A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TRAUMA, CREATIVITY, RESILIENCE, AND ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

by

James William Teachenor II

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry. The theories guiding this study were Masten’s resiliency theory and Vygotsky’s theory of creativity as they informed the literature on my topic by understanding the link early childhood, especially trauma, had on creativity and the link trauma had on resilience and the life courses of individuals. The qualitative design of this study was hermeneutical phenomenology. The purposive sample consisted of 10 participants who qualified from a purposive sample pool of 117 occupational creatives who were performers, musicians, and writers, and the setting was Nashville, Tennessee. The research questions were: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? I collected data through interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. The five themes that emerged from this study were: creating provided escape and a coping mechanism; trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective; resiliency was a byproduct of adversity; artistic inspiration came from everyday life; and creating was accompanied by a spiritual component. The most important takeaways from the results of my research were: childhood adversity reinforced creativity, creatives found resilience through escape and artistic inspiration; and trauma derived creativity increased awareness and compassion toward others.

Keywords: creativity, resilience, hermeneutical, phenomenological, trauma, artistic, inspiration
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Dedication

This dissertation manuscript is dedicated to my wife, Jen, my son, Charlie, and my daughter, Lily. You increase my capacity to love and my desire to be a better human.

Whenever I cross your mind, I hope you feel loved and full of joy.
Acknowledgments

I thank Jesus Christ for His gift of salvation through the cross, for breathing Ephesians 3:20 into my life, and for allowing me to experience a life of realized dreams. I thank my wife, Jen Teachenor, for always supporting and believing in me—no matter the journey; you and I have lived Genesis 12:1. I love you. I thank my son, Charlie Teachenor, and my daughter, Lily Teachenor, for loving me and cheering me on all the way to the finish line—even sitting with me and staying close to me in proximity, as I wrote this dissertation. You are both such blessings and I value and love each of you so much. Thank you to my family: my dad, Jim Teachenor, for your strong musical influence, your love for the Lord, and for doing the best you knew how to keep me safe in the early years of my childhood; Aunt Barb and Uncle Bud Baxter for taking me in when I had nowhere else to go; Uncle Gene and Grandpa Charlie for the Christian influence you have on me, still; and Grandma Alberta - “Bertie” for listening to me countless hours as I learned to play your piano. Thank you to my brother, Scott, for standing up for me when I was too little to stand up for myself, and thank you to my, momma, Carol, for the impact you had on me. I missed you so much when you left, but God used it all for good. Also, thank you, Dr. Marrero and Dr. Quindag for agreeing to join me on this journey, allowing me access to your incredible insight, and your patience with me throughout this process. Additionally, I thank each of the participants who agreed to be a part of this study—and the ones who were willing but did not qualify—you know who you are, your input has been appreciated, immensely. Lastly, I hope to encourage every underdog. You cannot outdream God and His plans and desire to glorify Himself through your future.
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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The perceived effects of childhood trauma have been studied from many angles; however, trauma has rarely been viewed as a possible catalyst of other positive benefits to the victim (Dye, 2018). Trauma is not good; however, this study attempted to shine a different light on traumatic experiences. Often, creativity is linked to trauma. According to Thomson and Jaque (2018, 2017, 2015) adverse childhood experiences can be a common catalyst prompting professions such as performing artists in adulthood. Unfortunately, many of the childhood adversity markers co-occur and therefore increase the chances of psychopathology showing up later in life (Thomson & Jaque, 2018). Recognizing the linkage and the reasons behind it can make a difference by providing a quicker pathway to healing and support (Beebe, 2018; Ioannou, 2016; Mittal et al., 2015). Creative persons learn to adapt cognitively to stressful environments, and trauma enhances adult executive function. (Thomson & Jaque, 2016). There are many benefits to creativity; creatives have gleaned goodness from tragedy and sadness. There are so many ways children can be exposed to trauma; however, humans are resilient and learn ways to overcome that trauma with building blocks straight from the Creator (Romans 8:37, English Standard Version). No matter the circumstance, rather physical, mental, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect, feeling unloved or unwanted, surviving the terrors of war, making it through the Holocaust, or a plethora of other tragic moments in human history or troubled pasts, human beings are overcomers and survivors. Resilience is a beautiful truth and characteristic ingrained in the human species. The Lord placed eternity in the hearts of humans (Ecclesiastes 3:11, New International Version). Indubitably, there are many persons who become creative without having the negative experience of living through adverse childhood experiences, however, it is
unfortunate that many creatives have endured tragedy and trauma, prior to creating beautiful things. The problem is creatives often go through childhood trauma before becoming creative and sometimes struggle to find peace and live happy, healthy, productive lives as adults (Masten & Barnes, 2018). Additionally, creatives often tend to return to this emotion—sadness or joy—as a source of artistic inspiration.

In Chapter 1, the historical, social, and theoretical background was discussed. This was followed by the situation to self, and then, the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions. This chapter concluded with a summary.

**Background**

Trauma has long been related to resilience, and resilience to creativity; however, there is very little research that addresses the perceived causation of creative resilience often birthed from traumatic experiences and coping mechanisms. As more research is released about the perceived effect of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on individuals who have lived through war, there is still an area of research that is needed yet overlooked. The overall trauma of a patient depends on three primary factors: the level of damage to the anatomy, amount of physiologic mental illness, and extent of the patient’s reserve depletion. (Roden-Foreman, et al., 2019). There is a perceived connection between trauma and creativity, especially early childhood trauma, that leads to creative escape, fantasy, and deep creative connection with others. Additionally, coping through creativity leads to resilience in the creative (Diamond, et al., 2020; Thomson & Jaque, 2018).

**Historical**

The beginnings of published theoretical research on humanity’s resilience surfaced in the
early 1970s after observing the way trauma impacted the development of persons and their functional coping skills, both inside and outside of a familial setting. The study of resiliency of individuals was born from a desire to understand how trauma affected mental health and development (Masten, 2018). There is a high level of adaptive functioning variation, especially when considering the overall course of life for at risk youth with exposure to adverse childhood experiences, such as genetic predisposition, socioeconomic poverty, and other types of trauma (Masten, 2018).

The overall concept of resilience has some shared origins in both individual and family studies, and much was learned and discovered in the aftermath of the way the second World War affected families and their children (Masten, 2018). All creators are products of time and their personal environment—even geniuses. One’s creativity is born from internal needs created prior to their existence and rely on their external capacities (Vygotsky, 2004). The use of arts-based therapy following trauma as a methodological approach to process emotions has been recognized as a helpful way to add coping skills and diminish the symptoms of trauma across all levels of trauma in children, creating new processes for them to find a path to emotional equilibrium restoration (Mutch, & Latai, 2019).

Social

Marginalized people groups tend to find their sense of creativity and originality fostered by their peripheral societal position. This exacerbates the likelihood of what Elliott (2003) refers to as the creative class to find their identity in their creativity. This modern social idea of a creative class identity shares commonalities with immigrants and religious sects of the past (Elliott, 2003). Many surviving victims of mass violence reside in third world nations with low-to middle-incomes (Morina et al., 2017). These researchers performed a meta-analysis of adult
citizens of these countries suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including, or not including depression, through randomized controlled psychotherapy trials. These trials occurred in low- and middle-income countries. The research study measured PTSD and depression symptoms and suggests PTSD and depression symptoms can be reduced effectively through psychological interventions for individuals in low- and middle-income countries. Creative therapy would be an inexpensive option for the many survivors of war in these countries as a cost-effective intervention and initiative. This approach is unorthodox but could serve as a positive societal improvement in the long run (Morina et al., 2017).

Rational coping has a negative influence on depression and a positive influence on divergent thinking, while emotional coping has a positive influence on depression, and depression has a negative influence on divergent thinking (Melendez et al., 2018). Both forms of coping—rational and emotional—help predict depressed mood and problem-focused coping and depressed mood influence divergent thinking, significantly (Melendez et al., 2018). Additionally, older adult males tend to be more exploratory on musical instruments than younger females (Sandak et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a need to prioritize intervention for multiple age groups that will identify healthy, problem-focused coping techniques to mitigate depressed mood through divergent thinking (Melendez et al., 2018).

Theoretical

Foundationally, the research problem of this study was developed through the lens and theoretical underpinnings of Masten’s (2018) resilience theory and Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity. For many decades, there has been a theoretical research focus on the science of human resilience that has highlighted how families and individuals—especially children—adapt to adversity. However, the focus of resilience theory—particularly in the areas and effects of stress,
adversity, and crisis—has been more on the family than the individual (Masten, 2018). This effectual context provided the basis of how stress, adversity, and crisis help sculpt distinct artistic inclination in individuals who have gone through trauma, especially as children. Masten’s theory of resilience can be summarized by understanding there are multiple layers involved in shaping living things and systems through the stages of development and function. Additionally, Vygotsky’s theory of creativity explains the strong connection between emotion and thought and describes the linkage existing between reality and imagination (Lindqvist, 2003). In the loftiest complexity of the tangible and intangible forms of creativity or action, human beings are chained to the events of early childhood, living out, over and over, the incidents of a distant past. (Vygotsky, 1971). Since childhood has such an effect on individuals, this study examined the influence adverse childhood experiences ACEs had on the likelihood of creativity. The association childhood trauma has to creativity was also the underpinning of the examinations I made related to creative individuals returning emotionally to sadness and brokenness, or magic and joy, for deeper artistic inspiration, later in life and often on demand. Many individuals experienced great joy as their primary emotion, but some experienced a loneliness. Vygotsky argued if humans were restricted in their activity to duplicating the past, then mankind would be constrained to the past and unable to adapt to future events, only interacting as they related to past experiences. However, humans can lean into this to create their future and change their present. Imagination is also known as fantasy and spurs artistic tendencies (Vygotsky, 2004).

**Situation to Self**

The repercussions of abuse, neglect, and the negative effects of childhood trauma have revealed an overwhelmingly large destructive societal issue. There are many studies on what constitutes childhood trauma and what can heal past wounds. PTSD is another form of trauma
that can be associated with multiple causes of traumatic events. However, PTSD has become associated widely with military members who have been wounded, emotionally, by acts of war. For example, my great grandfather Will Teachenor suffered severe PTSD from the physical and emotional wounds inflicted upon him in WWI. He died in 1943, at 58 years old, while the second world war raged on across the ocean and the effects of the first one raged on inside of his mind.

The essence of the problem is that often it takes negative circumstances to bring about positive results or outcomes. My own life was impacted at the age of seven, when my mother divorced my father, prompting me—as a form of coping through creativity—to play the piano for the first time. The healing and calming feeling I experienced through music became one of my lifelong pursuits and passions. Recently, my mother passed away, and once again I felt the Lord prompting me to turn to channeling my grief through creativity. I began to play the fiddle—and shortly after, the mandolin and the banjo—for the first time. Then, I saw the struggle in my children who have not had the same lived experiences as have shaped my life's direction and do not always exhibit the same drive or compelling to play music. My children exhibit many creative attributes but often, are not as easily compelled to lose themselves in creative thought as I was when I was their age. They come from a stable home environment and live lives full of love, joy, and belonging. Sometimes, I see their eyes light up when they learn something new, and I remember as a boy how I would play music by myself for eight to ten hours at a time, without even taking a break to eat! The Holy Scriptures tell us, "Consider it all joy" whenever we face trials (James 1:2, New American Standard Bible). However, it is difficult to see the good when we are in the middle of the bad. In retrospect, I see the plan God had for me and the calling He placed on my life.

