that for her, part of being resilient meant that she learned how to be patient and pick her battles. She explained:

> I think one of the things I learned that I didn't have probably as a leader, well I had it—I must have, but not in close supply, was I learned patience. I learned how to pick the battles. It's not that you just sit back, but you have to be a little watchful about what's going on, and I think I learned in knowing when to hold them [back] and knowing when to fold them—knowing when the fight is worth anything or if you're going to get [hurt]. [Asking yourself], "Are you going to win and still lose?" I learned those lessons and took them with me to every [subsequent] position.

In this quote, Francis explained how she learned to be more patient and connected this with her wounding crisis. She also learned that a person—in this case her—does not have to fight every battle as a leader, since sometimes even if you win the battle, it may not necessarily mean that you have not lost other things. Francis further explained that this could mean losing your allies, support, or even your position. Francis told me that this lesson aided her in other instances where she was subsequently wounded as she served as superintendent in other city districts. I took this to be a sign of her resilience since she stated, "You have to draw … within yourself [and learn] about being resilient." Next, I describe Emma's resiliency, in her own words, which she learned throughout and after her wounding crisis.

Emma: "If I'm pushed down, I come back up again." Emma, a White woman between the ages of 70 and 80, was wounded by a series of incidents during her time as a superintendent when she implemented a desegregation plan and other curricular changes in her district. She was met with resistance from her school board and the community. During her interview, Emma spoke of resilience by discussing how she learned "not to buckle" in the superintendency when "being attacked" all the time.

Emma believed that it is important for leaders to know and understand that verbal confrontation "is part of the job." She described it as being "willing to take that kind of a beating egotistically." Emma also emphasized that she also felt that "if you're a person of your [own strong] convictions, it has a lot to do with [the] resilience [you have within yourself]." She continued:

> I think resiliency in leadership is really important, because I could have gotten out of that experience in [city omitted to protect confidentiality] and just been so overwhelmed and sorry and sad, but that just wasn't an option for me. Resilience has always been, I think, one of my strong points. If I'm pushed down, I come back up again.

Recall that Emma resigned from the superintendency, which she loved, because she believed she could help the district move forward by resigning. She made changes and upheld an integration plan that she supported her predecessor in implementing. Because of her resilient spirit, as she explained, Emma went on to another district in another city, where she used the lessons learned in her wounding recovery to help her adjust and find success. Emma shared that she was wounded in that district as well. However, she learned many ways to address being attacked. Emma told me that she did not take attacks personally. Instead, she learned to "be strong" and "listen more," especially to divergent perspectives, since "you learn from opposing views."

Emma explained that part of learning the ability to bounce back from the wound she learned from "look[ing] at all views." However, she emphasized:

> When you do compromise, you have to do it thoughtfully, so you don't compromise your [personal] principles. Negotiating skills are very important professionally. I think you need to learn compromise, but you [also] can do anything you want to do, if you're strong enough [and] willing to stand up for [yourself and] your belief system…. There will be roadblocks, and there will be missteps. You just need to learn from each one of them [and be resilient].

Emma clarified how leaders need to learn how to negotiate without compromising who they are and be strong enough to stand up for their beliefs. As part of her retrospective reflection, Emma examined her wound in today's current context—now at the time of the interview. She explained that "some people have a hard time even trying to see other people's perspectives. Oh, my God. Aren't we witnessing it right now in the country? [the pandemic crisis was just beginning at the time of Emma's last interview in March 2020]." Emma elaborated and said that in her wounding experience, she learned that "it is important to stay positive and not remain angry," since "some people can't get over anger, which is why we have some of the situations we have today!" Emma told me that she was referring to President Trump and the government, the pandemic crisis, and the "lack of listening and compromise" in our country at this time. Recall, one of Frank's (1995) findings as well was that leaders in telling their stories of wounding said they were resilient, which allowed each of the participants in my study to continue their journey as a superintendent. This was the case for Emma, since she continued her career after her first wounding experience. She selected the wound to share in this study, feeling it was the most significant, because "it was really hard" and it also "made me strong as a leader."

Next, I discuss resiliency from John Black's point of view.

John Black: "Number one at the top of the list is know thyself." Another instance of an increase in intrapersonal resiliency came from John Black. As he shared, he, too, became a stronger and more determined leader as a result of his wounding experience. Recall that John Black is an African American man between the age of 70

and 80 and was a leader in a northeastern state. John Black, who chose his pseudonym, was wounded when he was called “despicable” by a White senator during a public meeting where he was trying to implement desegregation laws and equitable funding across districts. The wound, John Black said, led him to become a better leader because he felt that “there’s a different standard that personally drove me to be the best me that I could be, to be meticulous in the work, … to be thoughtful, to engage many, and [engage in] continuous improvement.” He meant that, from that incident, he learned that he would always be judged by a different standard; therefore, he had to ensure that he was always at his best.

John Black explained that the negative public critiques he received, which hurt him at his core, led him to “carefully” critique “every strategy [I] developed.” It seems that he learned how to be critical of himself to do the work to “an even higher standard.” He said he saw his role as “not just a job,” describing this as:

> [the] work of the foes and not just doing one’s J-O-B, doing one’s job. This is not about a job. This is about a shared mission of many people to use the opportunity afforded to make changes happen for children and communities that have been ignored.

Throughout my interviews with him, John Black emphasized the need to know oneself and one’s own power. He said this was the type of learning every leader needs—”Number one at the top of the list is know thyself.” He thought it was important for leaders to “have a set of core values that are yours” and “that are burned in ... deep in your DNA in a way that they are highly transportable, and you will stand on them under any circumstance. That you are uncompromised.” He said that learning about and upholding one’s core values is important since leaders are tested often, especially when implementing equity-driven agendas. This sentiment, of being “uncompromised” despite adversity, I believe, speaks to resiliency. Recall, it was John Black who described his wounding experience as “my head is bloodied but unbowed.”

In the next section, I share more about John Black's intrapersonal growth, particularly what he described as an increase in his emotional intelligence. Then, I explore how Emma learned to take care of herself throughout the healing and recovery process and how several participants (Emma, Frankie, and Juanita) discussed the importance of maintaining personal relationships.

Increasing Emotional Intelligence

John Black described working "to become a more emotionally intelligent leader," after his wound. Similar to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b), I found that leaders like John Black described a capacity for emotional intelligence. That is, all participants (6/6) in my study showed an "ability to be responsive in practice" to a culture, "adapting" oneself, and acknowledging limitations in order to better discover who one is personally and professionally as a leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b, p. 131). John Black explained that, after his wound, he:

> worked to become a more emotionally intelligent leader.... So that I don't react from that era of time [when he was wounded]. I mean ... my reactions are much more measured. And, I don't want to say masqueraded, but managed. My anger is managed more effectively, and my ability to work with protestants.... I use that term too loosely—to work with people of different perspectives on equity. I am not as quick to respond to them with anger, with frustration … learning how to manage difficult conversations and having some ability to train and retrain even the harshest criticism.

In the above passage, John Black is saying that he learned how to be responsive rather than reactive—thus, I believe he learned to use emotional intelligence more effectively. John Black's recollection is an example of what Campbell (2008; as cited in Mears, 2009) described and how a wounding experience can help the leader transcend to a higher self, rise to a higher moral stage of development, and experience an increased level of consciousness. This increased level of consciousness is initiated by the wound and is achieved through redemptive suffering and having experienced the agony of a return to wholeness (Mears, 2009). How these leaders process their wounds aids in

learning about themselves from the experience and, in John Black's case, learning how to be more emotionally intelligent, even under the most difficult circumstances.

In learning about themselves from their wounding experiences, most of the participants (e.g., Emma) also reflected on learning about the need to take care of oneself, which I discuss in the next section.

Caring for Self

During the third interview, five of the six participants mentioned *caring for yourself* as part of what they learned during their healing and/or recovery process. One of the five participants was Emma, a White woman between the ages of 70 and 80, whose anecdotes I will share because she passionately described and reiterated this learning.

Emma really homed in on self-care and said she wanted other leaders—and future leaders—to know the importance of caring for themselves. She said:

> You also learn that ... and one thing I wish that I would have done [looking back at the wounding experience after reflecting on the story she shared in the first interview and how she processed the wound during the second interview].... I wish I would have taken some more time to rest, some more time to get out of that moment and just take a vacation, just get a few days away. I didn't do that. I really believe superintendents are so intense. Their work is so intense. You've got to take time, and I don't think women [especially] do this as well as men, to rest, reflect, have some time for you.

In this quote, Emma described part of what she called the "agony … of the superintendency." As Emma clarified in her interview, she wished that she had stepped away during those difficult [wounding] moments. She told me that she should have taken time to "gather" herself and the space to think and rest between the series of wounding experiences. As Emma described, being a superintendent is hard work. She recounted:

> You have events at night. You have events on the weekend. You have to be out there. So, I think, and it's probably any CFO or CEO, you have to value some of the personal things, and sometimes you don't have time, or prioritize it as second instead of first. I probably was guilty of that. And I never did that in my whole career, and I still don't do it, but I preach it, because I think it's important. But I still probably don't do that. I'm better at

> it now. But it's such an important aspect that I was just a 24/7 workaholic, type A personality. It did me well [at work and to give so much to the work in the interest of students]—I feel like. But I really needed to take rest, because I think I probably would have been maybe a little bit better if I had done that.

In this quote, Emma reflected on the competing priorities she experienced as a superintendent. She pointed out how she has learned, even more so now that she retired, the importance of prioritizing herself. Although she stated that having a "type A personality" of a workaholic served the school district well, Emma continues to help and tries to inform future leaders that balance is so important for self-care. In Emma's words, "It's really a lesson learned. I really talk to superintendents [now] about that, both men and women. Take some time for you. Take some time for you. You need to take time for your family and also your relationships."

In recognizing the need to care for oneself, and learning about themselves as people and leaders, all six of the participants (6/6) talked about how they balanced the lessons they learned about themselves with lessons about deepening personal relationships, which I discuss next.

The Need for Personal Relationships

All six study participants (6/6) shared that they learned the importance of building and nurturing personal relationships. In this section, I return to an example from Emma before discussing how Frankie and Juanita described the need for personal relationship development as well. I then transition to intrapersonal healing and recovery processes by exploring how Julie, Francis, Emma, and John Black discussed their stories and the lessons learned.

Emma: "Being a superintendent is hard on a relationship." Emma recognized how personal relationships suffer when you are a leader and experience the pressures of a wounding crisis: "I think being a superintendent is hard on a relationship. I really do. Men or women." Emma shared more about her personal experience by explaining that

she got divorced when she moved across the United States for another job as superintendent after resigning from the district where she was wounded. She reflected:

> I also think that in [the new District] where I wasn't married was easier for me. But not having that [a marital relationship] ... which is awful to say—that it's easier to be a superintendent when you don't have that emotional tie, which makes you need it very badly….

In essence, Emma revealed that she found the demands of being a superintendent easier when she had no marital relationship. Looking back on the experience now (retrospectively), Emma said she also recognized that the demands of the job illuminated the "need to take time for your family and also your relationships." She explained:

> [Her husband] was in a tough job; I was in a tough job. We didn't take the time together to commit to coming together to seeing what each other was really going through. So, that's, of course, something I'll always regret.

Emma said she regrets not taking time to for her marital relationship during her superintendency and wounding experience; she said that presently, in her consulting work, she preaches the need for balance and to sustain relationships. She said that she tries to teach this important lesson to future and current superintendents, especially women, because in her experience, she found that her male colleagues took time away to think, rest, and nurture personal relationships, while she did not—even when her male colleagues advised her to do so.

Next, I describe how Frankie explained what he experienced as the power of relationships for a leader when experiencing a wounding crisis. Frankie is a male superintendent in his 30s, and, unlike Emma, he explained how he made time for personal relationships before and during his wounding crisis.

Frankie: The benefits of having "a really strong healthy support network." Frankie, a White male between the ages of 30 and 40, was wounded as a principal and later became a superintendent. Frankie shared the importance of prioritizing personal relationships and said that he learned that personal relationships sustained him through

his wounding crisis. He said that he was lucky and benefitted "from a really strong healthy support network" of family and friends that he spoke to often. Frankie said this network included "the loving single mom, who, I can't do any wrong in her eyes. Really good healthy friendships, and a great fiancée [at the time of wounding and now his wife]."

Frankie added that he had the support of a lot of people who knew him "inside" and "outside of the role of principal and outside of the organization." He described what it was like during his wounding experience in the district he worked in:

> I think one thing, most of my relationships in the community were very strong and healthy, and so I had a lot of love and backing no matter what, and felt that commitment back towards those people, so the kids most of all. So that was very [supportive].... If I had not been a present leader that was connected with the different stakeholders, I don't know how I would have survived all the policy changes and stuff because it meant so much that people could say, "We know this isn't you," or, "This doesn't seem like you at all that's going on."

In this quote, Frankie explained how critical it was to have the support of the school community during his series of wounding crises. Part of recovering from the wounding experience, according to Frankie, was establishing and maintaining close relationships that he could turn to in times of crisis. He said he also learned how important outside-of-work relationships were during the series of wounding events that led to his resignation, because "they offered a perspective outside of the education sector." He explained:

> It's all not relevant to [his outside support system], anyway, including my wife. She is not an educator and doesn't really care about [the job]…. And really not interested in my work. She's not impressed by my work. I'm someone totally different to her. I don't know how I, or we, could have survived if that were not true because though she was supportive when she needed to be and a good thought partner. I don't know, I just thank God that me—for her, wasn't wrapped up in me for my professional world. That was really nice to have that distance.

As Frankie said, his wife and friends who were not in his district network or education at all provided him with support outside of his profession. Mentors inside of higher education also supported him, he added. He told me he made time to spend with these allies, especially on bad days during the wounding.

Next, I share how Juanita described a similar belief in finding strength in family ties and support.

Juanita: "Thankful" for the support of family. Juanita, an African American woman between the ages of 40 and 50, explained that she was still processing her wounding crisis during my interviews with her. She stated that her family is what helped her to face each day with strength and that they also helped her build her resilience. As a reminder, Juanita agreed to a separation agreement with a school board. Unfortunately, as she explained, she learned that her friends on the school board were willing to "vote against" her, "attacked" her, and planned to fire her.

At the time of the interview, Juanita said that she did not feel like her normal self yet, since her wound was still new (less than two years). Like Emma and Frankie, Juanita explained that she learned how critical it is to have strong bonds, relationships, and friendships with people outside of work as a way to be sustained in times of crisis. She said she learned this the hard way, realizing that her "work friends" were not really her friends. However, she was thankful to know that she had a "supportive family" that reminded her to "trust God" and still remind her today "to rely on her faith" as her anchor to surpass the wounds that "still haunt" her in the present time. Recall, in Chapter VI, I shared how Juanita is still processing her wounding experience; she said she has not yet recovered from her wounds and is still healing with the support of her family. Next, I conclude the intrapersonal healing and recovery section before discussing interpersonal healing and recovery.