I have spent years in the music industry and have a subjective viewpoint of the evidence
garnered from both the individuals and the experiences. Therefore, I have become an insider. I have witnessed the self-destruction of many of my peers through the making of their art. This tortured artist has been glamorized throughout creative history—Hank Williams, Ray Charles, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, George Jones, Whitney Houston, Ernest Hemingway, Keith Whitley, Carter Stanley, Ira Louvin, Kurt Cobain, and more. Many artists suffer from addiction, however, because they believe they must be tortured to create. I have friends who are virtuosos and have been professional creatives for much of their adult lives, but once they become sober, they lose the ability to create. They have explained this phenomenon as being uninspired or being haunted by their inner demons. Additionally, several creatives struggle with finding artistic inspiration once they have “made it” enough to not struggle financially or once they have a stable marriage, routine, and homelife. The interesting reasoning behind this qualitative approach to research was how one’s individuality, inclinations, and viewpoints analyzed the evidence, subjectively. I had my own biases as I conducted field studies and used this approach to interpret the meaning behind the significant statements of the participants. I utilized a qualitative approach and therefore planned on working to keep distance at a minimum (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My passion regarding this topic was due to my lived experiences. I experienced neglect and loneliness for much of my childhood, and the Lord reached me through music and creativity. He used my trauma to inspire my creativity and allowed me to revisit the sadness and brokenness—not the specific details or circumstances—as a fountain of artistic inspiration. Initially, my own creativity fostered resilience through escape, imagination, and fantasy. Eventually, deep artistic inspiration was derived through my emotional return to former feelings of sadness, longingness, brokenness, and hope. I experienced firsthand the two sides of resilience, coping and inspiration, brought about by childhood trauma. It took many years to
realize the way trauma—namely childhood neglect—affect me as I developed an intense desire to create resilience but found it more difficult to be inspired when life was ordered and free from the worry, neglect, and brokenness I felt as a child. The Lord used the trauma of my life to increase my desire to create. Creating—playing music, writing, singing, painting, and producing—was where I found release and escape from the hurtful realities of my life and environment. Later in adulthood, I found myself returning to the loneliness and brokenness for a wealth of creative inspiration.

My lifelong passion is Jesus, followed by my family. However, I am very driven to lead, train, equip, and encourage others to discover how creativity creates a closer connection with our Creator. At heart, I am a dreamer, I love people, and am an entrepreneur. I have a dream of using my degree to lead my own organization through a philosophy based in creativity. I chose professional creatives as participants because I hope to change the way the music industry approaches audience consumption of music and art. I see the future of music as a much more immersive experience than it has been in the past. As a leader in the industry, I will continue to work with creative individuals, many of whom had a difficult past that will affect their performance or job-related tasks. Additionally, I hope to teach songwriting, business, and marketing at the collegiate level. This will allow me to educate and inform students and peers in the industry of innovative approaches and uses for creativity. I believe this dissertation helped fill a gap in the research that sees creativity through fresh eyes.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

Personally, I desired to get as close to the participants as possible. This study was hermeneutic phenomenology, because I have been immersed in the research setting for the past 21 years. I have a desire to understand what counts as knowledge, and I am selective; I see
creative individuals who have undergone childhood trauma as those with true knowledge of this subject. Therefore, I brought an epistemological, philosophical assumption to my research that to know this topic, I must be in very close proximity to the individual’s lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My axiological assumption is that I view the creative attributes of God as highly valuable to all humanity. My ontological assumption is that the fall of humanity is real—which created the reality of trauma—and God’s promises are real. I see God as sovereign and present in the reality of the unseen. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, King James Version). I view all healing as a creative act from God, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5, New King James Version). This healing happens when Heaven and earth overlap in the lives of those affected by Jesus Christ. “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (Isaiah 43:19, New International Version). Christ went through His own trauma on the cross and created—resurrected, restored, made new all who believe—from death to life. “Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so, he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make” (Jeremiah, 18:4-5, New King James Version). He can restore from the wreckage. These are the philosophical assumptions that influenced this study and determined my actions.

Social Constructivism Paradigm

Social constructivism was the paradigm for this study. Social constructivism is also known as interpretivism and is a paradigm where persons try to gain more understanding for a subject or a phenomenon through subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My worldview has been affected greatly by my years spent as a musician. I have been surrounded by musicians who have
had similar upbringings as me; this added to my bias. Since I took this approach, I realized the complexity of meaning as it related to categorical or ideological viewpoints. In fact, the overarching point was a strong reliance on the views of the subjects under study. Meanings are formed from historical and social contexts and are not just a concrete meaning imprinted or impressed upon a given individual in a society. They are constructed through social interaction. This social constructivism theoretical framework called for a style of writing that was much more literary than other styles or frameworks. Emergent ideals were inductive, methodically, due to the data collection style—interviews with participants, observing subjects, field immersion, and taking the time to develop and analyze significant statements. The overall inquiry approach allowed for value negotiation and honoring of traditions, and thus allowed for a multi-layered reality to be formed and constructed, namely co-constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Problem Statement**

The problem is creatives often go through childhood trauma before becoming creative and sometimes struggle to find peace and live happy, healthy, productive lives as adults (Masten & Barnes, 2018). Creativity has been linked to resilience through coping with early traumatic experiences—imagination, fantasy, and bonding with others, emotionally. Diamond, Ronel, and Shrira (2020) sampled 30 Holocaust survivors who were visual artists and resided in the nation of Israel. They used the instruments of semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions, and lived experiences. The study relied on convenience sampling and there were two primary themes in their findings: turning outward from a world of threat to a world at which to wonder and connecting with the world and others through creative experience. Creativity took the victims away from their reality to a world outside of their experiences and self. It also allowed them to
connect with others through those emotional experiences (Diamond et al., 2020; Melendez et al., 2018; Sandak et al., 2019; Thompson & Jaque, 2018).

This phenomenon needed to be studied and described to develop a better understanding of how to use creative resilience derived from trauma to remap victims’ thought processes through neuroplasticity. According to Masten and Barnes (2018), resilience theory explains the negative effects adverse childhood experiences have on whole life growth and the stages of development; however, this epidemic may also bring with it a few positive outcomes. Thankfully, childhood trauma is not a requirement for creativity. However, I am astounded by how many of my occupationally creative friends and peers have been victims of multiple adverse childhood experiences ACEs. As mentioned previously in my situation to self, my children exhibit many creative attributes but are not always as compelled to lose themselves in creative thought as I was when I was their age. They come from stable home environments and live lives full of love, joy, and belonging. As another side of resilience, creatives often tend to return emotionally to the sadness or emptiness of their childhood as a source of artistic inspiration. There are many known healing attributes of creativity, so this may be seen as a positive. Creativity may be a better option to heal by redirecting the brain to pain pathways and allowing healing through creative flow—especially if we discover a way to harness the positive effects of creativity (Lenz et al., 2017).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry. For this study, creative resilience derived from trauma was defined as the number of creatives—musicians, artists, dancers, writers—who had also fallen victim to trauma.
at some point prior to being creative, while finding relief and resilience through their creative
defforts (Ioannou, 2016; Creswell, 2013). The theories guiding this study were Vygotsky’s
(1930) theory of creativity and Masten’s (2018) resilience theory. Creative individuals were
employed professionally in a field related to the creative arts. Childhood trauma often plays a
role in sparking creativity in its victims (Beebe, 2018; Thomson & Jaque, 2018). I hope I added
and gave meaning to the lived experiences of my participants—highlighting the purpose of this
study.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to identify new methods of resilience, coping, and
artistic inspiration for victims of childhood trauma, as I believe it revealed how trauma can be a
catalyst for creativity, resilience, and artistic inspiration. This study also contributed to Masten’s
(2018) resilience theory and Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity research. Previous studies
have shown very little, if any, perceived causation between childhood trauma and creativity.
Furthermore, there were no studies related to returning to the emotion of that trauma for artistic
inspiration, which was also be a benefit of this research.

Empirical

This study explored and expanded studies on the effects adverse childhood experiences
ACEs have on the whole person's psyche in adulthood. ACEs focused on the negative effects,
and this study focused on positive outcomes (Martin-Higarza et al., 2020). This study supported
and extended existing literature regarding arts-based therapy for abused and neglected children.
This existing literature identified how the arts can create new processes, ultimately leading to the
restoration of their emotional equilibrium (Mutch & Latai, 2019). Therapeutic approaches
utilizing the creative arts have an influence on resiliency in adults. In fact, creative endeavors
provide an outlet for adults who have experienced past or current trauma (Reed et al., 2020). Additionally, this study expanded on this research through understanding trauma as a catalyst and recognizing ways the memory prompted an emotional return to joy or suffering as a trigger for artistic inspiration.

**Theoretical**

Theoretically, it corroborated and extended Masten’s (2018) rich work on resilience theory which helps explain how families adapt to stress, adversity, and crisis, however, Masten put most of the emphasis on the family. My study placed all the emphasis on the individual and their personal road to resilience. There are many factors that shape living things and systems, as they develop and function (Masten, 2018). Additionally, Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity was expanded and upheld by the findings of my study. Vygotsky (1930) discovered the strong connection human beings have to the events that take place in early childhood development. The research went as far as explaining creativity as living out events of the distant past which also determines our adaptability with the future (Vygotsky, 1971). Vygotsky (2004) suggested that all creatives are sculpted by two things: time and their environment, with created things coming from internal needs that preceded the creative, and relied, ultimately, on external capabilities in which they have no control.

**Practical**

This research helped individuals who were victims of childhood trauma through the identification of tools of resilience. Understanding how creativity is often born from trauma, required interpretation of creatives in their natural environment and looked at the occurrence phenomena of trauma victims who turn to creativity as a coping mechanism, or a catalyst. Identifying these attributes and trends helps traumatized individuals, even as a form a therapeutic
creativity. This study helped determine suggestions for developing programs that allow creatives to offer lessons or mentorship to children who experienced trauma. This helps them discover a passion they otherwise would not know they had. Some significant concepts were the long time disconnect between creativity and education, cognitive neuroscience, and structural and functional plasticity (Zhou, 2018).

**Research Questions**

Due to my lived experiences as an occupational creative who has undergone childhood trauma, I often crossed paths with others who had similar experiences prior to becoming a creative. Individuals are bound to the events that happened in their developmental stages of early childhood, whether consciously or unconsciously (Vygotsky, 1971). I was fascinated with the way life’s trials can bring about such beautiful outcomes as creativity, inspiration, and healing. Since Vygotsky (1971) identified the lifelong connection victims have with early childhood trauma, I hoped to discover a link between childhood trauma and creativity, especially as to how it related to resiliency and artistic inspiration.

**Research Question One**

What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors?

Childhood trauma plays a role in sparking creativity (Lindqvist, 2003). I wanted to understand how much of a role it played. I hoped to discover what made some more prone to creative resilience and others more prone to creative destruction. Vygotsky (1971) saw creativity as an unconscious social release, with our consciousness explaining our subconscious (Lindqvist, 2003).