Intrapersonal Healing and Recovery: Conclusion

I found that all participants (6/6) said that they experienced different levels of intrapersonal healing and recovery as they processed or began to process their wounding experiences. In this section, I shared stories from Francis's, Emma's, John Black's, Frankie's, and Juanita's reflections to exemplify intrapersonal healing and recovery. While Emma, Francis, and Julie said they felt they have healed and recovered, Frankie and Juanita are still in the process, since their wounds are more recent. John Black understood recovery differently, and I discuss his story in the next section. The stories of Francis, Emma, and John Black showed how these participants learned to be resilient throughout and after their wounding experiences. I then discussed how John Black reflected on an increase in emotional intelligence. Emma's story also showed how important caring for oneself is, according to her. Emma, Frankie, and Juanita provided an insightful telling of how personal relationships sustained them throughout the wounding crisis and were great supports as they healed and recovered or began the process. Interestingly, all participants (6/6) shared a desire to inspire future leaders to take care of themselves and balance personal relationships. When study participants were wounded, they felt that they had to rely on their own resiliency, their emotional intelligence, their care for themselves, and the connections of supportive relationships.

Next, I transition to interpersonal healing and recovery by sharing how half of the participants (Julie, Francis, and Emma) described their journey in their own words. Then, I share John Black's response to questions asked regarding healing and recovering, since he saw it from a different perspective centered on his race. He stated that he has not recovered but acknowledged the need to move on.

Interpersonal Healing and Recovery

I found that half (3/6) of the participants affirmed they have healed and recovered from their wounding experience. In this section, I discuss stories from the three participants—Julie, Francis, and Emma—that describe how they experienced interpersonal healing and recovery and the lessons they have learned from the crisis. That is, I share how Julie, Francis, and Emma describe their healing and recovery in their roles as professionals and leaders. Then I discuss the one participant, John Black, who said he did not recover from the racial context of the experience. Recall that recovery can be defined as "an individualized, intentional, dynamic, and relational process involving sustained efforts to improve wellness" (Ashford et al., 2019, p. 5). The concept of recovery involves healing aspects and is considered an "ongoing process of deliberate and sustained growth" (p. 2).

Julie: "No Longer Bothered"

Julie is an Afro-Latina woman whose decisions were overridden by mayoral control and the bureaucracy of politics within a large urban school district. Julie shared that she was "no longer bothered." Instead, she said she feels that she has found some "peace."

> I'm in a place of peace because I know I did the right thing for children. I gave them my all, and I think it's more on the moral compass of those schools that sabotage the process and allow people to continue engaging in the status quo—like continue to suppress Black and brown people. But because I never compromised my morals, I don't have any resentment or grief.

In this quote, I was particularly struck by Julie's ability to explain that she was able to learn from her healing and recovery because she felt she made the right decisions for students and did not compromise her morals or moral purpose. Julie expressed that others, who she believed had "a different set of values," may continue to "sabotage efforts" to make access to schools within her district more equitable. Her anecdotes,

which demonstrate her understanding of the wound and how she felt she recovered, reminded me of what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b) shared: “The wound is best understood where it hurts. The wound develops in relation to a leader’s efforts, conscious and unconscious, to cope with what we think of as existential conditions and tensions of leadership life” (p. 7). However, although Julie felt that she had recovered, she said that she still feels “sadness that children continue to be suppressed by the privileged.” That sadness, she said, “makes me want to realign … refocus where I stand in this system and how I want to move away from it, and in what capacity and what is it that I want to do to really create the kind of change that needs to happen for my people.”

I believe Julie’s quote speaks to the tensions of leadership life created by existential conditions. For Julie, she explained that these tensions include fighting a battle she thought she was “fighting strategically—and then losing control when final decisions were made” without her input. As she strived to integrate a school and uphold zoning to ensure diversity in the student population, Julie tried to” advance an equity agenda.” She added that she tried to “do the equity work” while those in power, who espoused the theory “equity and excellence for all,” made contradictory decisions. Instead, she said that the final decisions they made supported the privileged, affluent population while undoing the advancement in learning and achievements she made as the superintendent and leader of the district. I believe these conditions make Julie’s journey to finding peace and experience interpersonal healing all the more powerful.

Francis: “Recover More Quickly”

Francis also stated that she had healed and recovered from her wound as a leader. She exclaimed, “Yeah, I recovered from that.” She looked back at another experience and explained how now she is on her toes when it comes to being publicly wounded since, in subsequent districts, other school boards have attempted to wound her as well. However, she said that based on what she learned in her most hurtful experience of finding out that

she no longer had a position during a public reorganization meeting (described in detail in Chapter IV), she now knows "how to recover more quickly" from other wounding experiences.

The next time she was professionally wounded, Francis said she was more prepared "[to] the point where I [now] analyze the data [and situations] on the run." She explained that she now observes situations and prepares mentally to choose whether she will respond or not and, if so, how, as she stated earlier. "I was even ready in my next experience [where she was wounded by another school board] with a quote and a poem" to respond to their wounding words. She said that she recited the poem, "Still I Rise," by Dr. Maya Angelou, which she also selected as the metaphor/image that she thought best described the wounding crisis she selected for this study.

Francis said that she was able to recite "Still I Rise" and used it to reply to demeaning public accusations because she learned (like John Black) how to be prepared with a thoughtful response and remained on guard (being prepared with a response and on guard are elements of what I now call *lasting anxiety*). For example, she said, "Having learned from it [the most impactful wound which she shared in this study], I was able to speak up publicly the next time something as close to this happened." In this instance, Francis was able to link present circumstances with her past wound to become what she calls a "better leader."

Next, I share Emma's story of healing and recovery based on her reflections.

Emma: "You Can't Change or Wallow in the Past"

Emma plainly stated that she had recovered from her wounding experience. Recall that Emma resigned from a job she loved after facing a series of incidents that left her feeling attacked at her core, where she would rather quit than compromise her values. Emma said, "Oh, I've recovered. Absolutely ... I'm just a very positive person." She said

that people often told her, “Oh my god, you’re always looking at the glass half full.” To which she said she always replied:

> Well, I am! I just go forward. I’m just a real—let’s look at the next day type person, because I’ve just seen so many of my colleagues really being hurt by not doing that, for wallowing in the past. We can’t change the past, but we can change the future. That’s always been my mantra. Let’s look forward. What can we do today to make yesterday better? What I can do today is maybe correct some of the things we might have done wrong? I’m just a happy person. I’m a very positive person. I know it drives some people crazy, but overall, people will say that has been helpful [in healing and moving on].

I believe this quote illuminates how Emma felt her positive disposition helped her recovery. That is, I believe she faced her wounding experiences but did not remain stuck in the past. Dedicating her energy to looking forward helped her continue her career and become the superintendent of another district. Like Francis, she said that in her next assignment as superintendent, she was better prepared and applied the lessons she learned, because she “did not wallow in self-pity.” She said that she processed the series of events and “tried to learn from the things she could have done differently,” which allowed her to recover and “look back with little or no regrets.”

John Black: “Continue Your Growth”

John Black, who was wounded as a Black leader when he was called “despicable” by a White Senator, was the one participant that stated outright that he could never recover, yet he did acknowledge that leaders must continue to move forward and continue to grow. He did not describe it as healing or recovery, but stated:

> You have to suck it up and grow up. Continue your growth, continue your development because the external factors that existed in that time past persist in the time present and will forever persist in our American society. Or in society, no matter where [you are]. Black, brown, and poor, doesn’t really matter where you are on this globe. It’s pretty much the same thing structural racism that persists for us.

As is evident through this quote, John Black shared that he feels he may never heal from racism as he experienced it, but he told me that he thinks it is important to learn from the experience and continue growing and developing as a leader. He believes this to be true for himself and others.

During his interview, John Black explained that being "called despicable" while he was in a leadership role only happened because he was a Black man. John Black responded differently than the other (5/6) participants to the questions about recovering from a wound, but still very passionately. He exclaimed:

> Recover, I mean, recover: Do you ever recover from racism? From an institution of government within the structural racist context of America? Do you recover from that? I should hope not. I hope that I never recover from being treated in a racially disparate way that aims at this misrepresentation of our ability to educate all children. Right? This idea that some children can learn, and others cannot—is repugnant and repulsive. This idea promotes a policy framework or political framework that limits opportunities for historically underserved children.
>
> I'm not ever going to recover from that because it persists ... those same [policies] are as present in 2020 as they were in 2000. They're the same as they've always been.... When schools were under-resourced based upon who attends those schools. When materials and teachers, and facilities, and access to childhood curriculum was restricted for poor children throughout the history of public education in America. Recovered? I'm not ... not so much.

John Black explained through this quote how he believes the cause of his wounds had racist roots and that he believes leaders should not be put in the position of having to "recover" from racism. Now, in 2020, we are in the midst of a renewed interest in the Black Lives Matter movement, which has intensified with the increased assassinations of Black men by White police officers. I believe John Black's anger is more relevant than ever. As he shared, John Black believes that "the external factors that existed in that time past persist in the time present and will forever persist in our American society ... 30 years later." I discuss more about viewing the wounding experiences given today's context throughout this dissertation.

However, it is important to note that John Black, similar to Emma and Francis, acknowledged that as a leader, “you can’t stay stuck. You can’t live in the hurt. You can’t live in that moment.” He said that although he can never recover from experiencing racism, “if you really believe what you believe … and your internal value system is truly clear and firmed up … there is a resolve to enact that value system and make society better.”

Much like John Black, all participants (6/6) used powerful imagery when they recounted their stories, when they explained how they learned from and responded to their wounds, and when they reflected on interpersonal healing and recovery. I end this section with a conclusion before providing a chapter summary.

Interpersonal Healing and Recovery: Conclusion

In this section, I described the healing and recovery journeys of three participants (Julie, Francis, and Emma) in their own words. I included an insightful reaction from John Black, who described his transformation post-wound as not a recovery or healing, but a continued growth. In their interviews, Julie and Emma further discussed appreciating other people’s perspectives, while Francis extended the sentiment to being more compassionate to others. John Black shared how his outlook remains unchanged while viewing his wounding experience and the aftermath given today’s current context.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described what each of the six participants learned throughout their wounding experiences and how they described their healing and recovery processes. I organized the chapter into two sections: the first, intrapersonal healing and recovery, and the second, interpersonal healing and recovery. Throughout the chapter, I showed how some participants learned to be resilient, increased emotional intelligence, cared for

themselves, found a need for personal relationships, and became better leaders due to their healing and recovery processes, even when at different stages.

I think that these reflections demonstrate how leaders, regardless of the challenges they face, respond to the challenges by creating transformational learning experiences and work on growing their internal growth and capacity (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018). Similar to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b), I, too, found that "when leaders share a story of crisis, they gain insight into their leadership practice, enhanced self-awareness, empathy for others, and affirmation of self" (p. 105).

Like Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998) study, I was also interested in "not just in the explicit content of the stories –the actions, the events, and responses—but, in how the leaders' stories served to address the woundedness of the leaders and helped them to heal themselves" (p. 3). I explored this idea via Interview 3 and as I analyzed the data relative to RQ 3. In this chapter, I tried to situate the participants' healing and recovery in their experiences by reminding readers of the context where the participants' wounding occurred. In the next chapter, I present my conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter VIII

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I revisit the foundation of my study—including my purpose and goals, selection of participants, research questions, and conceptual framework. I then summarize what I have learned throughout this dissertation study by briefly discussing my research findings. I address study limitations before discussing the implications of my findings and my recommendations for further research. I close this chapter with a personal note.

The Foundation of My Study

In this section, I review my study purpose and goals, participant selection, and my research questions. Then, I revisit my conceptual framework, which I adjusted in light of learnings from participants in my study. Finally, I offer a summary of the findings (presented extensively in Chapters V, VI, and VII) that resulted in response to the research questions that anchored this study. These findings serve as the basis for the implications and recommendations discussed later in this chapter.

Purpose and Goals

Building on Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2001, 2002a, 2002b) series of research studies, the purpose of my study was to examine how six superintendents described and understood a leadership crisis or wounding experience. I sought to discover what the crisis meant to

them then and what it means to them now and how, if at all, they believe their wound influenced them professionally and personally. I also hoped to understand and describe how these superintendents learned from the wounds intra- and interpersonally whether they believed they had healed or recovered.

The goal of my research was to capture a holistic view of how six superintendents made sense of their wounding experiences. By exploring what the wounding experience meant to each of the participants, I sought to add to the limited literature on wounded leaders in the field of educational leadership and on superintendents. By bringing awareness to wounded leaders, my hope is that the field can understand and honor superintendents' experiences and better support future educational leaders who may experience a wound. Like Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002b), throughout my study, I told the leaders' stories by using their words while maintaining confidentiality (p. 3). In the following section, I provide a brief review of how and why I selected these study participants.

Selection of Participants

As a reminder, I chose six superintendents who were identified as having experienced a wounding experience by two experts in educational leadership and research. These six superintendents also self-identified as having experienced a wounding crisis. I selected participants who had at least two years of experience as an educational leader and at least a year serving as a superintendent. I wanted to learn from superintendents who had experienced a wounding crisis at least a year before the interviews and who did not quit after their first year as an educational leader. As I mentioned in Chapters I and III, these superintendents served in various sites across the eastern United States and primarily in urban districts.

Research Questions

As I discussed earlier, I sought to explore how six participants—superintendents at the time of their wounding crisis—described and understood their experience of being wounded. The following research questions anchored my study:

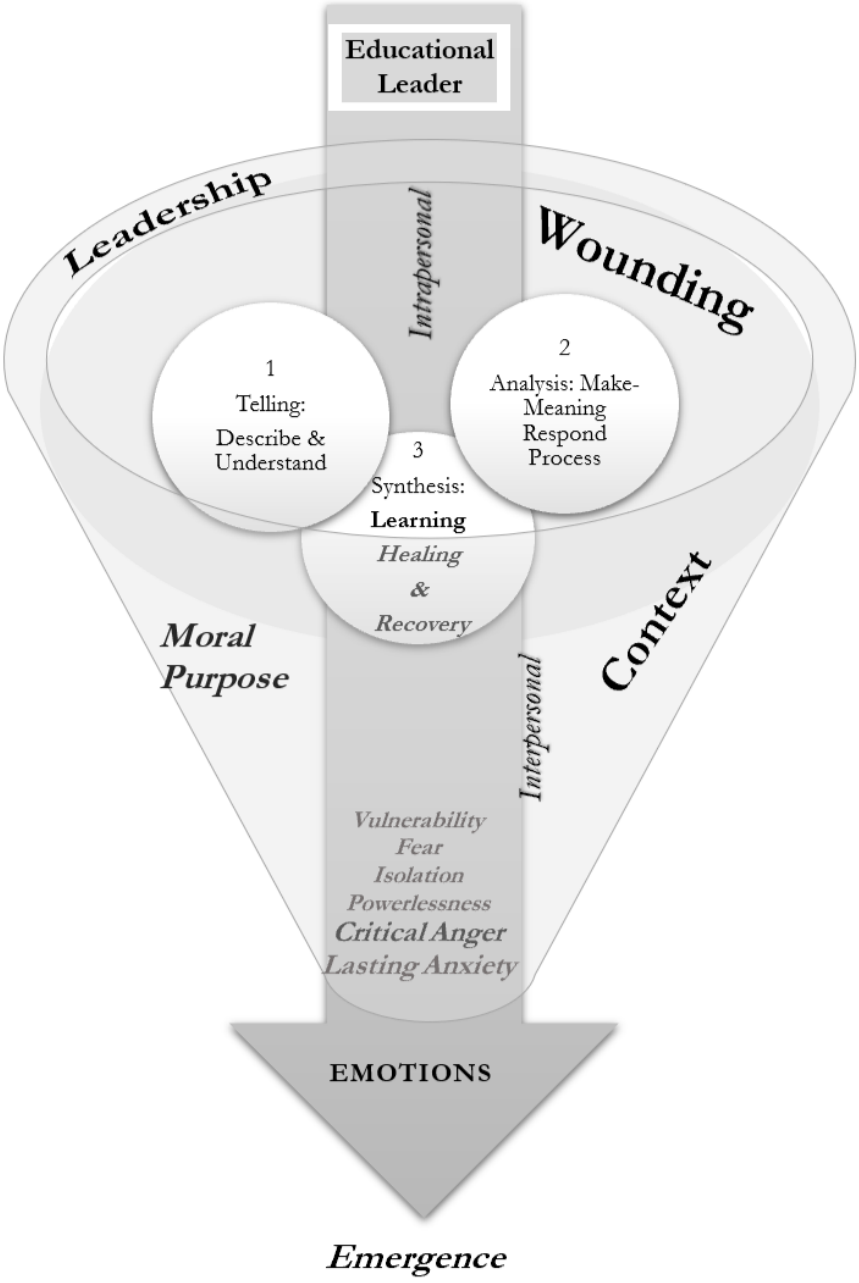
1. How do six superintendents, who have been identified and who also self-identify as having been wounded, describe, and understand a wounding crisis or experience prospectively (at the time—then) and retrospectively (looking back—now)?
2. How do these superintendents describe and understand how they make meaning of, respond to, and process their wounding experience?
3. How, if at all, do they describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? More specifically, how, if at all, do they say that they have healed? How, if at all, do they describe how they are still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?

Conceptual Framework Revisited

Now that I have summarized the findings, I would like to revisit the conceptual framework—and how it changed in relation to what I learned from the participants in my research. As shown in Chapter I, Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of my study's conceptual framework. I have now labeled a revised version Figure 4 to highlight new connections and relationships found during my study. New additions are italicized and in shades of gray.

At the top of Figure 4 is the educational leader (participant superintendent) who experienced a wounding crisis (represented via the arrow at the top). The arrow travels through a funnel that is imbued with the wound, where the superintendent is submerged in the context (e.g., time, place, educational sector) of the experience.

Figure 4. *Conceptual Framework Revisited*



The context (the shaded area in Figure 4) is relevant to my study because I sought to understand how participants responded in different contexts of the education sector, and it situates the wounding experience.

Another new dimension in the revised conceptual framework that I am adding to the wounded leader studies is how students aided in sustaining wounded leaders and in their recovery, which for 6/6 was a moral purpose. For the purpose of my study, moral purpose is defined as a commitment to improving instruction for all students and a belief that with the right supports students, teachers, and a school community can achieve to higher standards (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019; Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Fullan et al., 2006; Munby, 2019). Heifetz et al. (2009) described it as a "shared purpose" to educate all students (p. 39). Within the context, I now added moral purpose to my conceptual framework as a focus to reflect one source of the wound since 6/6 participants said that "doing the right thing for students" caused them to get wounded by upholding their best interests and the best interest of "stakeholders," which is a moral purpose. A focus on their moral purpose also kept them centered to continue to do the "righteous work for children," as both Emma and Francis stated. The term "moral purpose" in Figure 4 is slightly shaded and italicized to represent osmosis (osmosis tends to equalize concentrations of water) and their moral purpose to remain focused on students represented here. According to (6/6) participants, this helped them remain level and focused on what they (6/6) referred to as "the work."

The concepts depicted in the three circles in Figure 4—namely (1) Telling: Describing and Understanding, (2) Analysis: Making-meaning, Respond, Process, and (3) Synthesis: Learning Healing and Recovery—reflect the three research questions that anchored this study. Although I originally designed each interview to be separate, I learned that they sometimes overlapped during data collection. Therefore, in Figure 4, they are now interconnected to reflect that. During my study, the participants had an opportunity to describe how they understood their crisis (circle 1). I have displayed the participants who had an opportunity "to tell their story" as filtering through a funnel shape to imply movement and flow amidst the wound—as a liquid in a funnel would. I think the participants' discussion flowed back and forth between how they viewed the

experience at the time of the crisis—then (prospectively) and how they reflected on what they learned while telling the story now—in present time (retrospectively). Thus, the three circles/interview topics/research questions now overlap.

During the second interview (depicted in circle 2 in Figures 1 and 4) and the third interview (circle 3 in Figures 1 and 4), participants shared how they processed, analyzed, learned, recovered, and healed from their wounding experiences. During these interviews, I found that study participants experienced various emotions as they discussed their wounding crisis. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a, 2004b) named the emotions that surfaced in their study as byproducts of wounding (vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness) and termed these findings the *Givens of Leadership*. In my study, I, too, identified these emotions. However, I also found that participants discussed "critical anger" and "lasting anxiety" as important and prevalent emotions. I term my findings in relation to the emotional parts of wounding the *Givens of Leadership 2.0*. I named the givens in the conceptual framework (inside the arrow representing the wounded leader and their inner intrapersonal world). I also placed the word "emotions" at the neck of the funnel to indicate that the participants (6/6) expressed and said that they experienced different emotions during the wounding crisis and during the study. The funnel represents a filtering of their stories that emerged from the study when participants reflected as they described their wounding crisis (prospectively and retrospectively). As Beatty (2002) and Brackett (2019) explained, emotions provide essential knowledge about ourselves. When adults become actively engaged in their own emotional meaning-making process, the development of self can occur (Beatty, 2002; Brackett, 2019). I believe the participants *emerged* having processed and made meaning, since they shared with me that no one ever asked them to recount the story as "they saw and interpreted it," like Julie stated, for example.

Essentially, during the third interview, the six participants analyzed the stories they shared in the first and second interviews and discussed what they learned from the

wounding crisis. In light of this, I revised the conceptual framework to distinguish between two subcategories of learning and processing of the wounding experience: internal (intrapersonal) and external (interpersonal). Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman (2000a, 2000b; Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a) referred to these in the same manner, and they also termed intrapersonal as going "within" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p.16) or "the inner" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a, p. 3) and interpersonal as "outer" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000a, p. 6) and "without" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 16). Both interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of wounding are critical because leaders must manage their public personas, style, and appearance as well as search for their identity in their "outer" public role (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002b; Munby, 2019). "There are inevitable boundaries drawn between professional life and personal life, between outer life and inner life, mind, and body" and "when outer realities conflict with the inner truth of school leaders … a great wound of the soul is often the result" (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman's, 2000a, p. 3).

The "inner world" is now represented in Figure 4 via the shaded word *intrapersonal* inside the arrow—the education leader—and *interpersonal* is shown outside the arrow within the context or "outer" world (Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000a, p. 6). I found that for these leaders, intrapersonal learning involved building resiliency, increasing emotional intelligence, caring for oneself, and the need for maintaining relationships. Interpersonal discoveries for participants in my study included finding peace, learning to recover more quickly after the first wound, building empathic bonds with others by "sharing our experiences with others to help others work through issues and inspire them with hope," as Emma stated, and an investment in continuous learning.

Over 20 years ago, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski stated that research needed to examine educational leaders' wounding crises to learn about the quality of their subjective experiences and further illuminate the sustaining qualities of the work of

leadership. This recommendation is still relevant today. I believe that my study is important now—in the year 2020—since we are still trying to understand the sustaining qualities of the work of educational leadership, especially after they are wounded. The source of the wounds was linked to implementing change in what participants (6/6) believed was in students' best interest, which leaders may still experience today. Drago-Severson and Maslin-Ostrowski (2018) explained that leading change "can be an adaptive, technical, or mixed challenge in nature," and may "require leaders and those in their care to grow their cognitive and affective (emotional) capacities so that they can manage change" (p. 1).

Figure 4 shows the leader in the experience describing, processing, analyzing, and synthesizing the experience. After this process, the participant superintendent emerges from the funnel—from the wounding experience. Again, my hope in doing this research was to give superintendents a space to share their wounding stories so that the field of educational leadership can learn to better support future leaders who may experience a wounding crisis.

In the next section, I provide a summary of my findings for each research question before synthesizing what I learned.

Summary of Findings

I used the three research questions as a guide to developing a three-part interview protocol in order to learn how these participants—wounded superintendents—told their story of wounding, made meaning of their experience, and described any healing or recovery. In this section, I summarize the findings that surfaced in my analysis as I addressed each research question.

RQ 1: The Telling of the Story of Wounding

- All participants (6/6) described and understood their wounding crisis as (a) originating from doing the right thing for students (and other stakeholders even if it meant leaving the position); (b) a rub against their personal core values; and (c) a blindsiding experience—all participants (6/6) stated that they did not see it coming and did not anticipate being wounded by those they trusted and the community they loved. All participants (6/6) also shared that nothing really prepared them for a wounding experience.
- All participants (6/6) stated that they believed wounding happens to most educational leaders and that being wounded felt inevitable when implementing tough leadership decisions and changes that impact stakeholders. All participants (6/6) expressed concern that there is a lack of preparation for a wounding experience, a lack of support within the organization at the time of the crisis, and a lack of care for the individual after being wounded.

RQ 2: The Emotional Parts of Wounding—Making Meaning, Responding to, and Processing a Wounding Crisis

- All participants (6/6) shared that the second interview, in which I inquired about how they made meaning of their crisis, created a space for them to process their wound. All participants (6/6) shared that they were able to reflect on the emotions they felt at the time of the wound (then) and at the time of the interview (now) to describe how, if at all, they made meaning of the experience. From the six participants' views, describing a wounding experience allowed them to process the wound. Most participants (5/6) expressed that Interview 2 (as well as Interviews 1 and 3) was a source of learning and reflection—from the time the wounding experience took place, they explained that they had not fully processed or attempted to make meaning. I learned that all participants (6/6) expressed that they had rarely discussed or reflected on

this wounding experience, which they felt changed them and impacted them as leaders and as human beings. They all said this study was the first time they really engaged in retelling all aspects of the wounding crisis and had to process it more deeply in order to reflect fully on the learning and recovery.

- I learned that during the meaning making process of telling their story of wounding, several emotions surfaced. Participants (6/6) expressed that some of the byproducts of being wounded included vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness (i.e., originally named *The Givens of Leadership* by Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman in their seminal study in 1998). In addition to these emotions, I also found that most participants (5/6) expressed anger in their reactions, responses, and tones when they shared how they processed the wounding crisis. Anger is an appropriate emotion that I believe can be readily found in educational leaders. *Critical anger* (i.e., which I refer to as anger that developed as a result of systemic biases) served as a motivator for these participants. For them, staying focused on their moral purpose and on what is in the best interest of students and creating conditions to help all students and stakeholders achieve at higher standards was at the heart of their mission. They (4/6) also expressed a *lasting anxiety,* a constant reminder that they were wounded at one time and remained alert and prepared for the possibility of being wounded in subsequent positions—having learned from what they considered to be the most critical wounding experience. In my study, I refer to these findings of the emotional parts of wounding (i.e., vulnerability, isolation, fear, power/powerlessness, and anger) as the *Givens of Leadership 2.0* (discussed in depth in Chapter VI).

RQ 3: Recovery, if at all, and Healing, if at all, from the Experience

- I found that for all participants (6/6) wounds did not heal spontaneously over the course of their careers. Instead, participants shared that their wounds contributed to lasting anxiety, even when some (3/6) explained that they *healed*, or others (3/6) said they are still *recovering.* In fact, they all said that it is still a battle to fully overcome and forget how damaging their wounds have been to them personally and professionally.

  As discussed, Ardolino (2006) and Koltai (2018) used medical terms to make a distinction between recovery and healing. By way of reminder, Ardolino argued that while both terms are sometimes used interchangeably, recovery is a return to pre-injury status. Healing, on the other hand, is when a wound return to a normal state. "Healing more specifically implies physical healing of cells and tissues. Recovery is more focused on a return to normal function or a former state. There are many steps involved in returning a patient to their former state, and wound healing is the first of these steps" (Ardolino, 2006, p. 1). One can imply from this distinction that we can heal but not necessarily recover and that we cannot recover without healing first. For example, Frankie and Juanita, the two youngest participants in my study, who also have the most recent wounds, explained that they are still processing their experiences. Recovery is not a concept they were able to discuss—they shared—as they were still figuring out how to begin to heal. A wound can heal, but recovery takes time (Ardolino, 2006; Koltai, 2018).
- All six participants (6/6) shared what they learned about themselves (intrapersonally) throughout and after the wounding experience. This included developing resiliency (5/6), a higher emotional intelligence (6/6), an increase in caring capacity (4/6), a better awareness of the need for self-care (5/6), personal relationship development (6/6), and a greater understanding of oneself

(6/6). Half of the participants (3/6) explained how they transformed as leaders by learning about themselves interpersonally. These lessons included: finding peace and no longer being bothered by the past (2/6) and learning to recover more quickly from subsequent wounding experiences (1/6). As part of the recovery or healing process, all participants (6/6) shared a desire to inspire future leaders to care for themselves. When the study participants were wounded, each one of them emphasized to me that they felt they really had to rely on their own resiliency and inner strength (5/6), their emotional intelligence (4/6), their care for themselves (5/6), and the connections of personal relationships (6/6).

Limitations

In this section, I acknowledge and describe the limitations of my study, including researcher positionality, researcher bias, reactivity, and small sample size. Dean et al. (2018) explained that researcher positionality in qualitative research means that an individual researcher's personal values can shape how they analyze data. Because I am an educational leader who has experienced a wounding crisis, my positionality may contribute to researcher bias and reactivity. According to Maxwell (2013), "bias refers to ways in which data collection or analysis are distorted by the researcher's theory, values, or preconceptions" (p. 243).

To address researcher positionality and bias, I named my relation to the study and topic upfront to all of the participants in my introductory letter and in the first conversation before each participant committed to participating in the study. In order to attend to these validity threats, I engaged in member checks during the second and third interviews and shared transcripts with each participant for review and solicited feedback about my data and conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). Gathering "rich data" in a three-part

interview protocol enabled me to collect detailed and varied data, which were transcribed verbatim and provided rich and detailed grounding for my findings (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). In order to attend to the validity of my conclusions, these "rich data" were embedded throughout my findings as evidence for each claim. I also engaged in bracketing by naming my biases up front, memoing (keeping multiple journals), and sharing my thinking with my advisor and another research student.

Additionally, I also want to acknowledge that this qualitative study presents findings that are only generalizable to this sample of participants—what Maxwell (2013) refers to as "internal generalizability" (p. 137). The generalizability of my findings is limited by the small sample size of this study—I cannot make claims beyond this particular set of participants (six superintendents) and research sites (districts in the Northeast of the United States).

Future studies should aim to increase the number of participants and consider expanding the research to include principals and district leaders. A greater number of participants of educational leaders' wounding experience can be examined. The sample size could also be increased to include a greater number of diverse participants in terms of race, gender, age, and experience to capture trends and investigate the generalizability of my findings. While my sample was intentionally diverse, with respect to participants of different races and gender, increasing the sample number and maintaining a diverse sample, including female and male ratio, as well as different racial backgrounds, would serve well in an expansion of this study in order to find generalizability.

Implications and Recommendations

In this section, I present implications and recommendations that follow from my study findings. Based on empirical evidence gathered in this study, my experience as a practitioner, my personal experience as a scholar—from a global perspective, I have

learned that, like me, the participants in this study (who have generously interpreted their wounding experiences for my research) sought recovery after being wounded as an educational leader. I discuss my first recommendation: school districts and the education sector should better prepare and support current and future leaders in their work—before, during, and after a potential wounding experience—by viewing wounding as an adaptive challenge. Then, I discuss my second recommendation: school districts and the education should sector create forums for voicing, processing, responding to, and learning from wounding crises where leaders can fully express their emotions in order to determine avenues for recovery and healing. Finally, I discuss my third recommendation: school districts and education sector should foster environments to support and sustain wounded leaders. Before concluding this section, I share my suggestions for further research.