**Research Question Two**
What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing?

Thompson and Jaque (2018) explained how a derivative of negative ACEs is often creativity and artistic performance. The emotion from the initial trauma triggers the victim to begin creating as a vehicle for escape through fantasy and imagination. Others just begin telling their story through art as a way to heal. This helped me understand what fostered creative resilience through escape, imagination, and fantasy.

**Research Question Three**

How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration?

Creativity can spark resilience, both pre and post trauma, in the form of escape through fantasy and return through realism (Beebe, 2018). There are therapeutic advantages associated with creativity born as a product of trauma (Thomson & Jaque, 2018). I have witnessed many creatives—myself being one of them—experience an emotional return to former feelings of sadness, longingness, brokenness, and hope—whether healthy or unhealthy—as a source for artistic inspiration.

**Definitions**

1. **Artist** – creator of works or things through the use of imagination and great skill (Szostak, 2020).

2. **Creatives** – persons chasing creativity or engaging in the creative process, either occupationally or self-described (Corazza, 2016).

3. **Creativity** – necessitates a combination of potential originality and effectiveness (Corazza, 2016).

5. **PTSD** – posttraumatic stress disorder (Franklin, et al., 2018).

6. **Resilience** – “the inferred capacity for adapting to adversity that derived from observable success in overcoming challenges” “…that threaten the function, survival, or future development of the system” (Masten, 2018, p. 15; Masten & Barnes, 2018, p. 98).

**Summary**

There is minimal related literature, if any, linking childhood trauma to creativity among adults; however, research of this subject assists in the development of a much shorter healing process and pathway to mental and emotional healing and wellness. Additionally, I identified a phenomenon—a glaring gap in the research—of creatives returning to previous emotions of joy or sadness as a source of artistic inspiration. I developed a stronger connection between the effects associated with traumatic experiences from one’s childhood to creativity and resilience in adulthood and later in life. “Traumatized talented children in environments that focus on intense evaluation and criticism may compromise their ability to perform creatively. During training, they may respond with a decreased sense of control, including withdrawing from challenging tasks” (Thomson & Jaque, 2018, p. 7). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry.

Creativity can foster resilience and healing, though sometimes this can be through fantasy and sometimes realism. There are multiple factors—level and severity of abuse, physical, mental, emotional, sexual, feeling unloved or unprotected, neglect, a dysfunctional home life, that can lead to a higher likelihood of fantasy, shame, and anxiety, as an escape from or way to deal with reality. Talented students of creativity will do one of two things: they will withdraw from
learning and become distant and unwilling, or they will take on a hyper-vigilance to anything threatening their creative learning. Either way, there will be a substantial compromise, so that their talent and creativity may never be realized, fully (Thomson & Jaque, 2018). Creativity is a strong tool that can be used as a coping mechanism for victims of ACEs and PTSD. Often, entertainers find ways to channel sadness and develop a stronger creative flow than their untraumatized peers. The higher the amount of childhood trauma, the more likely performers are to exhibit a much more intense experience each time they are creative (Thomson & Jaque, 2018). When developed, it can create a shorter pathway to healing and comfort for survivors with a painful past.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

There are many perceived causes of creativity and resilience. Sometimes they are connected; sometimes, they are separate and vary, circumstantially. God has brought me on an unexpected journey, and it took me far too long to realize my pride and identity in creativity, unfortunately, at times even over my identity in the Creator. The research of this dissertation was supported primarily by two theories—Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity and Masten’s (2018) resilience theory. I explored the direct connection of this theoretical framework as it guided this study. When considering the related literature this study was built upon, this literature review discussed God’s creative nature and how the Holy Scripture directs us in James’ epistle to consider various trials as joy. Since this study was focused on the phenomenon of how many creatives experienced traumatic childhoods, I reviewed published literature regarding God’s creative nature and finding joy in the trials, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma derived creativity, and how creatives often escaped reality through fantasy and imagination. Furthermore, I examined related literature regarding neuroplasticity and the two sides of creative resilience—escape from sadness and return to sadness, as they both related to artistic inspiration.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in the guidance of two primary theories: Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity and Masten’s (2018) resilience theory. These theories utilized in my theoretical framework have informed the literature on my topic by understanding the link early childhood, especially trauma, has on creativity and the link trauma has on resilience and the life courses of individuals. There was a gap in the research because there were no theories that addressed this study, specifically. Since Vygotsky saw artistic expression as emotional liberation
and an unconscious social release, this helped inform the significance of further study on this topic (Lindqvist, 2003; Vygotsky, 1930).

**Theory of Creativity**

The first primary theory that guided this study was Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity. This theory illuminated how emotion is linked to thought and understands the existing linkage and connection of reality and imagination (Lindqvist, 2003). Humans are tied to the distant occurrences that occurred during the formidable, developmental years of early childhood, in the most complex forms of creative action, tangible and intangible (Vygotsky, 1971). If a person is constrained to their historical actions, Vygotsky (2004) believes, then all humans would be unable to evolve for the future because they would only be able to relate to past experiences. However, this is not the case because humans can imagine and fantasize; this spurs artistic tendencies, therefore, and can change an individual’s future by creating a new pathway for their present (Vygotsky, 2004). Vygotsky explained that human consciousness understands creativity. No theory of sociology explains where ideology came from because human mindfulness is the ideological beginning. Therefore, an appealing theory of cognizance should be a conscious theory of psychology, which affords a social dimension through cultural context and creative works interpretation (Lindqvist, 2003). The aspect of humanity that differs from person to person participates in culture and historical tradition. All humanity is united through various perceptions, however unique those interpretations may be. Vygotsky believed art to be a “social release of the unconscious, or a liberation of emotions” and the subconscious is interpreted by our consciousness (Lindqvist, 2003, p. 247). This study sought to understand the experience of people who suffered childhood trauma but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors. Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity connected us to early childhood events;
however, the theory of creativity was built upon by this study in an attempt to connect trauma
derived creativity as the link to resilience in childhood and adulthood.

**Resilience Theory**

Masten’s (2018) resilience theory was the second primary theory that guided this study. The theory realized the complexity of shaping human beings and systems as they go through the varying stages of development and function. The interest in resiliency came from a need to understand the way mental health and development of individuals was affected by trauma, especially how they made adaptations to their life course once they were exposed to trauma, poverty, or were considered at risk through some other valuation, such as genetic history (Masten, 2018). Masten’s (2018) resilience theory shaped my study by influencing the research questions and the overall design. My lived experiences increased my interest in the subject of childhood trauma resilience. Resilience theory informed and guided my study, particularly, because my study placed all the emphasis on the individual and their personal road to resilience. Masten’s (2018) resilience theory focused primarily on familial adaptation to stress, adversity, and crisis, therefore there were gaps in the literature. There are many things that shape living things and systems as they develop and function (Masten, 2018). Additionally, Beebe (2018), and Thomson and Jaque (2018), are some important thinkers in this field. Beebe (2018) built from the theories of Carl Jung and his early discussions with Sigmund Freud regarding the exploration of psychoanalysis. Further, he explored how resilience can be fostered from creativity—either after a traumatic event or awaiting prospective trauma—through both fantasy and realism (Beebe, 2018).

Theoretically, Masten (2018) identified how familial groups adapt to stress, adversity, and crisis. However, Masten’s (2018) resilience theory placed the main emphasis on the family,
but this study extended and corroborated the theoretical framework by placing all the emphasis on the individual. There was not much understanding of developmental coping and the role it plays on the overall resilience of the individual. Masten and Barnes’ (2018) *Resilience in Children: Developmental Perspectives* explained the exponential growth of resilience science due to the consequentially negative effects ACEs have on lifelong growth and development. The study identified the need for resilience to be nurtured during the lived experiences of a traumatic childhood (Masten & Barnes, 2018).

Thompson identified childhood adversity as levels of abuse—physical, mental, emotional, sexual, neglect, or dysfunctional family settings—and investigated how performing artists with at least four ACEs had a significantly higher amount of strong creativity and had a higher likelihood to experience fantasy, anxiety, and shame, from previous traumatic events. Negative adverse childhood experiences led to positive experiences in creative performances and therapeutic advantages, thus leading to many creatives coming from traumatic childhood backgrounds. Traumatic childhood backgrounds were based on four or more adverse childhood experiences (Beebe, 2018; Thomson & Jaque, 2018).

**Related Literature**

The phenomenology explored throughout this study examined how, in the early-stage, creativity provided resilience through escape—imagination, fantasy, but eventually provided artistic inspiration through returning to the heaviness of that emotion, pain, and sadness, as a trigger for artistic inspiration. This was not revealed in any previous studies and was a gap I discovered in the literature. Furthermore, there had been minimal literature regarding even a perceived connection between trauma, creativity, and resilience. What small amount had been published made some connection of childhood trauma to creativity, creativity to resilience, or
resilience as a result of arts-based therapy, but there was a gap in the research concerning the link or perceived causation of creativity being born from childhood trauma as a need for resilience (Beebe, 2018; Lindqvist, 2003; Masten, 2018; Mutch & Latai, 2019, Thomson & Jaque, 2018; Vygotsky, 1930). Furthermore, I found no studies explaining the creatives’ need to return to the emotion induced from earlier trauma as a muse or catalyst of creative flow.

**God’s Creative Nature and Finding Joy in the Trials**

All truth comes from above, and the Lord is the Creator, thus being creative is His nature, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, Christian Standard Bible). He created us in His own image, “So God created mankind in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female” (Genesis 1:27, Christian Standard Bible). Human beings are image bearers, both structurally and functionally (Hoekema, 1994). The motivation of my research regarding creativity derived from trauma and inspiration derived from resilience took on a new meaning when I read the writings of James, the brother of Jesus; The author wrote through the directive of God’s Word, “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4, Christian Standard Bible). Jesus explains how blessings will come through trials, and calls out the importance—even rewards—of enduring hardships (Kgatle, 2019).

Creative writing can assist individuals through the process of expressing grief. Music and creating helps one express their internal feelings through reflection—clearing a pathway for healing (Oehlers, 2020). Creativity can be a catalyst for resilience (Beebe, 2018). Music has a soothing aspect that can draw someone closer to the Creator through calmness which ushers in a
strong emotion of inspiration (2 Kings 3:15, English Standard Version). In the book of Kings, while in the Syrian city of Damascus, Elisha requested for a musician as he sought the divine revelation of the LORD. “But now bring me a musician.” And when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him” (2 Kings 3:15, English Standard Version). The creative attribute of God has the power to transform, “King Saul was anointed by Samuel, “After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you” (1 Samuel 10:5-7, English Standard Version). As the Holy Scripture states, God used music to soften Samuel’s spirit enough to be filled with God’s Holy Spirit, transforming Samuel into another man. The Lord told Moses He appointed Uri’s son, Bezalel—from the tribe of Judah, by name, filled him with His Holy Spirit—Ruah (Hebrew), and wisdom—hakma (Hebrew). This was the first time the Scripture told of the Father filling someone with both, His Spirit and wisdom. This is the artist who designed the gold, silver, and bronze works of art in the tent of meeting—including the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat! The Scripture states God has “put wisdom in the heart of every skilled artisan (Exodus 31:1-11, English Standard Version). This passage explains that creative, artistic abilities are a gift from God Himself, and therefore is given to whomever He desires. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17, English Standard Version). “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28, English Standard Version).
As Holy Scripture states, creativity is the nature of God; all Christians are instructed to consider all trials as joy, because testing provides endurance, making us mature, complete, and lacking in nothing. As Oehlers (2020) research reveals, trauma often enhances creativity. Therefore, it would be expected that the Lord, who according to Romans 5:8 gave His life for us before we loved Him, would allow healing through the trials we endure while on this earth. Therefore, an individual’s testimony and the resilience exhibited through their newfound creative output following childhood trauma can promote God’s kingdom and lead others to His restorative power with the help and power of the Holy Spirit. This Biblical research identified, foundationally, how creativity can be born from trauma.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**

ACEs are a strong indicator of future depression in adulthood; however, therapies focused on trauma, and cognitive behavior in adulthood can minimize, even prevent, the symptomatic effects of varying levels of childhood trauma (LeMasters et al., 2021). The Martín-Higarza et al. (2020) study was conducted in conjunction with the Kaiser Permanente and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and is one of the most expansive epidemiological investigations ever performed to understand the correlation of childhood and adolescent trauma and adult health. It examined in-depth: adult diseases, life quality, hospitalization and visits, and mortality rates and how each was affected by dysfunctional familial environments and the maltreatment of individuals during adolescence and early childhood. The study found the higher the number of adverse childhood experiences, the greater the likelihood of the victim of that trauma to be affected later in life by the effects in the aforementioned list (Martin-Higarza et al., 2020). This highlighted how childhood neglect and abuse have far-reaching effects. When concerning the propensity of the individual to overcome
the problem, past studies have revealed some strategies have a higher cost than others. In fact, the overall success potential is relative to that higher cost (Martín-Higarza et al., 2020).