Recommendation One: View the Wounding Crisis as an Adaptive Leadership Challenge

The Adaptive Leadership framework that I used to analyze the participants' wounds not only serves as a tool to examine stories of wounding, but I recommend that the framework can also be used to help educational leaders and the districts that support them. While wounding can happen as a result of technical, adaptive, and/or mixed challenges, in the case of my research, all six participants explained their unique wounding experiences in a way that meets the criteria Heifetz (1994) and colleagues (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) used to define adaptive challenges. Viewing a wounding crisis that stems from adaptive challenges offers pragmatic ways to prepare for and learn from the experience (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). While it may be true that participants in my research experienced other wounds that could be connected to technical or mixed challenges, the challenges that led to the wounding crises that the participants selected for discussion were adaptive in nature. Each participant was wounded due to instituting a change that asked people to give up old habits, values, and ways of thinking. For example, Emma and John worked to

desegregate schools. Julie attempted to make enrollment practices more equitable. Juanita sought to redistribute district resources. Frankie upheld the rights of the students by hearing and valuing their voices and opinions.

In general, wounds are multidimensional. For example, Julie's wound is adaptive in nature (making equitable enrollment policies throughout the district and ensuring that affluent White parents do not control access to one particular school). However, some elements of her wounding experience are technical, since they have some technical solutions. For example, when the decision was overridden, enrollment was allowed to continue with a technical registration policy. However, the root cause of the wound, as Julie explained, was a difference in beliefs. For Frankie, it was a values clash. Even if he could have obeyed his superior and adopted some technical solutions like enforcing a tardy policy and strict uniform policy, it was his belief in the way he wanted young adults at his school to be treated (to have a voice in decision making and choice) that caused his wound. Frankie said he wanted to run his school differently—with a culture of respect and not just strict rules.

Adaptive leadership. The practice of adaptive leadership aims to "help people tolerate the discomfort they are experiencing" and "to live into the disequilibrium" (Heifetz et al. 2009, p. 17). I believe confronting the wounding crisis through adaptive leadership can be used as a tool for preparing and supporting leaders who may experience a wound. I am suggesting that in order to better understand what precedes a wound, the experience of a wounded leader, and how we can better support wounded leaders, we need to be aware of wounding situations that are adaptive in nature—where there are no simple solutions. I recommend that districts, schools, and the education sector provide professional development where wounds can be approached using an adaptive leadership framework. Challenges (technical, adaptive, and/or mixed) can be confronted by learning to live in the productive zone of disequilibrium, observing, interpreting, and intervening; engaging above and below the neck; and connecting to purpose (Heifetz et al., 2009).

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), learning to live in the productive zone of disequilibrium requires helping "people navigate through a period of disturbance as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable, and as they experiment with solutions to the adaptive challenges at hand" (p. 28).

Helping superintendents and other educational leaders and stakeholders live in disequilibrium is the first step in preparing and supporting leaders as they navigate the professional challenges that may cause wounding experiences. This disequilibrium can catalyze everything from conflict, frustration, and panic to confusion, disorientation, and fear of losing something dear (Heifetz et al., 2009, pp. 28-29).

One way to help leaders with adaptive challenges and address other kinds of challenges that leaders outside of my study may face that may also lead to wounding is to engage in the cyclical process of observing, interpreting, and intervening (Heifetz et al., 2009). By making it a habit to observe patterns, interpret observations, and design interventions to address wounding, school districts can show support for superintendents and other educational leaders. The next step to supporting superintendents through the adaptive leadership framework is to consistently try to define and adapt to the challenge at hand so that challenges do not escalate. Finally, Heifetz et al. (2009) recommend the need to connect to "purpose," *or moral purpose*, which I propose is a final step in supporting educational leaders through an adaptive leadership framework, since "in the heat of difficult conversations and tough choices" stakeholders in the community "often become distracted from their shared purpose: education of young people" (p. 39). As the participants (6/6) in my study said, "We are here to do what is in the best interests of students," which I depict as *moral purpose* on my revised conceptual framework in Figure 4.

Supporting superintendents and other educational leaders is tremendously important—especially given today's current educational context. As we know, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closings nationwide and worldwide, an increased

focus on the Black Lives Matter movement and systemic racism raises critical concerns in our nation, and a historical presidential election creates unprecedented challenges (for educational leaders and the world at large). These challenges, which may be adaptive in nature, could potentially lead to a wounding crisis, even though they may include some inherent technical and mixed challenges. With no simple solution, these challenges require a new way of thinking and solving uncharted dilemmas in education and worldwide. Now more than ever, we need to begin acknowledging, understanding, and supporting wounded superintendents, who have faced and lived through crises—doing so is necessary to help minimize future wounds and support all educational leaders.

Recommendation Two: Create Environments that Help Leaders Emerge from Wounding

In order to help make meaning of wounding crises, to learn and move forward from the wounding experience, the educational sector should foster an environment that allows wounded educational leaders the opportunity to voice and process their experiences and emotions. Based on Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's seminal study in 1998, byproducts of being wounded included vulnerability, isolation, fear, and powerlessness (i.e., the *Givens of Leadership*). I also found that participants (6/6) in my study expressed anger in their reactions, responses, and tones when they shared how they processed—and are processing—the wounding crisis. I believe one safe way to provide a forum for wounded educational leaders is by creating effective holding environments that combine a level of high support and a high level of challenge "in order to encourage growth" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 47). An explanation of holding environments and two recommended "pillar practices" from Drago-Severson (2008, 2009, 2012) are detailed below.

Developing holding environments. According to Drago-Severson (1996, 2009, 2012), a "holding environment" is "a context in which adults feel well held psychologically, understood in terms of how they make sense of their work and the

world, and accepted and honored for who they are" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48). The term "holding environment" was originally conceived by D. W. Winnicott in 1965 to describe the experiences healthy infants receive as they grow and later used by Kegan (1982) to explain necessary opportunities for growth and development across the lifespan (as cited in Drago-Severson, 2012). Drago-Severson (2012) extended Kegan's use of the term by focusing on the creation of supportive holding environments in schools, school districts, and university preparation programs, to name a few.

In other words, a holding environment is a context where the conditions are intentionally constructed so that the adult/leader feels listened to, cared for, and safe enough to take the risk to grow within their developmental capacity or way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2012). Holding environments also serve as a prerequisite for implementing Drago-Severson's Four Pillar Practices (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2013; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2018a). Because holding environments can be structured as forums that offer support for leaders, wounded superintendents can begin voicing and processing their wounds in a holding environment, which is a vital aid in healing and recovery.

Using Pillar Practices to support growth. Implementing Drago-Severson's (2012) three of the four Pillar Practices, tailored to different leaders' Ways of Knowing (WOK), can aid in helping wounded leaders process their experience as they tell their story in safe holding environments. That is, I believe by using professional development structures such as *teaming* (fostering collaboration and capacity building), *mentoring/ developmental coaching*, and *collegial inquiry* (where there is a forum to test possible ways of responding to the wound via careful questioning and feedback), three of the four Pillar Practices, we can help a wounded leader find and make meaning of their crisis. A more in-depth look at teaming, mentoring, and collegial inquiry (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012) follows.

Teaming. Teaming is a Pillar Practice that offers members with different WOK an opportunity for groups within an organization to work together and learn from different perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2008, 2009, 2012). I suggest there is a need for teaming as a practice for creating effective and safe holding environments for superintendents to help push mutual work forward. It is a collaborative decision-making process that allows all perspectives to be valued through established ground rules, opportunities for questioning assumptions, and to grow together (Drago-Severson, 2012).

I suggest teaming for superintendents to team with other superintendents via professional organizations, especially in places that have multiple districts. For example, Julie and Francis worked in a city where several community school districts fell within a larger city under mayoral control where superintendents can work together across districts and engage in teaming. I recommend teaming based on the findings in my study, i.e., participants "feeling alone," "with no one to turn to," feeling that there was "no support." The longer-term objective of my study is to find ways to support superintendents, preferably before they are wounded, and certainly during and after—teaming is one way to help create and sustain relationships from superintendent to superintendent.

Mentoring and coaching. "Mentoring (and its related practice, coaching, with developmental intentionality)" can provide emotional support to wounded superintendents since it is a "more private and relational approach to supporting" educational leaders (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018a, p. 87). Wounded superintendents would benefit from mentoring and coaching with developmental intentionality. In this type of mentoring, both mentor and mentee would share expectations of their work and receive support in developmental theory, meaning they would know each other's WOK and how to support and challenge the other (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2018a). Both mentoring and coaching also allow for constructive and confidential

conversations, which would help support leaders before, during, or after a wounding experience.

Collegial Inquiry. Collegial Inquiry is a shared dialogue that purposefully involves reflecting on one's assumptions, values, beliefs, commitments, and convictions with others as part of the learning process (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). Exploring these practices is one possible way that may help leaders process and make meaning of their wounding crisis.

In my study, I found that offering participants opportunities to share their stories of wounding and then review their transcribed responses aided in allowing leaders to be reflective. It was surprising to find that all the participants (6/6) expressed that they had rarely discussed or reflected on an experience that changed them and impacted them as leaders and as human beings. They each said that this study was the first time they really engaged in retelling all aspects of the wounding crisis and had to process it more deeply in order to reflect fully on learning and recovery. I believe the interview structure also allowed participants to experience a "clearness committee," which Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004a) described as a disciplined approach to conversation aimed at collective and professional growth with people who are willing to bear witness to our stories without trying to fix the challenge posed for discussion by asking open and honest questions (p. 31).

I believe that Collegial Inquiry could serve that purpose—a clearness committee—for wounded leaders, because it is a disciplined approach to conversation, which, in turn, aids in professional growth via structured protocols for open-ended questioning and reflection. Perhaps districts or superintendent associations could facilitate a way for superintendents to form a collective. Alternatively, a superintendents' organization could offer structured long-term connections, which could encourage engagement in collegial inquiry as a practice before, during, and/or after a wounding crisis.

Reflecting on practice. Teaming and Collegial Inquiry, two of the Four Pillar Practices (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012), as I described, are two ways to reflect on practices that take into account a leader's Way of Knowing (WOK), how they view the world and themselves and are implemented by creating a holding environment. Other reflective practices, such as journaling, are completed alone and are a method for developing a greater self-awareness about the nature and influence of leadership, as defined by Osterman and Kottkamp (2004), and as enhanced by Drago-Severson (2009, 2012). While reflective practices such as journaling are done privately, teaming, and collegial inquiry are done collectively (Drago-Severson, 2008).

Participants (6/6) in my research told me that the interview process allowed these wounded superintendents to tell their story, reflect on it retrospectively, and retell through multiple interviews. They also explained that the interviews and the process of multiple opportunities to be listened to served as a catalyst for processing the wounding crisis and aided in their own meaning-making of the experience. Re-creating environments that foster the same kind of processing and mean-making could be of vital importance in the education sector. I recommend fostering a holistic reflection on practice—that involves individual reflective practices and group processing through teaming and collegial inquiry.

Another possible way of creating environments that support leaders who have experienced wounding crises lives in the structure of the organization and how the system sustains the leaders. Next, I offer one possible framework that may help support leaders who are wounded within the systems where educational leaders operate, whether they are small suburban or larger urban districts.

Cultivating a Deliberate Developmental Organization (DDO). When leaders are provided the opportunity to unpack their own weakness, they are better able to learn and grow (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016; Kegan et al., 2014). In creating an environment for superintendents to unpack their perceived weakness and tell their stories of wounding,

they may better understand how they may have failed to manage others' perceptions and left themselves open to vulnerabilities in different levels of the organization within the education system. I believe that cultivating opportunities to hear from wounded leaders and addressing gaps in support can be accomplished through fostering—what Kegan and colleagues refer to as a Deliberate Developmental Organization (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016; Kegan et al., 2014).

The Deliberate Developmental Organization (DDO) framework is most commonly used in business, but it has been piloted in the education sector. I believe the model can serve as a tool specifically for school districts addressing wounding crises. According to Kegan and Lahey (2016), a DDO allows leaders to improve themselves as part of the work requirement. As Kegan and colleagues (2014) explained, high-performing companies recognize that success is highly dependent on the capabilities of their people, but they offer an alternative to the never-ending search for obtaining the right people or winning the "talent-war mindset" (p. 1). Instead of creating a talent war, a DDO aims to attract and retain talent via support and development; Kegan et al. (2014) described the DDO practice as creating an organization with "[d]eep alignment with people's motives to grow … in which support to people's ongoing development is woven into the daily fabric of working life, visible in the company's regular operations, day-to-day routines, and conversations" (p. 2). The scholars went on to suggest that cultivating a DDO:

> requires commitment to nurturing a very different kind of culture—one that sees individual growth not only as a means but as an end; error and inadequacy as opportunities to transcend current limitations; and powerful communities at work as homes for the deeply rewarding disturbances that develop personal and organizational potential. (p. 14)

Thus, I believe in creating a Deliberate Development Organization (DDO), where "errors and inadequacy" or "limitations" that may be caused or created by a wounding crisis allow opportunities for educational leaders to be supported before, during, and after wounding. It is possible to change how the education sector (districts, education systems)

provides supportive environments for wounded leaders. I believe Kegan et al.'s (2016) developmental organization model offers a support structure as we consider ways to support leaders who may be recuperating from a wounding experience within the setting of education leadership. Since the education sector is a learning environment, I think the idea of viewing districts as powerful communities has the potential for cultivating districts where everyone learns and grows.

Superintendents on average remain on the job for three to four years (Chingos et al., 2014; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kriesky, 2018). Given the low retention rates and the "dearth of" superintendents (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, p. 1), it seems that it would serve the education sector well to consider operating in more deliberate and developmental ways, including mentoring or coaching support for superintendents embedded in their initial contracts. For example, in some cases, I believe there were missed opportunities for the school boards, the mayor, and other stakeholders to view disturbances (i.e., the school closure, closing the budget gaps by paying off the consultants) as a rewarding potential to create a powerful community.

Recommendation Three: Support Wounded Leaders in Coping and Responding to Their Crisis

Recall that my goal for this research, besides understanding how six educational leaders discuss a self-described leadership crisis/wounding experience and how, if at all, they believe their wounding experience influenced them professionally and personally, was to understand and describe how these superintendents coped with and responded to wounds. My findings have led me to conclude that there is a need for superintendents to be able to process the crisis both while experiencing it and after the wound has occurred. Next, I recommend ways that may help wounded leaders process and respond to wounds, and perhaps heal and recover, on a personal level.

Engaging in recognizing and regulating emotions. In previous chapters. I shared the current research (Brackett, 2019) on emotion management via the RULER approach

(https://www.rulerapproach.org/). It is my recommendation that wounded leaders engage in social-emotional learning at the superintendent level in programs like RULER's Seedlings Institute for educational leaders (https://www.rulerapproach.org/training/seedlings-institute-for-educational-leaders). Programs like these should become part of their professional development toolkit. Superintendents can learn to process "emotions wisely" in the workplace by recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating them effectively to employ strategies that support them as they meet work through demands that require "emotional labor" (Brackett, 2019, p. 220)—like wounding and processing crises (during and after). Our emotions affect our mental state and the emotions of those around us; therefore, it is important to help leaders learn how to better regulate the emotions that surface, as this is a skill needed in the workplace (Brackett, 2019, p. 220), but rarely acknowledged or discussed.