Creativity can be utilized as a method of intervention for victims of childhood traumatic events. These interventions come in several opportunistic forms to help individuals actively process their emotions through preferred, selected activities that allow all ages, socio-economic groups, and levels of intelligence to express themselves (Shakoor et al., 2021).

The ACE questionnaire assessment tool measures childhood trauma through the number of adverse childhood experiences, from one to ten. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire was included in (Appendix C) of this paper. To summarize the questionnaire, out of the ten categories of adversity generating the ACE score, three are abuse—physical, emotional, and sexual, two are neglect—namely physical, and emotional, and the remaining five categorical classifications are household dysfunction. These 10 ACEs are commonly the root of systematic societal issues. Furthermore, according to Martín-Higarza et al. (2020), there is a strong relationship between childhood trauma and physical and mental health in adulthood.

Many circumstantial factors have been explored, however, coping strategies were the focus of this research, because they were the most relevant to the phenomena (Manyema & Richter, 2019; Martín-Higarza, et al., 2020; Scobey-Polacheck, 2020; Stork, 2017).

There are many disease risk factors associated with ACEs and they can continue to appear throughout a victim’s lifespan as developmental problems. Some of these problems include disrupted neurodevelopment, impairment at all levels of the social, cognitive, and emotional psyche, high-risk behaviors that risk health, all forms of disease, disabilities, and other social and socioeconomic problems, even placing the individual at a higher risk for early death. This affects individuals of all socioeconomic strata and nationalities. Martin-Higarza (2020)
identified increasing financial support, coping methods, and life strategies as strategic approaches of resilience, however, these approaches are focused on task and problem solving. Stork (2017) placed more emphasis on emotions, identifying love—even from just one individual—as a key factor for trajectory change, resilience, and healing. (Manyema & Richter, 2019; Martín-Higarza, et al., 2020; Scobey-Polacheck, 2020; Stork, 2017). Added factors such as homelessness can increase the likelihood of ACES. One in three housed youth experience at least one or more ACEs compared to over half of all youth raised in homeless familial environments and nearly nine out of ten unaccompanied, homeless youth, which exacerbates the risks associated with poor health conditions (Barnes et al., 2021). Trauma that is cumulative and long-term increases the likelihood of psychological, mental, and socioemotional issues and raises the risk of abusing alcohol, drugs, and other substances—such as food or sex—and creates in the survivor an inclination toward re-traumatization (Naff, 2014). In addition to these major health concerns for the victims of childhood trauma, the individual can experience serious, negative effects on well-being, and their lifespan can be shortened by as many as 20 years (Shakoor, et al., 2021).

Early traumatic experiences are a cause of anxiety and can serve as a roadblock to a functioning adulthood. Sadly, many children fly ‘under the radar’, and abuse, neglect, and other harmful issues go unreported in childhood, but the aftereffects surface later in life through destructive behavior. Trauma victims often struggle to find peace and live happy, healthy, productive lives as adults. There is a strong need for future resilience measures to be taken when considering victims as it relates to their ACEs, and the study sought to bring awareness to the negative effects of childhood trauma. This is necessary for the underlying health of individuals affected by stressful early life trauma who desire self-care in communities to begin a road map
for healing individuals and communities. Healing is a journey that differs from person to person and is very individualized. The approach is taken, and the perception of healing can be credited to many influences—physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual, but it is nonetheless indicative of trusting and believing in the unknown, whether subliminal, chance, metaphysical forces, or some other phenomena. This cultivates a high level of mojo or magic commonly attributed in fiction to that of superheroes. A lack of nurturing relationships in a child’s early life can inhibit relational well-being and increase negative emotions and anxiety in the brain, impeding overall health development (Bethell et al., 2017; Masten & Barnes, 2018; Shauck, 2017). Furthermore, early childhood adversity due to adverse traumatic events may even alter adult function-ability and adaptation later in life through the occurrence—even likelihood—of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcoholism (Lee & Oswald, 2018).

The studies related to how adverse childhood experiences—trauma, can lead to many health issues later in adulthood (Bethell et al., 2017; Masten & Barnes, 2018; Shauck, 2017) provide the exact trigger for which I looked regarding a possible or perceived catalyst for creativity. At a minimum, they put the individual in a position of distress—creating the possible need for escape. Since the primary focus of my research was the Shakoor et al. (2021) suggested utilization of creativity as a mitigation intervention for victims who have identified multiple ACEs through individualized artistic expression and resilience, this area of scholarly literature was very helpful to my studies. The research performed in this study revealed methods to avoid or lessen some of the identified negative effects of childhood trauma discovered by Martín-Higarza, et al. (2020) and LeMasters, et al. (2021), such as depression, social and cognitive impairment, disrupted neurodevelopment, all forms of diseases, partaking in all types of high-risk behaviors, and early death.
Trauma Derived Creativity

Creativity is "the ability to produce work that is both novel [i.e., original, unexpected] and appropriate [i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints]" (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 3). History has even shown the possibility of a link between creative output and mental illness. In fact, a person with a mental illness and a person who is creative are in almost the exact state of mind (Snapp et al., 2018). The documented connection of creativity—inspiration from the divine, and mental state alteration, first appeared in the 4th century, B.C. Well-known philosopher, Plato, stated madness—whether recognized as mental illness or creativity—is a gift from above and the channel of most blessing (Snapp et al., 2018). There has been an influx of research that has revealed creativity is rewarded in the workplace (Gerhart & Fang, 2015; Marks & Huzzard, 2008). What cognitive neuroscience means for academia remained to be discovered as there had been a gap in the literature. One out of every four children will experience trauma that will affect their learning, development, and behavior; therefore, trauma has a strong influence on its victims throughout the course of a lifetime (Goessling, 2020; National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), 2008; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), 2014). The cognitive process of creativity from a neurological standpoint analyzes the associative pathways of individual brain activity and categorizes the relevance of engaging actively in all aspects of behaviors that are creative. There is a nature and nurture side of creative resilience. The connection between intelligence and creativity—the “nature” side, and as both relate to cognitive neuroscience, creativity and creative thinking, can be triggered by specific traumatic events—the “nurture” side. Studies in cognitive psychology
and education are evidence of the contribution academia has on the development of creativity as a skill (Zhou, 2018).

**Partial Genetic Overlap, Risk, and Psychiatric Disorders**

There is little known regarding the genetics of creativity; however, a small amount of research identified creative attributes and characteristics are inheritable, at least partially, from generation to generation (Li et al., 2020). Additionally, creativity is shaped by culture, social values, and where a person is born, at least partially, therefore making it changeable (Snapp, 2018). There is a strong probability that the creativity trait in humans is polygenic, meaning the phenotypic trait of creativity originates from multiple genes (Benson et al., 2010). There are multiple variations of polygenic traits—especially due to the contributing influence of multiple genes, and each has small effects on creativity. There are epidemiological associations linking risky behaviors and associated psychiatric disorders; therefore, persons with a predisposition to behavioral risk-taking and disorders of the psyche due to variations in their genetics may be a key factor underlying the basis of genetics in creativity (Li et al., 2020). Creativity through the arts provides persons with a safe place, fosters mindfulness, and promotes their overall well-being—especially when dealing with depression, anxiety, and other common issues of mental health (Atayero et al., 2021). When considering how many artists are known to have suffered from mental illness, have committed suicide, died, or been institutionalized due to some form of mental illness, it is evident there is more at work than mere chance or coincidence (Markowitz & Hancock, 2017). These iconic artists are major figures throughout all artistic disciplines—poets, painters, writers, artists, musicians, actors, and singers, and many have experienced trauma (Snapp et al., 2018; Sussman, 2007).
The Benefits of Creativity in Trauma Victims

Maureen Neihart (1998) defined creativity as producing an item or artifact that is mutually new and treasured or valued. Lived experiences allow us to learn from examples of external artistic expression and deep-rooted introversion, where childhood trauma affects individuals in different ways. Creativity becomes a tool victims of childhood trauma can utilize to build resilience through expression and release (Clay, 2017). Victims of trauma—especially children or childhood survivors—who have learned to utilize creativity and other forms of artistic methods as a survival tool while experiencing the struggle associated with creative expression as it continues through adulthood, experience the benefits of creativity when dealing with the aftereffects of childhood trauma. The aptitude for resilience through creativity materializes from a forbearance of the unknown occurring from trauma. However, this may be increased or decreased whenever there is a relational association (Wehle, 2016). Music contributes to enhanced psychological well-being and minimizes stress in those who suffer from anxiety. Creativity, especially making music, enriches non-creative areas of the life of an individual (Hallam, 2015). The act of being creative—whether as a construct or an expression—is a powerful tool that can assist in wounded psyche healing and regeneration of compromised states of mental issues (Snapp et al., 2018). “Traumatic influence was seen to have a discernible impact on the expression of emotion in music, memory for music, career choices, and interpersonal relationships. It was through music that they reestablished their connection to self and others, and, after a period of struggling with emotional expression, experienced a deepening of affect” (Swart, 2014, p. 193). Following a traumatic event, music and art makers can suffer at first; then the creative act can transform the individual and restore their well-being through the added resilience brought about by the creative act. The act of playing or performing can assist
the individual in memory recovery and lost motor skills, and the emotional healing benefits can lead to growth in the victim’s spiritual dimension (Swart, 2014).