Drago-Severson (2012) recommends yoga practice as an individual strategy for self-development. Therefore, another recommendation that may help leaders recover and heal is a yoga-based program called RISE for educational leaders. RISE (resilience, integration, self-awareness, engagement) is a five-day program delivered at the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Massachusetts (https://kripalu.org/rise; Trent et al., 2019). RISE includes yoga, meditation, lectures, experiential activities, mindfulness practices, breathing techniques, and education about mindful communication, mindful sleep preparation, and mindful eating (Trent et al., 2019). Research shows that it improves psychological and occupational well-being in education professionals (Trent et al., 2019). Education professionals, such as superintendents, are exposed to a considerable level of stress. In the United States, more than half of educators experience excessive stress several days per week, and nearly 40% of educators leave their positions in the first five years (Trent et al., 2019); superintendents last an average of 3-4 years (Chingos et al., 2014). Chronic workplace stress puts educators at risk for health problems, including mortality (Trent et al., 2019). In order for superintendents to protect themselves from

these negative consequences, it is imperative that educational leaders like them obtain resources that help them cope with the stress produced by the nature of the work (Trent et al., 2019), especially when they experience wounding crises.

Engaging in collegial inquiry and reflective practices. Again, based on my data analysis of the third interview, in particular, I recommend that superintendents engage in reflective practices alone and collegial inquiry with others as possible avenues for processing the wound in efforts to aid intrapersonal healing. Reflection on practice is essential for leaders in truly understanding themselves and their experiences. Asking the right questions, such as "What really happened? Why did it happen? What did it do to me? What did it mean to me?" (Bennis, 2009, p. 57) or "Who am I?" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000a) are ways to discover new life and, as I believe, begin healing from the wound.

As Drago-Severson (2009) articulated, engaging in collegial inquiry provides leaders "opportunities for experimenting with new ideas, ways of thinking, behaviors, and strategies" (p. 75). As Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2015, 2016) explained, exploring our core elements is vital to being an effective leader. This exploration includes understanding how we speak, listen, see, and act, but also how we welcome and respond to questions, connect, and build relationships, and seek new knowledge to develop our capacities (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015, p. 41; Drago-Severson, 2012). These ways of reflection require recognizing the importance of context and culture, as they both impact our thoughts and actions (Drago-Severson, 2009). Deepening our understanding of the culture and the context and culture of the events (when they occurred) is an essential component, I believe, to understanding and complementing the healing and recovery processes of wounded leaders.

According to Bennis (2009), reflection leads to understanding and occurs by unlearning pressures from others and, as leaders, being self-directed learners who "discern learning from others but are not being made by others" (p. 64). Bennis identified

this as a distinguishing paradox for leaders, since they must learn to synthesize the self and others, and begin to inspire others by first trusting themselves and inspiring themselves, while taking the products of everything that impacts their lives to recreate themselves by using experiences "rather than be used by" them (p. 64).

Reflection on practice was essential in relation to the study because part of the third interview was to understand how the participants made meaning of the experience in the way they reconstructed the story. In the third interview, participants reflected on the first and second interviews as a way to gain deeper meaning. Zooming in and out on the crises through reflection seemed to invite the individual participant to take an up-close look at the wounding experience and make-meaning—as they shared with me. I believe that if superintendents who are wounded would engage in a structured opportunity for reflection (i.e., listening, speaking, seeing), then perhaps the benefits of the reflection on practice, as provided by this study, can be replicated.

Another recommendation I have for superintendents who have been wounded is to set intentions to renew and recharge, which can also help sitting superintendents and those in preparation programs. Drago-Severson et al. (2013) found that for educational leaders, making space for self-care is of "vital importance of maintaining a comfortable work-life balance, connecting with others, and finding space for reflection" (p. 224). Similar to one of the findings in the case stories shared in Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002a) work, in my study, it was clear in the telling of some wounding experiences that for leaders, it was very easy to be used by their experiences, and that those wounding experiences can frame a leader's life story. In an effort to fix the wound or the damage caused by the wound, some leaders increased their devotion to work and spent less time with family and community. Ironically, it is in the time with family and community that may help sustain a leader, as Francis, Juanita, and Frankie, and later Emma, acknowledged. For example, Emma said that looking back, she wished she had taken more time for herself to balance, to be with family and friends, and time away from

the district to think about solutions to the challenges she faced. Thus, I recommend setting the intention to renew and recharge.

Setting the intention to renew and recharge. After finding that the wounded leaders in my study said they wished they had had time to process the crisis while they were in it, taken time away for themselves to reflect and recharge, and relied on their own resiliency and inner strength to heal, I suggest that leaders who find themselves wounded prioritize ways to renew and recharge the self. Drago-Severson (2012) called renewing and recharging through self-development, "returning to the central dot: refilling the self" (p. 191). In order to make space to restore ourselves, grow, and create holding environments for personal support, she offers three strategies: "1) securing support for oneself, 2) prioritizing self-development, and 3) making time for self-renewal" (p. 192).

Drago-Severson (2012) pointed out that self-development relates to our own internal capacity, and not surprisingly, in her research, she found there is a paucity of literature on structures that support how to grow our inner selves. In searching for literature to recommend as a suggestion for wounded leaders, I too found the same. Therefore, I offer her strategies as suggestions for wounded superintendents who need to renew, recharge, recover, and find balance (before, during, and after a wounding crisis). As Drago-Severson explained, it is important to care for one's growth as the world becomes increasingly complex, and the adaptive challenges we face require greater internal capacities, even when the work of superintendents, as well as other educational leaders, becomes more demanding. While independent strategies for self-development include writing (journaling regularly), reading, meditating, practicing yoga (e.g., RISE program for leaders that I recommended above), and attending conferences, Drago-Severson (2012) stated that we also need the support of others to help us grow.

In her research, Drago-Severson (2012) found that many leaders prefer to "talk with someone to support their growth rather than read about it" (p. 199)—which I think is an essential element for leaders who have been wounded. One strategy for self-

development that can help us connect with others is forming dyads (a one-to-one thought partnership). This includes mentoring or what Drago-Severson (2012) refers to as co-mentoring, which acknowledges that both partners have the expertise to help the other grow. Collegial Inquiry, discussed as an earlier recommendation as well, also offers opportunities for self-development. Collegial Inquiry functions like a critical friends group that comes together regularly and employs the use of protocols to build their own and each other's internal capacity by challenging and supporting one another through purposely reflecting on leadership challenges (Drago-Severson, 2012).

Drago-Severson (2012) highlights the importance of renewing and refilling the self. Also, in her learning-oriented model for leadership development and support, Drago-Severson "emphasizes the importance of learning that involves changes in seeing, understanding, and being better equipped educational leaders to meet the many complex adaptive challenges they face" (p. 6). This model rests on the belief that while informational learning (i.e., increase of in skills, content, and information such as budgets, data analysis) is important, transformational learning changes how leaders interpret information, and experiences (Drago-Severson, 2012), wounding experiences, I suggest, is one of them.

Thus, I recommend Drago-Severson's (2012) learning-oriented leadership framework as one way to think about how we can support wounded superintendents and educational leaders. I suggest that there is a need for wounded leaders to find ways to recharge and renew after experiencing a wounding crisis in order to recover and continue with their careers.

Based on the findings in my study, I think that reflection on practice, as well as strategies for personal development and renewal, is necessary to aid wounded leaders as they recover personally and professionally. I recommend that individual superintendents seek renewal within themselves, in their district, university programs, and educational organizations. Study participant Francis, for example, who was wounded during a

reorganization in a large urban district, said that she was able to recover from her wound because she had the support of colleagues in the Broad Foundation. This educational organization supports public education systems nationwide with grants to support school district leadership and best practices (https://broadfoundation.org/education/). Francis explained, “It was a group of like-minded people with very similar experiences, but also still just had a commitment to public education. So that’s a piece that Broad was able to do that I do think formal education circles could do more of that.” This was an opportunity for Francis to renew, recharge, and recover. She said after being wounded, “being in a sphere of other superintendents … with people all around the country … positioned” her “in a better place” and allowed her to “connect with the academic and the practical, not just one person or two, but with people with different strengths, different stimuli, [who] take very different paths … [who] expose you to different leadership circles and stories and help you take charge of your story. That’s the powerful learning.”

Next, I share my ideas and suggestions for future research before summarizing the importance of this work and concluding with a final thought.

Suggestions for Further Research

How might future studies contribute to the supporting superintendents and other wounded educational leaders? Utilizing Kegan’s Constructive-Developmental Theory (C-DT) as a theoretical construct seems appropriate when exploring the stories of wounding that education leaders share. I suggest that by using C-DT as a foundation for future studies, the education sector can gain a better understanding of the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development of individuals as well as bring more awareness to the appropriate environments for facilitating growth (Drago-Severson, 1996, 2004a, 2009; Helsing & Howell, 2014; Kegan, 1984, 2000, as cited in Drago-Severson, 1996, 2004a, 2009, 2012).

As I think about how leaders were able to tell their stories and make meaning of their leadership wounds, I thought the CD-T framework could be informative in future studies. Because C-DT takes into consideration how adults interpret the world, the theory considers different lenses based on different levels of development (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012, 2016). I think that leaders at different levels of development may view and reconstruct their wounding experiences differently. Constructive-Developmental Theory offers a way of understanding implicit and explicit developmental demands placed on adults. It is my recommendation that subsequent studies can consider educational leaders' developmental capacity as one way to better understand stories of wounding so that we can better support educational leaders and ourselves.

Further, Drago-Severson's (2004a, 2009, 2013) Ways of Knowing (WOK) framework is an extension of Kegan's Constructive-Developmental Theory. Using the WOK to frame future studies may offer additional approaches to analyzing the stories of wounded leaders beyond the *Quest, Chaos,* and *Restitution* framework used in this study as well as by Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a) to analyze the narratives they captured. Considering educational leaders' WOK and how, if at all, their WOK influence the leaders' understanding of the wound, making meaning, responding, and recovering could be an important consideration for future research.

As Drago-Severson (2009) wrote, "Ways of Knowing represent a new meaning-making system for how adults make sense of their experiences, themselves, and their various roles" (p. 52). While using the WOK system works to identify the supports and challenges needed depending on a leaders' developmental capacity, to the best of my knowledge, these tools have not been used to explore how superintendents make meaning of crises or wounding experiences.

In my opinion, the descriptors of the different WOK may help future researchers better understand the participants and know how to approach asking questions and probing for how the wounded leader is making sense of the experience based on their

developmental capacity. I agree with Drago-Severson (2009) when she states, “Asking questions and probing for how a person is making sense of an experience is a good way to understand an adult’s way of knowing … it is important to understand the broader principles of development and know how to listen for them” (p. 61). In future research, we can listen to how superintendents with different WOK make sense of a wounding experience to better inform how we can sustain educational leaders who have been wounded and coach them based on their developmental capacity.

Examining educational leaders’ wounding stories through the lens of developmental diversity, particularly the Ways of Knowing (WOK), may help the educational sector better understand how leaders experience their wounding crises in different ways and how they may reconstruct their crises to retell their stories. Perhaps a continuum could be developed in subsequent research capturing how wounded leaders qualitatively made sense of their different wounding experiences based on their WOK. Since WOK reflects an adult’s perspective on how they experience the world, it would be an important next step to better understand how that informs the telling of the story, meaning making, and recovery. This, in turn, will inform both research and practice on how to even better support practicing and future superintendents (with different developmental capacities) who are bound to experience adaptive challenges, and may be wounded, at some point in their career.

Future research can also extend this study to include a greater number of participants with intentional diversity in terms of race, gender, age, and experience. In addition, since race and gender were emphasized by participants in my research, further research should focus on: (1) exploring the protective factors that allowed the participants to withstand a wounding crises and if there is any relation to race and gender, and (2) examining social location, i.e., according to Hearn (2012) also referred to as positionality and defined as a person’s position as the result of “social factors which include, but not limited to, race, sex, class, gender, ability, age, religion, sexual

orientation, nationality, physical stature, education, occupation, relational status, language, etc." (p. 42). Specifically, how does racial and gender identity relate to wounding? And, (3) intersectionality, i.e., according to Al-Faham et al. (2019) defined as the inter-relationship of identifiers, such as gender and race, that construct social positions. Intersectionality categorizes "others into their existing frames in order to understand and make sense of what they see and experience" and is "helpful for participants in their meaning making" (Hearn, 2012, p. 44). Future studies might also link this to my recommendation about understanding how wounded leaders construct meaning based on their WOK and the relationship or the influence of their social location.

The world continues to change, and we will continue to face challenges that may lead to wounding due to differences. It is critical to engage in future studies so we can better understand wounding experiences and create systems in order to support and sustain educational leaders, especially superintendents.

Conclusion

Like Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002a, 2002b), I suggest that even today, 20 years later, there is still a need for leadership development and the conditions necessary for the leaders to find their own path and personal and professional fulfillment (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002b). Perhaps it is via Drago-Severson's learning-oriented leadership model, which places the leader at the center.

Based on my experience as a principal, district leaders, and superintendent, it seems that the final score in education, in the age of accountability for leaders, is on student results alone with little interest, feedback, or celebration of the process itself or adults as learners. Given the increased pressures and complexity for educational leaders in the 21st century, we need to create a space that integrates personal learning as ongoing support for leaders, since they are prone to be wounded. I hope to have shed light on

wounding in educational leadership and to have shared meaningful recommendations for supporting superintendents before and after they experience a wounding crisis.

I agree with Drago-Severson (2016) statement that:

> In school systems around the world, it is becoming clear that we need to better care for … leaders and all who dedicate themselves to improving conditions. We need to learn how to better help them grow—as needs for their leadership increase. We need to do something different, something more. (p. 57)

The Importance of Surfacing Wounding Experiences

At the time of writing this chapter, there were over 250,000 deaths in the United States due to the COVID-19 pandemic and over one million deaths worldwide (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/). In addition, in New York City, the Department of Education is the first in the nation to have students return to school via a blended learning (in-person and remote) model amidst controversy from teacher and administrator unions. Although most education decisions are local decisions, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust education policy onto the national stage, bringing unusual attention to new debates about when to reopen schools and what resources schools need to get back on track (Belsha & Barnum, 2020). These are unprecedented times for educational leaders and educators worldwide. Besides the challenges posed in the new era of educating students remotely since March 2020, when schools were shut down, some educators have succumbed to COVID-19. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, in New York City, where 81 staff in the NYCDOE of education have passed away, there is little mention of the wound this creates for school communities. Superintendent voices, to the best of my knowledge, are hidden voices in the public, and any opinions have not surfaced in the public records or media.

Now more than ever, wounds are raw and open. I wonder, how many superintendents and other educational leaders will be wounded as a result of the

management of these current crises—where the superintendent will be considered at fault for decisions that are made in insular districts (i.e., districts with school boards) or superintendents who serve in cities under mayoral control or a charter network. The life and world of schools and education have changed in the eastern United States, where participants in my research study served as leaders and the world at large, where all have faced adaptive, technical, and mixed challenges (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). These challenges include deciding if schools should open or continue to operate remotely—a major challenge. However, policymakers, including the President, Congress, the Senate, governors and mayors, and others, have not addressed the complexity when it comes to education. It makes me wonder: What do we value in education? Do we value learning or a political opportunity just to say, "schools are open"? Is health a priority or the economy? There are no simple solutions. There are no right answers. This is the current context of schooling and possible openings for wounding crises.