Creativity provides an outlet for victims of childhood trauma to overcome adversity through resilience and identity reformation, and celebration (Meyer, 2019). The arts provide a method for individuals to tell their stories, be vulnerable, and be heard when words alone are insufficient. Youth thrive in rich, expressive, creative environments (Meyer, 2016; Wright, 2016). Characteristically, conditions of doing and actively engaging in creative activities, where the youth feel a sense of autonomous freedom, fosters whole person resilience. Creativity creates a narrative in the silence and abstract that uncages the areas the person has kept locked inside. The artistic expression brings with it the freedom to release pain and sadness while taking control of and mastering the trauma that could otherwise control them. There are even many benefits associated with this openness and creative expression in a group setting. According to Lougheed (2019), artistic expression allows the victim to self-heal and share their story, bringing with it a sense of safety and mindfulness. When a victim desires a story to be told, while the details and truth remain anonymous, they can use one of many forms of abstract and ambiguity—creating aliases and pseudonyms, changing the locations and details, even scripting the story as purely abstract. The approach that is partially or fully abstract creates a deeper element of safety and freedom (Lougheed, 2019; Meyer, 2019; Wright, 2016). There are multiple methods to utilize artistic expression in forms that are beneficial and therapeutic. Even small amounts of creative arts-based therapy—moderate time spent painting every other day, can improve the imaginative and creative mental cognition and socioemotional health of individuals (Hu, et al., 2020).
Creativity and even creative tendencies are a paradox since either come from an acceptable allowance for the unknown that can be hindered or increased by any level or amount of relational trauma (Wehle, 2016). There are times when trauma is extremely difficult to articulate, especially since some childhood trauma occurs prior to the victim being verbal. In post-traumatic situations difficult to verbalize, music and the arts become a safe pathway for creatives to express emotions in ways unattainable for their non-creative counterparts (Swart, 2016). Playing the piano can even increase a trauma victim’s lifelong well-being, “when we consider health holistically, it is also important to ask how piano playing can contribute to human flourishing” (Fourie et al., 2016, p. 125). There are centers of emotion located in the brain, even subconscious, that music can enter directly, bypassing normal cortical functioning; therefore, music exhibits cathartic characteristics—leading the individual to purge negative feelings and emotions through artistic creation (Swart, 2016).

Musical creativity is a factor of resilience building, and traumatic healing, even relationship building; however, it is difficult for some children to gain access to creative opportunities (Sullivan, 2021). Victims of trauma, especially children, may find expression through creativity more comfortable than traditional communication (Desmond et al., 2015). Recently, there have been advances in the field of treatment for trauma victims through creativity (MacIntosh et al., 2020). This diverted away from the field’s former focus on counseling and shifted toward therapy based on the body. These interventions more readily targeted the creative and social aspects of trauma-healing methodologies for children and, more recently, adults through the use of singing, specifically, choral music (MacIntosh et al., 2020). The researchers explored the emotive impact singing had on adult-aged victims of childhood trauma and identified major improvements in seven areas: “feelings about “structure,” feelings about
repertoire, dealing with triggers, choir as a safe and healing space, getting connected to music (again), getting connected to others, and therapy without therapy” (MacIntosh et al., 2020, p. 22).

The Holy Bible describes how King Saul found reprieve through the playing of David on his lyre, “And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So, Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him” (1 Samuel 16:23, English Standard Version). Additionally, the therapeutic benefits of artistic endeavors include decreased traumatic event effects—including the intensity of emotional pain in victims who are creative—the victim has more resources available, trauma victims have a deeper understanding of the trauma and the meaning behind it, and there is an increased abstract resilience fostered by imagination and creativity experienced by the victim (Hass-Cohen et al., 2018). Overall, creativity and imagination help control the adverse impact of the individual’s trauma (Hass-Cohen et al., 2018). Music, art, drama, and dance are all forms of expressive arts due to their focus on the communication sensibilities of the creative. Post-traumatic creative healing is associated with safety, comfort, self-efficacy, communal-efficacy, connection, and hope (Meyer DeMott et al., 2017). However, the fear of survivors of childhood trauma is self-destruction associated with the freedom coupled with the temptation to explore their own creativity (Wehle, 2016). This is because one finds out who they really are through the act of being creative, and this exposes the possibility of harm to the survivor when there is possible creative suppression if the socio-setting is psycho-manipulative by nature. Creativity is improved when the traumatic impact is identified as a catalyst for becoming creative. There is a relationship between creativity and freedom. Traumatic events in childhood, whether being deprived or neglected regularly or long-term, or undergoing a one-time life-threatening, or
seemingly life-threatening event, takes away the human ability to be comfortable in body, mind, or external interaction (Wehle, 2016).

Dancing is another form of creative expression with therapeutic benefits. Authentic expression becomes very difficult for many victims of trauma; however, dancing can allow the survivor an opportunity to bring forth sensations in ways that boost self-confidence and esteem. Therefore, dancing is another form of creativity that can lead to catharsis in the victim, post trauma (Koch et al., 2019)

**Escape through Fantasy and Imagination**

Furthermore, imagination creates a bridge from inner—mind and spirit to outer self—body and social environment of the external world (Dowd, 1989). Once an individual has gone through a traumatic experience, this relational idea of the inner self is shut down and locked away deep inside the individual, only to be set free—outer self—through the transitional vulnerability associated with art and creativity. Fantasy and imagination are often the initial signs of healing and a path to resilience in the victim, developing a new facet of their identity. This occurs through the release of the trauma experiences as they grow healthy, emotionally (Meyer, 2019; DeMott, et al., 2017). Some talents are only identified using art (Meyer 2019). Artistic escape is a powerful gift when faced with adversity, but it is also a way to relieve the stress and anxiety associated with everyday life (Dreifuss-Kattan, 2016). Artists and thinkers exhibit connectivity between creativity and mourning. Knowledge may be exhibited through the healing process of creativity as it serves as a mending combatant juxtaposition to painful trauma and loss. Twentieth century artists and scientists had to realize their own mortality and access creative energy reserves—previously unknown—in addition to a modern experiential time healing away from everyday life (Dreifuss-Kattan, 2016). Artistic imagination has been viewed
as an autopoietic functioning phenomenon that generates and regenerates itself the more it is utilized (Wu, 2016). Major event traumas and ongoing, minor traumas will affect the recovery possibilities of each victim, differently. Creative engagement can assist individuals and speed their likelihood of recovery, greatly. This may also aid in creating a positive self-image and communality (Williams-Cooper & White, 2017).

There is a creative process that comes from coping with traumatic experiences. Trauma—when observed through psychoanalytic meditation—addresses creativity, the art of trauma, psychoanalysis, and creative process (Ioannou, 2016). Creatives learn to deal with the often laborious feat of surviving while discovering the time and energy it takes to foster their own creativity (Wehle, 2016). This creates a quandary in conjunction with their artwork being compromised from their long list of miscellaneous external annoyances such as time, energy, work, home, and normalcy (Wehle, 2016). Beebe (2018) accomplished his expansion of psychoanalysis in *Trauma and Creative Resilience* through the exploration of two artists and their respective works of art. Beebe (2018) observed stark differences in their paintings, yet there were many hidden signs and similarities in each artists’ creation. Creativity can foster resilience after negative childhood events, either post or awaiting potentially traumatic events through imaginative fantasy. Originality is tied directly to the expression and voice of the artist. There has been some interest in where creative flow or artistic inspiration has occurred; however, it is often likened to feelings of joy, play, or other positive aspects of concentrated focus. (Beebe, 2018; Shauck, 2017). Music has a perceived linkage to identity through the manifestation of a sense of inclusion and a feeling of belonging. (Gracie et al., 2018).

Humans have shown extreme resilience throughout history. Levels of trauma are relative, making it difficult to categorize what level of trauma will have the greatest effect on the victim.
The phenomenon trauma creates is the need for resilience in individuals, no matter the circumstance—war, homelife, neglect, violence, abuse. Research has explored the lived experiences of Holocaust victims as they created art; survivors who turned to creative endeavors tended to experience an uplifting enhanced emotive realm of engagement—leading to positive emotional outcomes. (Diamond et al., 2020). This new normal is a place where the traumatogenic agent—the event or party responsible for the trauma—cannot have any power. “Beyond the enduring inner world of abandonment and threat, enhanced through art is a realm of wonderment at the world beyond the self” (Diamond et al., 2020, p. 609). Creative resilience is about escaping from reality, whether through fantasy or realism in painting (Beebe, 2018). Mythopoesis—making up stories or creating characters—is a strong defense for patients that reveal delusional tendencies. There is a strong likelihood of contrary actions of patients using realism as a defense when they are neurotic. This is just a form of psychological creativity. Self-transcendence is a fundamentally emotive state relative to an artist’s experience with trauma as it reveals the arts’ potential as to how it is associated with and connected to trauma (Beebe, 2018; Diamond et al., 2020; Ioannou, 2016; Shauck, 2017). According to the Holocaust survivor research of Diamond et al., (2020), “themes pointed to the emotional state of self-transcendence as fundamental to survivors’ artistic experience and suggests how this may relate to their enduring struggle with trauma; thus, shedding new light on the redeeming potential of art in the face of trauma” (Diamond et al., 2020, p. 609). The creative victims of the Holocaust utilized art to escape their reality (Diamond et al., 2020). Music and creative endeavors lead to a higher self-esteem in children victimized by traumatic experiences, accompanied by promoting trust and overall identity development benefits (Hallam, 2015).
Grief can be expressed through the outlet of writing as a form of therapy; however, the creative act is often enhanced by the traumatic event (Oehlers, 2020). Prose and poetry are helpful tools to bring form to painful, jumbled thoughts the author would otherwise be unable to express fully, even though it will likely be born from feelings of sadness and distress (Oehlers, 2020). Thomson and Jaque (2017), in their work, *Creativity and the Performing Artist: Behind the Mask*, examined creativity, proneness to fantasy, flow, and creative process, and psychopathology as each related to performers at all degrees of childhood trauma, from none to severe. This was important to the study because it addressed adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), creativity experience, dispositional flow, fantasy, number of traumatic events, and psychopathology—trait anxiety, internalized shame (Thomson & Jaque, 2017). Artistic flow is “a positively felt state of deep concentration and calm” (Chemi, 2016, p. 37). Flow is higher among creators who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (Thomson & Jaque, 2017). Resilience measurements lack consistency, therefore undermining the ability for programs that construct progression toward understanding resilience. (Serfilippi & Ramnath, 2018). Resilience methodologies can be identified through child-aged therapy measures such as creative outputs that help vocalize or amplify coping skills—musicality, dancing, telling stories, acting, drawing, painting, and sculpting—especially as a retort to trauma and adversity. Focused attention on adaption through creativity is enhanced through all forms of creativity (Callaghan, et al., 2019).

**Neuroplasticity.** The human brain can alter mapping through demanded responses brought on by the environment (Hyde et al., 2009). Creativity induced brain flexibility assists in triumphing over routine patterns of cognition and engenders fresh ideas and associations; therefore, being a person involved in ongoing creativity has a much stronger effect than single
one-time performances or acts of creativity (Praszkier, 2018). There have been neurological studies exhibiting this ability in healthy adults, but outside of Hyde et al., (2009)’s research, there has been very little research related to plasticity in the developing brain of children—especially the post-trauma time frame following four or more adverse childhood experiences. Hyde et al., (2009) discovered when compared to a controlled group of young children who did and did not receive 15 months of music lessons, research has shown, neuroplasticity induced through 15 months of instruction on a musical instrument in early childhood had an influence on structural neurological differences, such as the areas of sensorimotor auditory, and multimodal integration in the adult professionals—creatives and non-creatives. In other words, music lessons given to young children for longer than a year brings about cognitive changes in the structure and makeup of the child’s brain that deviate from the formation of the brain under non-musical factors. Since there were no significant variations among the groups prior to the musical instruction, the study suggested all developmental differences were a direct or indirect result of the musical training the subjects received in early childhood (Hyde et al., 2009). Adulthood neuroplasticity is affected by childhood trauma, whether impaired by the occurrence or improved by the absence (Reiss et al., 2019). Childhood stress and adversity may increase cognitive functionality in adults. Shifting between tasks quickly and efficiently is most beneficial in volatile environments, effectively connecting uncertain early childhood conditions to be manifested in similar adulthood situations, and ACEs do not impair or inhibit universal cognition; rather they can enhance mental functions when needed in circumstantial uncertainty (Mittal et al., 2015). Survivors who become creative will better solidify their resources, abilities to cope, and their individualized knowledge as their technical skills are reinforced through understanding. If the individual begins to see a space that is respectful for their creativity, they
will likely begin to see an increase of their self-esteem and worth—often, the two are connected. Creativity helps ease stress and tension due to the focus shift from self to a project. The more difficult the level of creativity, the higher probability of results. However, results tend to vary from person to person (Naff, 2014).