If and when the world enters a new normal and school districts begin to function as they used to, I hope there will be many opportunities to continue exploring how leaders describe and understand their wounding crises, how they respond, process, make meaning, and heal and recover, if at all. Now, more than ever, there is a need to continue exploring wounds and how we can retain and sustain leaders who have been wounded.

A Final Thought

In Brené Brown's (2017) words in *Daring Greatly*, you can't get through courage and living with a whole heart without walking through vulnerability. My hope was that participants valued these opportunities to tell their stories of a wounding crisis. Completing this study took much courage on behalf of the participants and proved to be a challenge for me from the day I embarked on this journey. After completing all my coursework centered around superintendents building principal capacity and having two

years' worth of research, a sudden wounding crisis occurred that made me question the education department to which I had devoted a lifetime of work.

A change in central administration impacted the positive work I was doing as a superintendent in the poorest congressional district in the nation, where the student achievement was dismal. Although I rigorously implemented significant changes to instruction and leadership in four years and reading scores doubled for the first time, like Francis, Emma, Frankie, Julie, John Black, and Juanita, my moral purpose did not align with people that I assume wanted to maintain the status quo. This crisis shook me to the core and made me question who I have been as a professional and the individual who defined herself by her lifework and purpose.

Being a first-generation college graduate after immigrating to the U.S. at seven years old and speaking another language, education was central to my being and providing equitable opportunities for children in urban public education. Constantly improving student learning and closing the achievement gaps wherever they exist, especially in underserved communities of color, via teacher and principal development as levers for increasing achievement became my moral purpose.

After 24 years of an impeccable record as a successful educator, I would have never imagined, like Emma, John Black, Francis, Frankie, Julie, and Juanita, that I would be blindsided and wounded when I was demonstrating success for 24,000 students, 35 principals, over 65 assistant principals, and over 3,000 teachers. This was the beginning of many conversations about how superintendents have short tenure and rarely stay for more than three years. My professors at Teachers College, Columbia University shared research, articles, and words of wisdom and encouragement. One article, *Ad Astra per Aspera* (*To the Stars through Adversity*) in *The Wounded Leader* (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002a, 2002c, 2004b), provided by my advisor, Dr. Drago-Severson, in an adult development class, shifted my academic writing focus from superintendents leading the learning, as I had done in my district, to how educational leaders are wounded.

The goal for my research study shifted after writing my first proposal, which just needed final revisions for a proposal defense. I was challenged to explore this topic, but did not want the rest of my career to focus on having been wounded and not my knowledge of instructional and transformational leadership, principal development, and strong curriculum command, to name a few of the intersections of my previous topic. However, after reading to explore the concept of the wounded leader, I found a huge gap in the literature; the only study conducted began over 20 years ago. I started wondering more about the phenomenon of wounded leaders after more and more leaders shared that they had been wounded or knew someone that had been. Each person always emphasized, as I had experienced, that no one ever wants to talk about it, as I confirmed later in my study. Everyone always wants to celebrate our victories as leaders, but not our wounds. After exhausting the literature, I found no extensive studies on how leaders are wounded since Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (1998,1999, 2000a, 2000b) seminal work. I switched topics, and the primary purpose of my research became to fill the gap and develop a better understanding of how superintendents describe and understand a wounding crisis.

My study identified how six superintendents described their understanding of a wounding experience, how they responded, processed, made meaning, and how they began to heal and recover. During the interview process, I re-lived the stories of wounding with the participants as they made meaning of their experiences. I was there beside them—attentive to each as the researcher. While rendering my analysis and considering recommendations, I realized that I was no longer on "the dance floor" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). To write this chapter (i.e., findings, implications, and recommendations), I had to move from the dance floor to the balcony often—to take what was said at the time of the interview and shift my perspective to reflect, learn, and grow. It was an iterative dance of reflexivity [i.e., being part of the world that I study (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125) and asking in which way might I be wrong], and I hope that after

stepping back and looking at all my findings, I am able to share a clearer view to inform the big picture for educational leadership research and practice.

Despite my findings, I still believe there is a need to continue this research and expand it in multiple ways. I hope that this study inspires more wounded educational leaders to share their stories. I hope it also encourages the education sector to find ways to acknowledge wounding, structures for processing and responding to wounding experiences, and more researchers in education to further investigate this phenomenon.

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Appendix A

Protocol for Interview 1

Getting to Know Each Other: Context of the Participants' Experience
Topic: Telling of the Story of Wounding (Before)
(90 minutes)

Name of Interviewee: _____

School/Site: _____

Date: _____

Duration of Interview: _____

Introduction to Interview (15 minutes)

A. Appreciation & Logistics

Thank you very much for volunteering to help with this research project and participating in this three-part qualitative interview series. I know how valuable your time is as an educational leader, and I am very grateful that you are investing your time to contribute to this important research by sharing your personal stories. As mentioned, this interview should take 90 minutes (the second and third interviews will take 90 minutes as well). I know you're very busy. Does this still feel like a good time?

As you know, I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, and a former superintendent, principal, and district leader. My hope is that by conducting this research I, with your participation and contribution, can learn from you and a few other leaders and share my learning to help others understand the phenomenon of wounding in education leadership, so we can all learn and continue making a difference in the lives of students, teachers, and each other on this complex education leadership journey.

Your story will help contribute and expand knowledge about how leaders experience wounding and the strategies you use to make sense of, process, and learn from the experience. I think it is important to give voice to stories leaders often encounter in education and help the community of leaders. Understanding how you make sense of the challenges that caused a wounding experience will be very valuable to me and all leaders, especially since many leaders experience a wounding crisis in their work life. Sharing your journey can help the education sector better understand how leaders understand and describe the wounding experience. Thank you, in advance, for your generous contributions.

In addition, thank you for signing and returning the consent form and for giving your permission to audio-record each of the three interviews. Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Ask participants if they have any questions about the informed consent form. Give one copy of the form to the participant and retain one copy for my records.

B. Purpose

Thank you again for your time and for sharing your experiences with me. I really know that your time is a precious gift. Before beginning, I want to take a little time to remind you about the purpose of this series of interviews. I want to know how you lived through your wounding experience, how, if at all, you used it to shape your leadership, and how it influenced you as you moved forward. The purpose of my study is to understand what a wounding experience means to you and to a few other educational leaders and how it influences you in contemporary society. I also hope to understand how you, as a school leader/principal /superintendent/district leader, made sense of and responded to a wounding experience that surfaced in your practice and what the experience meant to you at the time it happened (prospectively) and now looking back (retrospectively) as a leader and as an individual.

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers—just this chance for me to learn from you as the expert on your own experience. Thank you so very much for sharing this personal journey and experience of a wounding crisis as an educational leader!

C. Confidentiality

As a researcher, I will write about what you share with me to help people learn about how wounded leaders describe and understand a wounding experience. However, when writing about your experience, I will protect your confidentiality and privacy. As you know, I will write about what I learn from you and the other leaders in this study in order to share new knowledge and ideas so that others can benefit from your wisdom and experiences. In any publication, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things that you say, but I will never use your name.

In order to protect your confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym for your name and your organization's name (as well as all participants). I will replace your real name with a pseudonym/alias that you select. I will also disguise the name of your district or school and the district or school where the wounding experience occurred. This way, readers will be able to learn about the insights and examples you've shared without knowing that you were the one that said them.

Do you have any questions about this? Is there a name you'd like me to use for you? Your school/district/organization? Also, please know that you are free to stop the interview at any time—and that you don't have to answer any question that you choose not to answer. Everything that you share is entirely up to you, and I will completely trust and respect whatever you decide.

Participant Pseudonym: _____
Organization Pseudonym: _____

Does the participant agree to have identity concealed? YESNO

D. Taping

In order to make sure that I can listen very carefully while we are talking, and so that I can go back and review what you've shared with me later, is it still ok with you if I record our conversation (audio only)? The tape recording will be transcribed – meaning that someone will type our words into a document – a transcript – so that I can have a print-out of our conversation – but no one other than me and the transcriber will have access to the tapes. The transcripts of our interviews will also be kept confidential, and no one other than me and the people who are helping me with this research (like my teachers at Teachers College and other graduate students who are also working on research) will be allowed to see them. Also, I promise not to include any identifying information in these transcripts if I share them with others, so no one reading them will know that you were the person talking. I will also share your transcript with you prior to the second and third interviews so that you have them and so that you can check to see if it accurately captures what you shared. In the second and third interviews, I will also check with you to see if some of my interpretations are accurate. In other words, I will discuss them with you at the beginning of the second interview and the third interview. Do you have any questions about this? Does this still feel ok to you?

E. Your Questions?

In a few minutes, I will begin the interview. *As I mentioned earlier, please know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will talk about.* My goal is to understand *your* experience in order to learn more about your wounding experience. Do you have any questions before I begin? About me or the study or anything else? If you have any questions <u>at any time</u>, please let me know, ok?

I. Warm-Up: Background and Context (10 minutes)

A. The first part of this first interview focuses on your background, the specifics of your role, and how you got here (i.e., how you landed in this position at this time in your life, in light of the wounding experience and where you are at the present time). I want to briefly discuss what you are doing now. Does this feel ok? Are you ready to start?

1. Could you please share how you self-identify in terms of demographics (i.e., race, gender, and ethnicity)?
2. Can you please tell me, what is your current role: principal, superintendent, district leader?
3. How many years have you been in your current role? In education, more broadly?
4. What were some of the other roles, if any, that you held in education?

B. I would love to learn a little bit about where the wounding crisis or experience took place (school/district/organization). Could you please describe that work context? *(If it's the same place then I would continue to the next question)*

1. How long did you work there?
2. How did you decide to work there?
3. What was your role there?
4. What was it like there before you experienced the wound?

5. Is there anything else in particular about the context of your school/district that would be helpful to know in order to better understand the work you do/did when the wounding occurred?

II. Telling of the Story of Wounding (60 minutes)

Next, I'm hoping that you can help me learn about your wounding experience. Thank you so much for your trust. Please tell me as many details as you can recall. I want to learn how you describe and understand your wounding crisis when it happened then. (NOTE TO SELF: I am interested in the explicit content of the stories –the actions, the events, and responses— how the lives of school leaders were affected by the stories they share).

Are you ready to dive into your story? In these qualitative interviews, my goal is to listen deeply to the story and how you construct the story. Is that okay with you?

A. Tell me what happened right **before** the wounding crisis?

Probes: What was going on immediately before the wounding experience?
1. What was happening THEN?

B. What was the wounding experience? Tell me what happened.

Probes:

1. What does wounding mean to you?
2. Can you share what exactly happened that caused the wound?
3. Who caused it?
4. What was the incident specifically?
5. Was it one clear event? Or a series of events?
6. Was it an event you anticipated or a complete surprise that caught you off guard?
7. At the moment the wounding crisis occurred, did you feel it was a surprise?
8. Was there more than one specific thing, or were their other things going on?
9. What were you thinking?
10. How did you feel?

C. What was happening **during** the wounding crisis?

1. How did you see the wound?
2. How did you react?
3. What was your response?

Probe: How did you feel at the moment?

D. What happened then --right after your wounding crisis? (in interview two and three we will go more deeply into this)

1. What does a wounding crisis mean for you now?
2. How do you see it now?
3. Did you see it coming?
4. Looking back now, do you still think it was something you could not anticipate?

5. How, if at all, did you respond?
6. When this wounding crisis happened, who, if anyone, helped?
7. How do you make sense of it now?
    4. How did you feel?
    5.

III. Closing and Gratitude (15 minutes)—Clarifying questions (10 min) Closing (5 minutes), to acknowledge the courage, new learning, and offer gratitude.
To close:
1) Is there anything else you want to tell me about any of the questions I've asked?
2) Do you have any questions for me?
3) Can we please set up a date for the second interview? When will be best for you _____?
I would like to send you a copy of the transcript from this interview for you to review for accuracy. Will that be OK?
YES NO

Please confirm which email address you'd like me to use for sending your transcript and communications about this work.

Best Email: _____ (not work email as this will take place out of the workplace)

I want to thank you again for all you've so generously and courageously shared. Please know how much I appreciate your trust and sharing. Your participation means so much to this research. All you've offered is such a courageous and tremendous contribution. Anything else you feel that you need to share. Thank you so very much!

Appendix B

Protocol for Interview 2

Topic: The Details of the Experience- Learning More about the Wound (During) (90 minutes)
Telling of the experience of being wounded and the barriers or "boundaries' that prohibited leaders from seeing their wounds. How do they understand the wound?

Name of Interviewee: _____

School/Site: _____

Date: _____

Duration of Interview: _____

A. Appreciation & Logistics (5 min)

Appreciation and Logistics. Thank you for meeting with me for this second interview. I really appreciate our last conversation. First, I would like to share transcripts from the first interview, my understandings thus far, and offer an opportunity to clarify any points that you feel need to be enhanced, revised, or further explored. Second, we are going to turn toward questions oriented to helping me understand more about your wounding experience. My goal is to hear more details on your wounding experience, and I would greatly appreciate it if you can share as many details of your wounding experience as you can remember. How does this sound to you?

B. Purpose

Thank you again for your time and for sharing your experiences with me. I really know that your time is very valuable. I want to take a little time to remind you about the purpose of this series of interviews. The purpose of this study is to understand what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to educational leaders like you, and how it influences your professional and personal growth development in contemporary society. I also hope to understand how you, as a school leader/principal /superintendent/district leader, made sense of and responded to this significant dilemma that surfaced in your practice and what this wounding experience means to you now as a leader and as an individual.

In this second interview, I really want to know how you lived through your wounding crisis and how you, if at all, used it to shape your leadership and how, if at all, it influenced you as you moved forward.

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers—just this chance for me to learn from you as the expert on your own experience. Thank you so very much for sharing this personal journey and experience of a wounding crisis as an educational leader with me!

C. Confidentiality

As we discussed last time, I will write about what you share with me to help people learn about how wounded leaders describe and understand a wounding crisis or experience. However, when writing about your experience, I will protect your confidentiality or privacy.

Thank you very much for picking a pseudonym last time in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of what you share with me. Does _____ (selected pseudonym) still feel like a good choice to you?

D. Check-In Around Interview #1 (20 min)

Thank you very much for all that you shared in our last interview. I really appreciate your trust and your honesty. I've been thinking a lot about your important experiences and what you shared with me, and I wanted to make sure that I'm making sense of everything you told me in a good way. To help make sure that I most accurately understand your thinking, feeling, and experiences, I am going to share a quick summary of what I think I learned from you last time. You also had time to review the transcript I emailed you from the first interview. Can you please let me know if this sounds correct – or if there's anything you would like me to adjust?

1. Summary of big themes / ideas from Interview 1. Participants will share in this member check, and I will consider all of their adjustments to my interpretations (Maxwell, 2013).
2. Since you've also had some time to think about these ideas since we spoke last, is there anything you would like to add, adjust, or change at this time?
3. I also have some <u>follow-up questions</u> to share with you?

Participants would have reviewed transcripts sent prior to the second interview and will clarify any outstanding questions.

E. Your Questions? (10 min, I want to make sure they are comfortable with what they reviewed and heard themselves say and share during the first interview)

In a few minutes, I will begin the interview. *Please know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will talk about.* My goal is to understand *your* experience in order to learn more about your wounding experience. Do you have any questions before I begin? About me or the study or anything else? If you have any questions, please feel free to stop me <u>at any time</u>, ok?