Childhood music lessons for victims of abuse, neglect, and dysfunctional households have even shown increased brain plasticity in adulthood (Hyde et al., 2009). Playing an instrument—such as the piano—encourages neuroplasticity, overall psychological health, and cognitive retainment. This is due, partly, to the interaction and emotional interdependence brought about by learning music through training and practice, musical motivating factors—such as the way it makes the performer and the listener feel—and the complex construct associated with musical identity. Elderly or aged keyboardists have even experienced enhanced motor skills and therapeutic, sensory benefits. When learning music, multiple parts of the brain are working. (Fourie et al., 2016).

Childhood trauma victims show a dysregulation of endocrine and evidence of gene variations demonstrated in neurological disrupted circuitry functions in the corticomesolimbic region of the brain through hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis—the key to fight or flight responses of stress, and glucocorticoid cortisol signaling dysregulation, genetics—determining responses to traumatic events in childhood, and DNA and its protein histone or RNA noncoding regulations and modifications, namely, epigenetics. Thus, the HPA axis determines negative experiences are dampened in the prefrontal lobe and hippocampus, and good experiences are amplified in the amygdala. This function of the HPA axis—especially when affected by genetic makeup—will sway the potential for psychopathological resiliency or vulnerability (Lee & Oswald, 2018). Additionally, epigenetic mechanisms do not allow the revelation of trauma’s
physiological penalties placed on the individual due to its ability to regulate genes without altering the sequential DNA. These enduring, yet hidden, functional genetic changes increase the potential of comorbid disorders in adults, such as, alcoholism and PTSD (Lee & Oswald, 2018). Music and art allow for victims of childhood trauma to process through trauma more naturally—providing access to their traumatic past in a much more bearable fashion, tricking—even bypassing—the internal walls of the limbic system. In addition to victims of childhood trauma, military combat veterans with PTSD and refugees have shown playing musical and percussive instruments to enhance belonging, confidence, wellbeing, and communication competence, while relaxing them and lessening the negative symptoms of trauma and overcoming cultural barriers to shape the bonds of community (MacIntosh et al., 2020).

One of the important concepts in this related research section was how a mentally ill individual shares an almost identical state of mind with a peer who is a creative individual (Snapp et al., 2018). Additionally, since the research of Goessling (2020), the NCTSN (2008), and SAMSHA (2014) all stated that 25% of all children will be victims of some form of trauma strong enough to impact their learning, development, and behavior—and continue to do so throughout the course of their lifetime—provided a wealth of insight regarding trauma. Furthermore, Zhou’s (2018) explanation of how the nature side of creativity as it relates to cognitive neuroscience and higher-level thinking in creatives can be triggered by a nurture side catalyst of trauma helped me understand my study on a much deeper level. Li et al., (2020) and Snapp (2018) explained how creativity is only partially inherited, and the full scope of the creative is shaped by culture, society, values, and other subjectivities. This, along with Clay’s (2017) findings of the beneficial aspects of creativity—especially concerning resilience to the
effects of trauma—drew me to discover the perceived phenomena of trauma derived creativity further.

**Two Sides of Resilience: Imaginative and Inspirational**

Resilience comes from individual attributes of personality, neuroplasticity, skill acquisition, internal or external factors of protection, and life experiences that either bring out resilience as the need arises, or as a matter of outcome development (Garcia-Dia et al., 2013). Imagination and creative inspiration call for a resource bank that is developed over the lifetime of the artist. Factors—whether internal or external—can protect a victim through adaptive resilience or place them at risk through maladaptation. However, some artists experience two sides of resilience. Imagination is formed by the creative’s holistic reasoning for making art, the artist’s viewpoint, insight, rational cognition, and frame of mind, model artistic behavior for operative creating, and process driven sequences as a subject matter response. Artistic inspiration reaches outside of mere enjoyment to developing identity and community (Garcia-Dia et al., 2013; Hendon & Sandino, 2018; Shauck, 2017). The emotions creativity stirs inside of survivors of adversity enhances all levels of trust and feelings of safety in oneself and the community in which one comes into contact—allowing a sense of freedom even outside initial circles of comfort (Callaghan et al., 2019). Through creative arts therapy, adults have been known to develop resilience. Artistic adults can find reprieve from work-related trauma through artistic endeavors—visual expression, playing a musical instrument, physical expression, and writing (Reed et al., 2020). Furthermore, the creative arts have been shown to benefit survivors of major event trauma, such as sudden, short-term, or one-time trauma, and cumulative trauma, such as multiple traumas that span long-term, lasting years—even much of one’s lifetime (Naff, 2014).
One form of developing resilience through fantasy is the creative discipline of acting. Actors can make the imaginary real, bringing it to life as if fictitious events are authentic storylines. Acting is pretend character portrayal that can be extremely believable—not only to the audience but in some circumstances even the actor themselves (Panero, 2019). Other forms of resilience through creativity that have been used for therapeutic healing are instrumental performance—from beginner to mastery—both lessons-based and self-taught, drumming, writing lyrical and instrumental songs, playing different types of games, imagery guidance, free thought, and improvisation (MacIntosh et al., 2020).

Flow, also known as inspiration, is experienced in musicians while performing—encouraging expression and multiplied inspiration. Flow, especially in the form of artistic inspiration, is the moment everything meshes for optimum creativity in an individual (Panero, 2019). The inspiration and brain function associated with flow is related directly to complete absorption—such as all-consuming tasks and the height of intellectual stimulation (Panero, 2019).

Some well-known, established actors earn millions of entertainment dollars each year through movies, theatre, cartoons, and Broadway shows. However, there has been very little research regarding acting—especially when compared to music and the visual arts (Panero, 2019). Acting has a psychological experience that has been barely studied—namely, the extent an actor believes they become the character. Little attention has been given to whether there is an inspirational flow or a dissociation with reality, when a creative is in the act of acting (Panero, 2019). Nonetheless, trauma has been identified as a catalyst for improved emotive expression. Often in times of extreme tragedy, such as the loss of a family member or loved one, it can be linked more deeply due to the support the survivor once received and the possible association
Performing in the aftermath of trauma has been noted as the single-most healing aid for a victim throughout the entire process of grief. The performer expresses their emotions through singing or playing (Swart, 2014). Creating works of art, such as novels, movies, painting, or writing, conveys the emotional memory of an event that cannot be captured through any other method (Swart, 2014). The level of emotion and feeling is reduced during the early practice, or learning stages, and the emotions related to music take over; then once the performer has moved past the initial learning stage to the live performance, the overall emotive energy and intensity of feelings and emotions heighten, drastically (Swart, 2014).

For the non-creative, trauma can be a catalyst for dissociation, spurred on by a menacing experience that is impossible to escape. However, creative persons can escape traumatic experiences through imaginative fantasy—transforming painful events into an output of creativity. Although this trait is invaluable to creative actors as they connect with the intense emotions often associated with and needed for character portrayal, victims of childhood trauma do not typically have a trusted ability to separate real from fantasized emotions (Panero, 2019). However, the advantages of creative expression include enhanced mood, less anxiety, stress, psychosis, and depressive symptoms, and better self-esteem, social skills, and overall confidence—culminating in a more relaxed, functional, healthier individual (MacIntosh et al., 2020). Creativity—especially artistic creativity—serves individuals in an experiential form of resilience contribution through the promotion and fostering of safety and happiness. It empowers the creative while improving the social culture of the community in which they live. It improves the personality health through the creativity of the participating individuals. In addition to the
direct benefits associated with artistic creativity, participation has even been known to increase short- and long-term resilience to the trauma associated with school violence (Kim, 2015).

**Left Brain Versus Right Brain**

Left brain versus right brain dominance has been accepted as the hemispheric division of logic and emotion by many educators and makers of policy (Zhou, 2018). Traditionally, right-brain activities are viewed as the main side of the brain stimulated during innovative and creative thought and activities, and left-brain activities are viewed as the much more analytical, logical side (Sawyer, 2012). There has been a plethora of programs designed to influence the functions of creative thinking. Some research has shown that cognitive neuroscience has not identified one side of the brain as the sole hemisphere of creative activity. (Sawyer, 2012; Zhou, 2018). However, other studies have shown creativity as a process that takes place, primarily, in the right cerebral hemisphere through a modulated dump of dopamine during associative processing (Aberg et al. 2017). This process occurs while turning ambiguous ideas into some viable form or medium. Creativity is increased through the overall remote dopamine associative constraints (Aberg et al., 2017).

**Ego Boundaries and Neurological Development.** In the past five years, there have been major developments in the pedagogy and practicality of music as Allan Schore’s (2012) neuropsychoanalysis has shed new light and comprehension on the pathology intersubjectivity of right hemisphere modeling of the brain. With this deeper understanding, the discipline of psychiatry is aligned—bridging the fields of trauma, creativity, and music as all happening in the right hemisphere. Neuropathology does have creativity association; however, the specific processes of art, music and other forms of creativity have not been deemed to be pathological (Schore, 2012). Self-identity is developed in the right hemisphere and is the emotional attribute
associated with the unconscious and subconscious of our inner self. The conscious part of our being develops along with language processing and function as one ages in the left hemisphere. The corpus callosum, a neurological structure of bundled fibers that connects the two hemispheres—right brain and left brain, is consistently larger and more developed in creatives, especially musicians. The neuro-hemispheres form separately and at different times; the right side—where emotional processing and communication is formed—is the first to develop, followed by the left with cognitive processing and communication. Additionally, the autonomic systems of nerve function and the limbic system are linked to and connected directly with the right hemisphere (Schore, 2012; Schore & Schore, 2014; Swart, 2016). Emotional reactions to songs and musical performances happen in the amygdala and the nucleus accumbens; however, the cerebellum is also involved (Swart, 2016). Additionally, the cerebellum is key to concepts of rhythm and timing (Altenmuller & Schlaug, 2015). Musical memories and experiences—like when a song reminds you of a different time and place—take place in the hippocampus. Reading music happens in the visual cortex (Swart, 2016).

Artistic Inspiration

Inspiration is an ineffable characteristic of creativity (Hendon & Sandino, 2018). Artistic inspiration is essentially synonymous with creative flow—a state of deep concentration (Chemi, 2016, p. 37). Creativity was originally thought to come from one’s ability to combine three factors—natural material, traditional knowledge, and human derived work (Szostak, 2020). Nearly every creative draws their artistic inspiration from different sources—Freud suggested a theory where all creative impulses were sexual—sublimated human libido, that propelled creativity, while Russian Silver Age scholar, Vysheslavtsev detested Freud’s teaching with the explanation of Freud’s error to be as an attempt to explain and comprehend the highest, most
lofty human abilities and faculties by using the lowest guttural instincts (Tabachnikova, 2018). There are many examples and explanations for creativity; however, Curutiu-Zoicas, (2019) identifies two types of creation, primary and secondary. Primary is something the author explains that humans obtain at birth and secondary is something born of consciousness (Curutiu-Zoicas, 2019).

Endemic of many creatives is the need to integrate and draw from deeply emotional and individualized resources for inspiration—pain, sadness (Holmes, 2017). Neurologically, there is a connection between the trauma and the creative trigger (Gold & Jordan, 2018). The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis is activated in the event of a person undergoing a traumatic experience. This is a stress-related reaction and is associated with long-term health issues, both physically and psychologically, in the form of changes in neurobiology and epigenetic mechanisms. Remission from trauma suffered in childhood is improbable in adulthood without proper treatment. This is due, partially, to the memory fragmentation and inaccessibility of painful emotions and feelings, either permanently or occasionally. The feelings generated from childhood adversity are very difficult to comprehend, and the survivor may act out through the presentation of strange or baffling behaviors. This is an effort to numb the pain and emotions that come with being affected. They may relive or re-enact the traumatic experiences of their past (Gold & Jordan, 2018).

Artistic imagination—the aptitude for higher-level creative thought and idea development—is brought about through having enough time for free play (Keats, 2016). Often too much time is filled with schedules and commitments. This is a killer of artistic inspiration and diminishes the ability to create, exponentially (Keats, 2016). One must have time to be inspired (Keats, 2016). Regularly, adults prone to fantasy have self-reported a higher level of
ACEs, noting their usage of fantasy as a form of escape from reality and coping mechanism. This fantasy dissociation fosters a sense of detachment from one’s own body and traumatic circumstances. Professional creative actors, both theatre and film, exhibit a higher frequency of unresolved sadness than non-actors. This may be supported by the need for creatives, especially actors, to invent characters that seem authentic to the audience (Panero, 2019). It is possible this high involvement and proneness to fantasy is seen as a requirement by the creative when creating their characters—thus blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality through the actor's return to a previous sadness and recollection of traumatic events buried deep in their past. This makes healing and resolution much more difficult for creatives than it is for their non-creative peers (Panero, 2019). This is evident when creatives are overly invested in the character, finding so much artistic inspiration they experience pain and harm through pathological dissociation (Panero, 2019).

Research has shown the conditions of bipolar disorder and even schizophrenia as predictors of creativity in the individual. Creatives have a 10-40% greater chance to being bipolar than the general population—59% to 77% of all prominent, professional creative adults throughout human history could be diagnosed with a mood disorder of some type. Strikingly when comparing individuals who are artistically inclined to creativity with general population professionals in other forms of business, eight out of ten writers have suffered from depression (prolonged) or will be diagnosed as manic depressive at some point in their life or career, while only 3 out of 10 non-creatives have had a shared or similar experience or diagnoses in mental health. Additionally, only 6% of the general population have been treated for manic depressive disorder or depression, compared to 38% of creative writers—playwrights, poets—or visual artists—painters, sculptors—who have undergone treatment (Snapp et al., 2018). Jamison (1989)...
discovered creatives—especially poets—to self-report their most prolific and best times of
creativity were extremely like experiences of manic episodes. Performance demands the artists
interpret the emotion the composers intended to convey. This can be an outlet of healing to some
and an overwhelming experience to others—it depends on the person. Additionally, only the
most gifted performers can convey emotion in the same way the writer intended—sometimes
even better than imagined. Performers are supposed professionals at conveying the emotion of a
song and regularly recreate the emotions the original composer felt when the song was created—
ocasionally years after the song was composed. The underlying issue with artistic
interpretation’s strength of traumatic experience representation when traditional methods are
unable to represent or express emotion, effectively, can also be its downfall. This is due to the
emotions of art being present through the removal of the protective barrier or mechanism (Swart,
2014).

The related literature of this section sums up the main points of this study well, because it
helps identify the duality of resilience—imagination, and inspiration. Callaghan et al. (2019)
explains how creatives experience raised levels of safety and trust, which leads the individual to
a sense of non-circumstantial freedom, otherwise inexplicable aside from creativity. Panero
(2019) identified fantasy as something or somewhere created in the mind of the creative
individual and artistic flow—also known as inspiration—as the height of intellectual stimulation.
This was beneficial to this study, because it explored the rationale behind creative imagination
and artistic inspiration.

Summary

There has been much interest in the separate issues of the effects of trauma—especially
childhood trauma—creativity, and its causes—genetic, environmental, or both, what makes some
persons more resilient than others, and the catalysts of artistic inspiration. However, there have been very few studies discussing the perceived connection between trauma and creativity, creativity and resilience, or resilience and artistic inspiration. Additionally, there have been no studies connecting the trauma derived creative resilience and resilience derived artistic inspiration phenomenology explored in this study. Creativity is often derived from traumatic childhood experiences; however, it is not known why trauma is not always a catalyst for creativity, and creatives do not always go through adverse childhood experiences—abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Additionally, it is not understood why creativity can cause such amazing resilience initially, then the artistic inspiration that accompanies that creativity can take such a toll later in life. Often, I have been told suffering is part of being a creative.

Among the literature related to this study, the Holy Bible was a major influence. God is the Creator, and He made us in His image. According to His Word, He is the source of artistic inspiration through His Spirit and the source of all wisdom. Additionally, the Bible explains how trials are opportunities to grow through endurance toward maturity in faith through Jesus Christ our Lord. Furthermore, I reviewed the Kaiser Permanente and CDC ACEs questionnaire study, and investigated how childhood trauma often triggers creativity. The related literature explained how artists and thinkers showed a connection between creative arts and trauma while allowing the opportunity for the victim to self-heal. The creative can create an escape or reprieve from adversity through imaginative fantasy (Dreifuss-Kattan, 2016; Meyer, 2019; Thomson & Jaque, 2017). Resilience can come as a derivative of this alternate reality when the traumatogenic agent no longer has power or control over the victim (Beebe, 2018).

The problem identified in this study has both theoretical value—because it filled a gap in the literature, and practical value—because it shed light on a few phenomenological concerns in
the field. As I mentioned in the theoretical framework, the theory of creativity explained how humans are tied to the distant occurrences that took place during the formidable, developmental years of early childhood, in the most complex forms of creative action—tangible and intangible—and resilience theory identifies how familial groups adapted to trauma—stress, adversity, and crises. (Vygotsky, 1971; Masten, 2018). Contemporary artists and creators have come to rely on their ability to turn to fantasy and realism. The psyche makes a concerted effort to turn from childhood trauma by dissociation through the creation of an alternate reality—fantasy and imagination. Imagination and fantasy spurs artistic inclinations, and can change an individual’s future and present pathways through neuroplasticity (Vygotsky, 2004).

My proposed study explored how trauma often drove creativity, resilience, and artistic inspiration, whether through escape—resilience, or return—artistic inspiration, while it also expanded on the very few articles regarding creativity as a derivative of trauma and source of artistic inspiration. It is difficult to explain the return for artistic inspiration—it does not mean reliving the details; however, it does mean pulling from that emptiness and never allowing it to fully heal without the fear of the artistic talent leaving with it. This is common in the lives of many creatives, especially writers and method actors. It is perplexing to me why the very thing—creativity—that provided escape and freedom—resilience—from pain and sadness can keep the creative individual bound to revisiting that pain as a source of artistic inspiration—sometimes feeling required to remain there in that broken state, forever—long after they have been set free from the circumstances that held them there when they began creating. After spending the past 21 years in the Nashville Music Industry, I noticed a theme with many of my creative friends—professional musicians, artists, songwriters, authors, and dancers—who became creative after going through multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Therefore, I studied the
phenomenology of creatives who, after having gone through childhood trauma and adversity, became resilient through creativity and imagination as children, then turned that same emotion into artistic inspiration as adults. In essence, they escaped the traumatic events of childhood through imaginative resilience, then in adulthood, returned to and drew from those emotions through inspirational resilience.

This research provided insight to organizational leaders who have a philosophy based in creativity. Hopefully, it will even change the way the music industry approaches audience consumption of music and art—allowing the future of music to become a much more immersive experience than it has been in the past. Organizational leaders who work with creative individuals will understand that many of those creatives had a difficult past that will affect their performance or job-related tasks—both positively and negatively. This study informs leaders of innovative approaches and uses for creativity.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The design of this qualitative study was hermeneutical phenomenology, because of the bias derived from my lived experiences. I hoped to ascertain what type of traumatic lived experiences triggered victims to create and whether there was a perceived positive or negative effect on their emotional health, brought about by the creativity. The setting was the Nashville Music Industry, with 10 participants who were occupational creatives and peers from my experience in the industry. I used the ACEs questionnaire (Appendix C) to pre-qualify the participants. Data was collected through interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. The components of this hermeneutic phenomenological human science consisted of six methodical features and methodological themes of research. The reasoning behind this was to allow for the invention of methods, techniques, and procedures of research that addressed and solved the problem and research questions, appropriately. The six components were not intended to give the researcher a step-by-step mechanistic approach, rather to encourage inventiveness, understanding, and insight (van Manen, 1997). In this chapter, the design, research questions, setting, participants, and procedures are discussed, followed by the researcher’s role, and then, the pre-qualification—ACEs questionnaire (Appendix C), the data collection—interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups, which were followed by the data analysis section. There were sections explaining in detail this study’s trustworthiness, that is, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, followed by ethical considerations. This chapter concluded with a summary.

Design

The planned type of this study was qualitative with a hermeneutical phenomenology
research design. Research based upon hermeneutic phenomenology begins with personal, real experience that leads the researcher to make a contract of return or reawakening (van Manen, 1997). The basis of this design was founded on the researcher having gone through the experience—at least to an extent—prior to researching the phenomena. The nature of the lived experience is fundamental to the wisdom and grasp of the situation. A phenomenological researcher must remain firm in the fullness of the lived experiences of life in the center of relational living and situationally shared experiences of the world while investigating the categorical modalities and qualities of the lived experience (van Manen, 1997). This was the most viable design for my research due to my lived experiences of resilience to childhood trauma which was derived from creativity. Additionally, I have experienced the phenomenon firsthand of returning to the brokenness and sadness of my childhood experiences, emotionally, as a source of artistic inspiration. I had personal and direct lived experiences of both sides of resilience guiding this study, escape through imagination, and return for inspiration through the creative arts.