II. Topic: Emotional Parts of Wounding Then and Now (45min)

A. I will ask any additional clarifying questions that surfaced as a result of reviewing the first interview.

B. Telling of the barriers or boundaries that prevented the leaders from seeing the wound during the experience.

8. What, if anything, was hard about it—then, at the time of the experience—for you?
   a. Probes: How did you feel when the wounding happened?
9. What do you think was hard for others?
10. What, if anything, was a barrier (internal or external) or boundary, if any, that during the experience made it hard to believe this experience was happening to you then?

11. What was that like for you?
12. What did you do?
13. How did this feel then?
14. What was the outcome after that experience?
15. Given what you said about your wounding crisis and what you said about your work now, looking back (retrospectively), how do you understand the wounding experience now?
16. What is that like for you?
17. How do you feel now?
18. What was the greatest challenge?

Probe:

a. What, if anything, was hard for you in responding to the wound?

b. What, if anything, prevented you from understanding the wound at the time?

19. If you had to choose an image to represent the wounding experience (if needed, I will have cards with images, e.g., social explore cards) –to illustrate the wounding experience, what would it be?

Wrap-Up, Gratitude & Previews of Next Steps (15 min)

I want to thank you very much for all that you have so generously shared with me today, and the last time we were together. I really appreciate your time, trust, and your willingness to think so carefully about these important questions. Please know that what you shared will be a big contribution to this research and to helping others understand how educational leaders describe and understand wounding. I have just a few more questions before we wrap up, and I also want to circle back to what will come next in my research project, ok?

A. First, I'm wondering if there's anything that you feel is important to share about wounding and your experience that I haven't asked you about today or in our last interview.
B. Finally, like last time, I want to provide you with some time to ask any questions you might still have about me, this project, or anything else that I could help you with. Is there anything you would like to ask about right now?
C. Can we please set up a date for the third interview? When will be best for you?

Well, that brings me to the end of our second interview! Thank you very much! In the third interview, I will share what I've learned from you thus far. I want to give you an opportunity to share anything that came after the second interview, discuss additional thoughts, expand, and/or explore these ideas together. Do you have any questions about this? I look forward to seeing you for our third interview on. Thank you once again so very much for your great help today!

Appendix C

Protocol for Interview 3

TOPIC: Wounding- How it influenced their leadership THEN and NOW (AFTER) (90) (Reflecting, Refining, and Expanding Upon Interview Learnings: Learning, if at all, from the Wounding Experience)

Name of Interviewee: _____

School/Site: _____

Date: _____

Duration of Interview: _____

This third interview will explore research question 3- How, if at all, do educational leaders describe the ways in which they have recovered after a wounding experience? (Do they say that they have healed? Are they still healing? What supports them in healing? What challenges them in healing?—These are questions you suggested within RQ 3 but will not be asked directly, and the healing claims have been deleted from the DP except when it is a finding from previous studies) It also further explore responses to RQ 1 and RQ 2.

A. Appreciation and Logistics (5 min)

Thank you for meeting me for this third interview. I shared the transcripts of the second interview, and you also had the transcript from the first interview. I would greatly appreciate any feedback that you can offer in general, on the details, or my interpretation of what I thought you meant. Please feel free to make any clarification you think I need to make.

B. Purpose

Thank you again for your time and for sharing your experiences with me. I really know that your time is a precious gift. I want to take a little time to remind you about the purpose of this series of interviews. The purpose of this study is to understand what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to educational leaders like you, and how it influences your professional and personal growth development in contemporary society. Today, in particular, I really hope to understand how you, as a school leader/principal /superintendent/district leader, cope with and responded to this wounding experience and dilemmas that surface in your practice and what the experiences mean to you as a leader and as an individual.

In this *third* interview, I really want to know how, when looking back (retrospectively), you lived through your wounding crisis and how you used it to shape your leadership and how it influenced you as you moved forward. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers—just this chance for me to learn from you as the expert on

your own experience. Thank you so very much for sharing with me this personal journey and experience of a wounding crisis as an educational leader!

C. Check-In Around Interview #2 (20 minutes)

Thank you very much for all that you shared in our last interview. I really appreciate your trust and your honesty. I know you have now read the transcript for interview number one and now interview number 2. I've been thinking a lot about your important experiences and what you shared with me, and I wanted to make sure that I'm making sense of everything you told me in the right way. To help make sure that I most accurately understand your thinking, feeling, and experiences, I want to review the quick summary of what I think I learned from you last time that I shared with you via email. Can you please let me know if this sounds correct – or if there's anything you'd like me to adjust?

1. Summary of big themes / ideas from Interview
2. Participants will member check, and I will make any adjustments to my interpretations (Maxwell, 2013).
3. Since you've also had some time to think about these ideas since I last spoke to you, is there anything you would like to add, adjust, or change at this time?
4. I also have some follow-up questions to share with you? Ask follow-up questions that surfaced during preliminary analysis?

Review transcripts and clarify any outstanding questions.

D. My focus today is to understand more deeply how you made meaning of the wounding experience in the context of the two previous interviews and looking back (***retrospectively)*. (50 min)**

I. Topic: NOW: Present Meaning Making of the Wounding Experience

1) How is it for you now?
    a. Probes: How do you feel
    b. Is there anything that still bothers you about the wounding experience?
2) In what ways, if any, do you think you have recovered from this wounding experience?
    a. Probe: Do you feel that you have recovered?
    b. Probe: Do you feel that you are no longer bothered by it?
    c. Or do you feel like it is something that you have not recovered from yet?
    d. If not, why do you think that?
    e. What makes you think that?
    f. How does that make you feel?

II. Topic: Learning if at all from being wounded

3) What, if anything, did you learn from your wounding crisis/experience?
    a. Probe: What would you say you learned as a leader, if anything?
    b. Probe: What would you say you learned professionally, if anything?
    c. Probe: What would you say you learned as an individual, if anything?

4) How, if at all, would you say that the wounding/crisis experience changed you?
5) Given what you said about your wounding crisis/experience, and what you said about your work now:

Looking back -How do you make sense of the wound?

6) How do you understand the wounding experience now?
7) What sense does it make to you now?
8) What, if anything, have you learned about yourself? About others?

III. Topic: Implications for Learning from wounds for education leadership and preparation

9) How, if at all, has the wound influenced your leadership practice?
10) How, if at all, was anything you learned helpful?
11) How do you sustain yourself and your commitments—particularly in relation to what you learned in this experience?
12) How, if at all, were you prepared for a leadership wound?
13) Was there anything, if at all, in your leadership preparation that prepared you for anticipating, managing, and/or processing a wounding experience?
14) What supports, if any, do you have?

Probe: Wish you had?
Probe: How do/would these help?
Probe: Why would these matter for you?

15) Is there anything else you would like to share about your learning from the wounding experience?

IV. Topic: Wounding –how it influenced their leadership practice NOW

16) Where do you see yourself in the future as you look ahead in your career and personal life?
17) What, if at all, do you think might the education sector better prepare leaders forth the possibility of being wounded?
18) How might training and professional development help?
    a. Before becoming leaders?
    b. After taking a leadership position?
    c. After experiencing a wound?

Closing & Gratitude (15 minutes)

Clarifying questions (10 min) Closing (5) minutes, to acknowledge your courage, new learning, and offer gratitude).

I want to thank you again for all you've so generously and courageously shared. Please know how much I appreciate your trust and sharing. Your participation means so much to this research and will impact the education sector. All you've offered is such a tremendous contribution to all of us as leaders. To close, do you have any questions for me? Anything else you feel that you need to share. Thank you once again.

Appendix D

Recruitment Invitation for Educational Leaders

TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
525 West 120th St. New York, NY 10027
212-678-3000 | www.tc.columbia.edu

Date

Dear Educational Leader,

My name is Rafaela Espinal, and I am a doctoral student in the Urban Education Leaders Program (UELP) at Teachers College, Columbia University. I have been a teacher, coach, principal, central office director, and superintendent. I know how valuable your role is at the school and/or district level. I am passionate about supporting students, teachers, and school leaders.

I have researched many topics in the field, and although I am passionate about instructional leadership and transformational leadership, in my doctoral studies, I was introduced to a book titled *The Wounded Leader* by Richard Ackerman and Pat Maslin-Ostrowski. I was particularly moved by one chapter titled *Ad Astra per Aspera,* which means *To the Stars through Adversity*. My professor, dissertation sponsor, and advisor Dr. Eleanor Drago-Severson introduced me to this research in one of her classes. I know you have worked with Dr. Drago-Severson since, as the expert recommender for my study –she recommended you!

You are invited to participate in my research study called "The Wounded Educational Leader: A Qualitative Exploration of How Educational Leaders Describe and Understand a Wounding Experience." As an expert recommender, Dr. Drago-Severson recommended you because you have shared your wounding experience at some point in your career as an educational leader. Therefore, she has suggested I reach out to you because you also self-identify as someone who has a story of a wounding experience. A wounding experience for the purpose of my study will be defined by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's definition since I am expanding their series of studies conducted over 15 years ago. They defined a wounding experience as a dilemma, a serious conflict, or critical event in a school leader's practice that has, in some way, profoundly affected them, emotionally and professionally.

I would love to have the opportunity to interview you to learn about your experience in a series of three 90-minute interviews. I will ask for your permission to tape-record your interview for accuracy and so that I can listen and learn from it. The interviews will take place at your convenience in a place outside of your work in person or over the phone/video via Zoom or Skype. The interviews will be transcribed, and recordings will

be deleted immediately. If you agree to participate in this research, you will receive an informed consent form that outlines the requirements of this study and your permission. Please know that all information will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be used. The data collected will be for research purposes only. If you have any questions or concerns, you can reach out to me at any time at 732-754-0876.
I hope that you will consider participating in this very important study! Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

In gratefulness,
Rafaela Espinal

Appendix E

Preliminary Coding Scheme

1. Wounding Crisis
    - Context (roles, policies framing the work) at the time of the Wounding Crisis
    - Context Now
    - Leadership Role
    - Challenges
    - "Givens of Leadership" Emotions:
        - vulnerability, loss, power & powerlessness, isolation, fear
    - Blindsided
    - No surprise
    - Key players, Stakeholders
    - Wound-Wounding-meaning to participant
    - Make-sense, make meaning,
    - Response
2. Challenges Experienced
    - Adaptive Challenge
    - Technical Challenges
    - Process-how (draw, write, explorer card), response, sense-making
    - Intrapersonal
    - Interpersonal
    - Boundaries
    - Barriers

- Biggest challenge

3. Recovery
    - Supports
    - Coping
    - Hero's Journey : *Chaos*, *Restitution*, *Quest*
    - Back in the game Strategies
        - Political
        - Human Resource
        - Key Players
4. Influence
        - On the "self" as a leader, individually
        - The leader, the role, professionally
    - Lessons Learned
    - Impact on professional life (with others, the organization, inside/outside org), career
    - Growth or lack of growth
5. Leadership

- Preparation (before, recommendations for)
- Sustainability

Appendix F

Informed Consent and Participant Rights

TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
525 West 120th St. New York, NY 10027
212-678-3000 | www.tc.columbia.edu

INFORMED CONSENT & PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Protocol Title: THE WOUNDED EDUCATIONAL LEADER: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF HOW EDUCATIONAL LEADERS DESCRIBE AND UNDERSTAND AWOUNDING EXPERIENCE

Principal Researcher: Rafaela Espinal, Teachers College
732-754-0876, rye2101@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research study called "The Wounded Educational Leader: A Qualitative Exploration of How Educational Leaders Describe and Understand a Wounding Experience."

I am conducting this research as a Doctoral Student at Teachers College, Columbia University, in the Urban Education Leaders Program (UELP) in the office of Organization and Leadership. I have been a teacher, coach, principal, central office director, and superintendent. I know how valuable your role is at the school and/or district level. I am passionate about supporting students, teachers, and school leaders. There is no funding for this study.

You are invited to take part in this research study because you were recommended by an expert in adult development and educational leadership, who based on past work with you in a professional capacity and as an educational leader knows that you shared that you were wounded—experienced a leadership crisis or dilemma. You were recommended because you have had an experience of a wounding crisis or a dilemma or leadership crisis at some point in your career as an educational leader (principal, superintendent, or district leader). You are over 18 years old, have been an educational leader for a minimum of 3 years, and have experience leading a school, district, or have been a district-level leader.

Thank you very much for considering being part of my research and for sharing your experience of a wounding crisis-- defined as a dilemma, a serious conflict I will invite 6 leaders to participate in my study. Thank you again for considering to volunteer. Participating in this study will take 4.5 hours of your time to complete (three separate 90-minute interviews over the next 60 days).

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

I am conducting this study to learn how wounded educational leaders describe and understand a wounding experience that occurred at some point in their career and [about] a year ago. My study seeks to address this gap in educational research by exploring what a self-described leadership crisis or wounding experience means to education leaders and the way a wound may influence them professionally and personally. This study will help the education sector better understand how leaders understand and describe the wounding experience and how it impacts leaders.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, I will individually interview you on three separate occasions. During each interview, you will be asked to discuss your experience as an educational leader and a wounding experience.

- In the first interview, I will first briefly ask you to share a little about your background, the specifics of your role. In the second part of you will begin to tell me about your experience of wounding—and what that was like at the time. I want to learn how you describe and understand your wounding experience.

- During the second interview, I will ask you to share your story with more details. I will ask you to share a little more about your experience and how you made sense of, responded to, and processed the experience when it happened, based on what was happening at the time –then, as if you were looking at what was coming in the future (prospectively).

- The third interview will ask you to look back (retrospectively), so I can further understand how you made meaning of the wounding experience in the context of the two previous interviews and looking back, having lived the experience. I will also want to learn how you will describe and understand if you recovered from the wounding experience, if at all, and if so, how? If not, what has been a challenge?

Each interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio recording is written down (transcribed), the audio recording will be deleted. During the interviews, I will take some hand-notes as well. The three interviews will take 90 minutes each. You will be given a pseudonym in order to keep your identity confidential, or I will ask you to select one if you prefer.

Teachers College, Columbia University
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 20-136
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

All of the interviews will take place at a location of your choosing that is most convenient for you. Each interview will take place outside of your work location and not during your work hours. We can meet before school, after school, when school is not in session (holiday, winter break, vacation break) or on the weekend. However, if you are not able to meet in person, the interview will be conducted using an online platform like Zoom (or Skype. If I conduct your individual interview remotely (Skype or Zoom), I will let you know when I start recording and when I stop recording.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems that you experienced in your role as a leader that led to the wounding experience, or the wounding experience may be difficult to speak about. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to someone. Your information will be kept confidential**.**

I will be taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password-protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of education leadership to understand better the best way to support leaders when they are wounded by a wounding experience in their role.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when you have completed the three individual interviews. However, you can leave the study at any time, even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
I will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked home office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio (and video) recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio recording will be written down, and the audio recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. The confidential data (using your pseudonym) must be kept for three years after the completion of my study.

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Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 20-136
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

For quality assurance, and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in my dissertation. It may also be published in periodicals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of my dissertation.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

I will be audio recording as part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded
_____
Signature _____

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded
_____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow written, and/or audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University
_____
Signature Date

___I **do not** consent to allow written, and/or audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature Date _____

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT
As the primary researcher, I may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

Teachers College, Columbia University
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 20-136
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

The researcher may contact me in the future for other research opportunities:
Yes _____No_____
Initial Initial

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:
Yes _____No_____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Rafaela Espinal, at 732-754-0876. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Drago-Severson, at 212-678-4163. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu, or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures,
- risks, and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion if the participant is not able to commit to three interviews.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available, which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**:_____
_____

Signature: _____

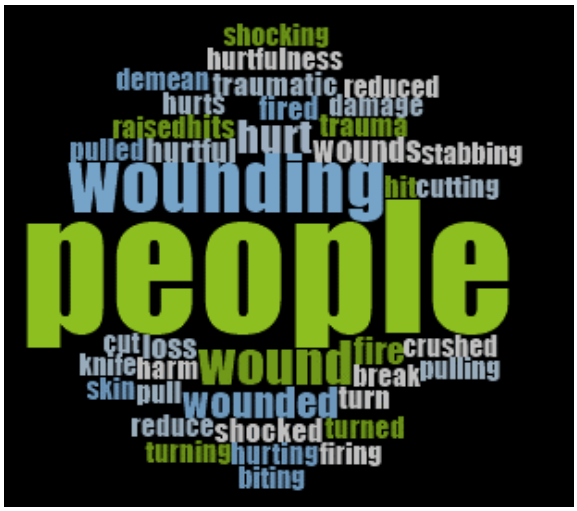
Teachers College, Columbia University
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 20-136
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

Appendix G

The Meaning of a Wound Word Cloud

This word cloud is a result as per the definitions extracted from each participant during Interview One transcripts and conducting a cross-case analysis of their definitions of "wounding" using Multiple Queries in the NVivo program and using In Vivo codes derived from initial manual coding).
These are the top Six (6) Words when Coding for Wounding.

NVivo Word Query results when *all files*, memos, transcripts were coded for "wound,"

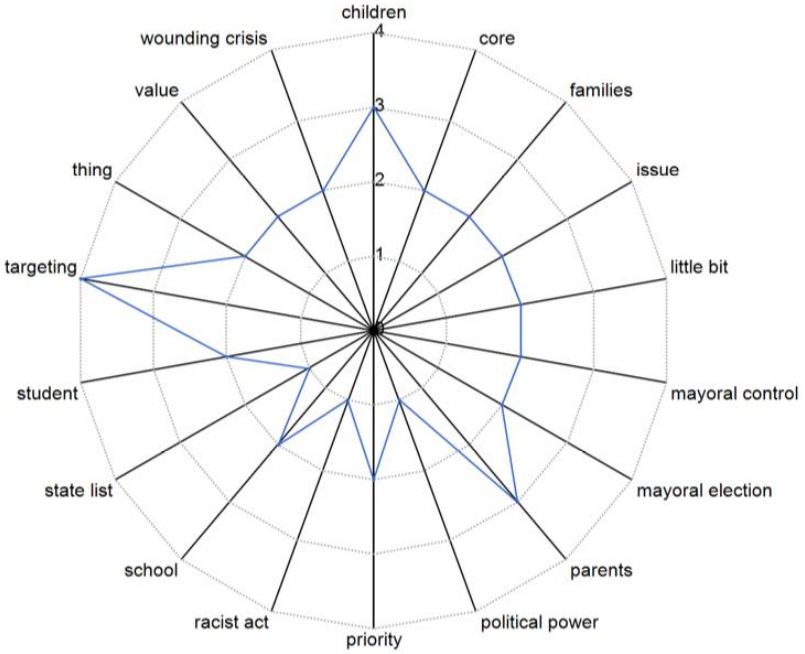


"woundedness," "wounding crisis."

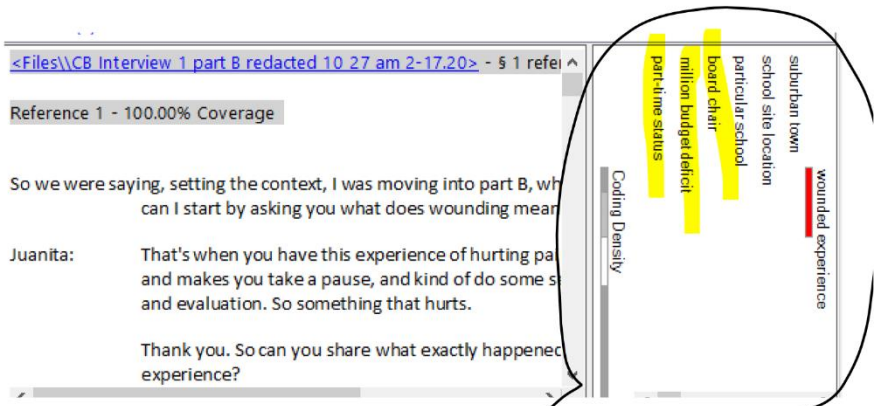
Appendix H

Examples of Coding Themes and Queries Using NVivo/CAQDAS

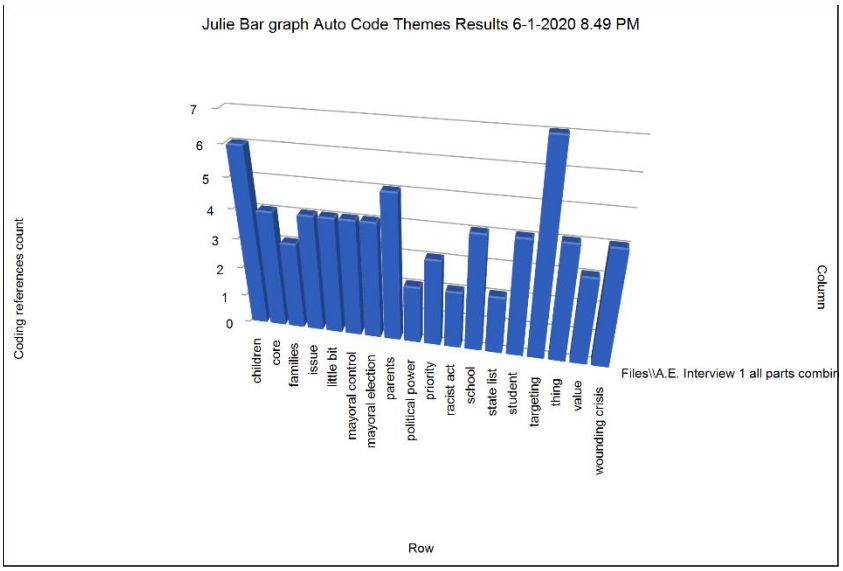
After manual coding a test was conducted to cross check data and compare theme results across interview transcripts in response to Interview One in NVivo. These are the results of Julie's responses.



Juanita Interview One auto coded themes



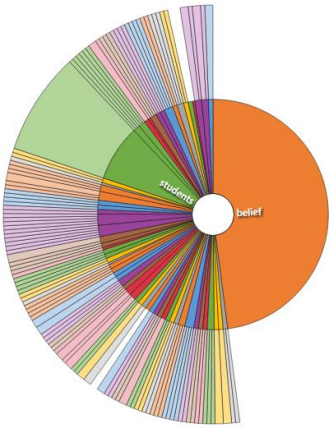
Juanita Interview 1. Same as previously hand coded as major causes for the wounding experience



Julie's Bar Graph for Interview One: With-In Case analysis after manual coding to cross-check themes auto-generated against themes arrived at manually.

Belief in *Students* at the Core

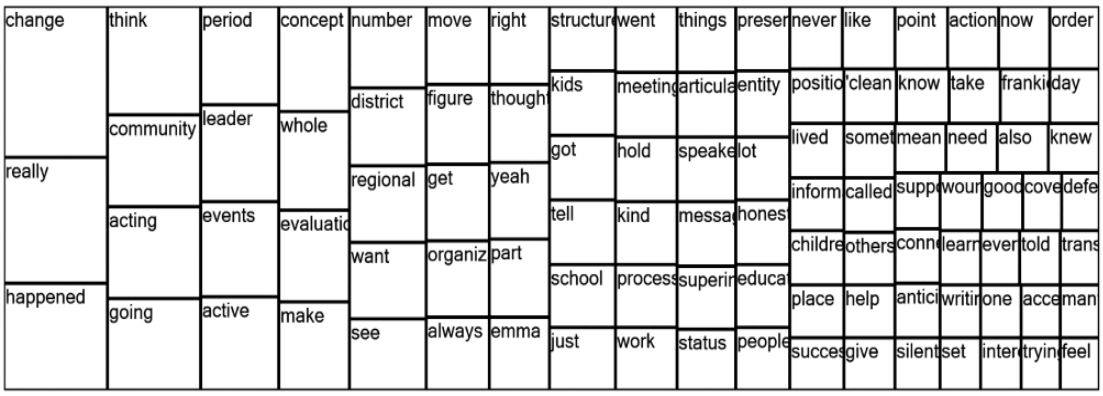
Graph of wounding and what it means to the superintendents when it is analyzed in NVivo using codes (nodes): hurt, students, belief, wound, wounded, wounding. *Belief* in *students* is at the core. A belief in students and "for the best interest of students" resonated as the root cause of the wound as they implemented changes in communities and appeared in 6/6 interviews.



Appendix I

Word Cloud and Word Tree for Interview One Cross-Case Analysis

(All six transcripts were included to examine generalizations across the cases)

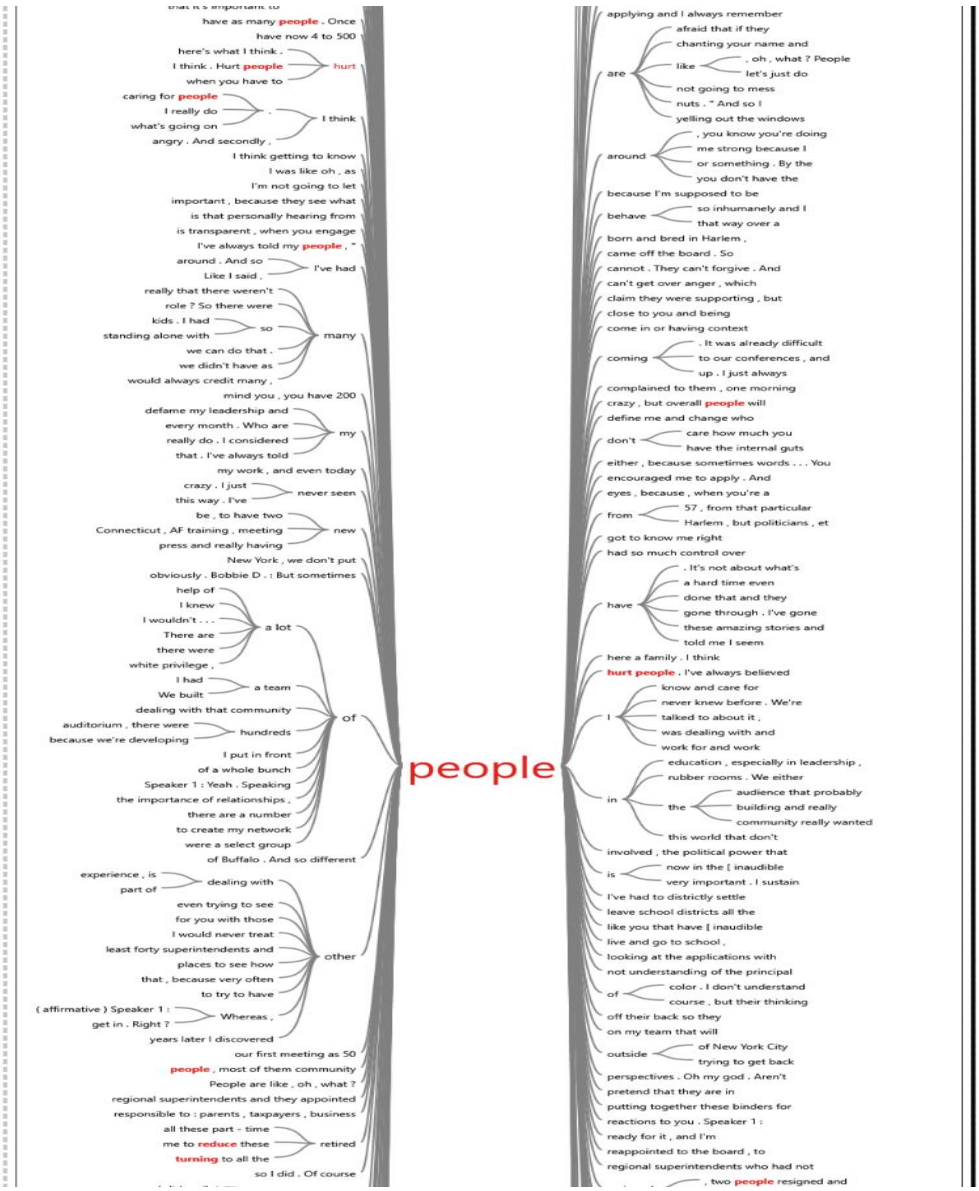


The first three most commonly used words across transcripts in interview one revealed the message, “Change really happened.”

Appendix J

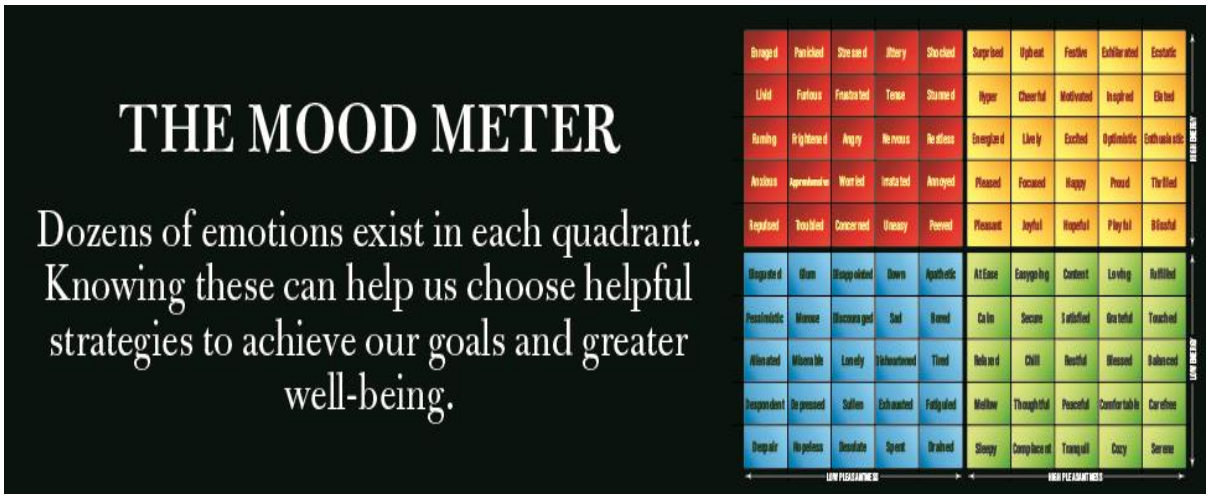
Word Tree: Participants' Definition of Wounding

(In the search for *wound* during a cross-case analysis, *hurt* and *people* were the top results.)



Appendix K

Mood Meter (Brackett, 2019)



The Mood Meter is a map of emotions which attempts to “cover all the bases” of emotional categories with one hundred words divided into four quadrants (Brackett, 2019, p. 113). These include a red quadrant with emotions that from “enraged” to “panicked”; a green quadrant with emotions that range from “ease” to “serene” and from “calm” to “balanced”; a blue quadrant with emotions that range from “down” to “despair” and from “lonely” to “alienated”; and a yellow quadrant with emotions that range from “joyful” to “ecstatic” and from “hopeful” to “optimistic.” Anxiety and anger are in the upper “high energy” left hand quadrant in red within “unpleasantness.”