For this qualitative research project, I selected hermeneutic phenomenology as the approach because the study was driven by a singular abiding concern. It is devoting one’s thoughts and thinking fully to the entirety of one aspect of a phenomenon. This hyper-focus is best served when the researcher has a strong, serious interest in the topic of research. Hermeneutic phenomenology came with the corollary of not beginning with a fashion of disembodiment, rather as an individual project. The design was based around and focused on one singular interpretation, and therefore would never have been exhaustive because human experience is not exhaustive. There could always be a deeper understanding or, at the least, a complementary descriptive study (van Manen, 1997).
Hermeneutic phenomenology was a valid approach because qualitative research was “an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explored a social or human problem” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 326). This qualitative approach to research was an activity that situated the researcher to identify the observer in the world. Made up of an interpretive set of practices that materialize to view the world through selective glasses, this type of research can be wholly transformative due to the way the environment becomes a chain of representations—interviews in the form of field notes, video and audio recordings, narrative documents, memos, questionnaires, conversations with persons with lived experiences, and even photographs. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a natural approach that is highly interpretive. Researchers who take a qualitative approach desire to identify the phenomena and the meanings associated with them (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research was the most appropriate method for this study because the findings of this study were best represented in the form of a narrative. Moreover, I collected the data through interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. Phenomenology allowed me to justify my research through word analysis and participant viewpoints from lived experiences, creating a complete in-depth understanding in a natural setting. Additionally, I focused on the common meaning of participants who had experienced a phenomenon—overcoming trauma through creating, and thus uncovered the universal essence, through the reduction of phenomenon contained individual experiences. There is a time and place for understanding the essence that delivers a specific experience and the importance it brings to the study. This is the distinct difference in phenomenological research from all other research in that it looks at and separates how things look or appear and the overall essence of the phenomenon. Furthermore, lived experience is distinguished from what grounds the phenomenon through the observation and
understanding of obscurity. Phenomenological research is defined as a human experience object that starts with wonder. The “what” and “how” of research is compiled from the lived experiences of individual subjects to understand the true essence of the individual’s essence. There is a powerful philosophical component in phenomenology. First-hand, lived experiences will deliver experiential, evidential proof for this research. Initially, it was influenced by the work of Edmund Husserl, a renowned mathematician from Germany who saw no separation between phenomena and experiencing them, but his viewpoints and discoveries were shaped and added to by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Chamberlain, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Merleau-Ponty saw individual perception as what separated phenomenological experiences in qualitative research. He was convinced consciousness existed through the different ways they experienced things through touching, tasting, audibly, visually, or smelling. Spiegelberg, another phenomenologist, thought it involved intuiting, analyzing, and describing—living with it—viewing the structure, and developing a presentation of the research discovery. The research of Heidegger had the major focal point of understanding being—facticity, existentiality, and forfeiture. The primary ideals behind these three guiding aspects were (1) “always in the world,” (2) “always in advance of themselves,” and (3) “distracted by the insistent claims of everyday moods, interests, and companions” (Chamberlain, 2009, p. 52). Historically, phenomenology is grounded in personal lived experiences, seeing each one as conscious experience and the described development of the experiential essence of each of these. Phenomenology calls for a traditionally philosophical task, having no presuppositions, having the intentionality of consciousness, and repudiation of a subject-only contradiction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Simply defined, phenomenology is a conscious phenomenon study that searches to “make explicit the implicit structure and meaning
of human experiences” (Sanders, 1982, p. 354). I have a biased opinion due to my lived experiences; thus, I took the approach of hermeneutical phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology concentrates on the text or action at a conceptual level (Annells, 2006). Through language’s role, biased narrative, and research structuring in lived experience orientation, questioning constructs that ignite intrigue, and an exhaustive methodological pedagogy style for unearthing the essence of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1997) gave a foundation for the research (van Manen, 1997).

Van Manen (1997) explained phenomenological research is doing or to do and then bringing that finding to speech in the form of writing. When one writes from doing, experientially, it is very difficult to separate language and thought. This design applies language and thinking to a lived experience aspect—phenomenon. There will usually be a temptation to wander from the fundamental phenomenon or foundational question due to the researcher being side-tracked by speculation. Biased opinions formed from accidental preoccupation with viewpoints of narcissism and hearsay or misled thoughts are the enemy of phenomenological research. One must be strong and focused on the initial relation to the pedagogy of the research. It is easy for a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher to get lost in the details and never reach the main point of the research findings. One must look at the whatness of the question. In other words, the researcher must measure the wholeness of the design juxtaposed to the parts and the importance they bring to the overall structure (van Manen, 1997).

**Research Questions**

Due to my lived experiences as an occupational creative who has undergone childhood trauma, I often crossed paths with others who had similar experiences—such as childhood trauma—prior to becoming creative. Individuals are bound to the events that happened in their
developmental stages of early childhood, whether consciously or unconsciously (Vygotsky, 1971). I am fascinated with the way trials can bring about such beautiful outcomes as creativity, inspiration, and healing.

**Research Question One**

What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors?

**Research Question Two**

What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing?

**Research Question Three**

How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration?

**Setting**

The setting of this study was the Greater Nashville, Tennessee Area. Nashville is known as Music City and is a southern Tennessee city with a warm climate and a small-town feel. Due to its large concentration of record labels, recording studios, live venues, management companies, and performance royalty organizations responsible for collecting monies generated from radio airplay, the city has drawn creatives, especially musicians, for nearly a century. It is home to WSM’s Grand Ole Opry, and since the city has an overabundance of two and four-year colleges that are public, private, and technical schools; it is also known as the Athens of the South. The surrounding areas are beautiful, and there is a heavy focus of healthcare in the city. There are multiple lakes and rivers—the locals say water generates more creativity—there are many trees for a major city, and there is a vibrant downtown area.

The rationale for this setting was because I lived in Nashville and had many friends and
acquaintances who were currently or had been employed full-time as occupational creatives. I spent 21 years in the Nashville country music industry and had experienced multi-platinum success as a singer/songwriter, musician, and producer in this town and industry. Additionally, my spouse is a best-selling author and helpful resource, and she and I have a network of friends and peers in other subgroups of occupational creatives, locally. Pseudonyms were used for the individuals and the institutions; each was disguised through name variations chosen by each participant—for example, if I had used Jamie, the name would have become Johnny or something similar, and if I were to have used Jen, her name would have become June or something similar.

**Participants**

The participants came from a purposive sample of 10 participants. I chose 10 because I only wanted to have participants who met the qualifications of being resilient to childhood trauma through creativity, to elucidate their specific and experiences. Phenomenological researchers have used as few as one to as many as 325 for their sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A purposive sample is the main method of strategic sampling utilized in qualitative research as it allowed me to select the persons and the study setting for their purposeful informative ability to inform on this study’s research central phenomenon and problem. I knew I had reached an appropriate number for my sample size when there were no longer any significant differences between themes emerging in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants were selected by convenience sample from a sample pool of all the creatives in the Nashville area—individuals in the country, bluegrass, and Christian music industries, authors/novelists, urban artists, and professional dancers; there were creatives from diverse backgrounds who experienced multiple ACEs and most information was collected in one-on-one
interviews or gleaned from narratives of lived experiences. Ultimately, all of my participants were performing artists, musicians, and writers.

The Nashville music industry is a longstanding industry made up of niches, clicks, and subgenres and has a nontraditional organizational structure. When viewed as an organization, the industry is comprised of many layers and channels. There is the subgroup of executives—in the earlier days of the music industry this group would have been known as the suits—made up of a segment thought of as mostly non-creative in the most general term. Executives, usually referred to as execs, consist of label heads, presidents, vice presidents, directors, artists, and repertoire (A&R), promotions, and all the other typical business roles to include accountants, attorneys, royalty collection departments, marketing teams, publishers, managers and booking agents. Another subgroup is the recording artists, but this is divided by artists who have had music hits, artists who are signed to a label but have not released a single or album, and artists who are singer/songwriters. Artists who are unsigned are in a subgroup all on their own. There is a subgroup of songwriters, divided up by those who are also singers, musicians, audio engineers, and producers, in addition to being categorized into having or not having hit songs or gold and/or platinum albums. Additionally, there is the subgroup of musicians, divided up into subcategories of studio and live, road band musicians. There are also all the other persons employed in the non-creative jobs or performance royalty organizations (PRO)s, namely, Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), and Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC), and video producers, stylists, road crew members, and songwriting advocacy groups, for example, Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI).

Participants for this study were two were females and eight males, all of the participants
were Caucasian with ages ranging from 29-64. I expected a higher percentage of males than females with ages ranging from 20-85 years old and mostly Caucasian and African American. Most of the Nashville music industry is made up of Caucasian males, so finding diversity in my sample size was difficult. I would have liked to have had a more racially diverse and equal male to female ratio group in races and gender, however that did not occur. I sent out information on the study to peers and colleagues of other races and ethnicities in the music and book industry who I knew had experienced trauma as children, but none other than Caucasian participated. For this study, trauma was defined as the individual having experienced a score of four or higher on the Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ) listed in (Appendix C). This proved to a challenge in identifying qualified participants, more than I had anticipated. Upon taking the questionnaire, several willing participants self-identified as having experienced two or three ACEs, disqualifying them from the study. I identified other possible participants for my study through snowball sampling. I commenced data collection with the first qualified participants and asked every participant to give me one or two referrals of participants who might qualify to participate in my research (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). However, none of the participants gave me any referrals who became participants in this study. I contacted 117 possible participants before securing my 10 participants who took place in this study.

Upon asking participants if they were willing to participate in this study, I explained to them this may have been a tough process that may have stirred up difficult emotions of trauma from their childhood and past experiences. I explained to them it was understandable if they choose not to participate in the prequalification ACEs questionnaire, and they could choose to stop the process at any point if they felt uncomfortable. I provided each potential participant a handout of mental health resources (Appendix D) to have accessible for them if they felt
distressed when completing the ACEs questionnaire, the interview, or the focus group session in which they participated. I provided those mental health resources again upon participation in the interview and focus group. The safety and mental health of the participants was important to me, and I wanted each participant to have those resources available without their having to have disclosed to me their level of distress.

**Procedures**

I secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A) and then I piloted the interview with three individuals outside of my study sample to ensure clarity of questions and wording. I elicited participants for this pilot study from music industry peers who were a fit for the purposive sample of this study, none of which participated in the actual finalized study. All the interview questions were clear and concise to the individuals in the pilot study, I did not collect any data from these participants, and none of the questions needed any changes. I made a list of possible candidates and asked the ones who were a fit, the purposive and convenience sample first to refer someone else they thought was a fit for this phenomenological study, snowball sampling (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). I qualified participants by administering the Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ). This tool revealed which participants had experienced trauma as a child and qualified participants by measuring the degree of trauma the individuals experienced during childhood. I only allowed participants who self-identified four or more ACEs (ACEs Too High, 2021). I did not require them to provide the details of their questionnaire answers. Once I qualified the participants, I gathered data in this order, through interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups of five participants each. For the artifact analysis, I asked each participant to bring something that was meaningful and related to their initial resilience experience to their interview. When conducting in-person interviews, I
took a picture of the artifact; when conducting the interview virtually, participants sent me a photograph of the artifact via text message. I asked them to explain why they chose the artifact and shared this with the focus group. We discussed why each participant chose their artifact with everyone else in the focus group. I asked them to describe how old they were when they first took possession of that item. I asked them what particular emotion they associated with it. I wanted the participant to help me identify something that promoted a memory and had special meaning to them and their situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008). My focus groups were conducted in groups of five and the questions were derived from a post-analysis of my interview questions and artifact analysis. The themes and patterns discovered in the participant interviews became the foundation guiding the focus groups. I utilized my focus group questions to answer any remaining questions I had about gaps in my interview questions. I recorded the interviews, the explanation of why they chose the artifacts and the special meaning they associated with them, and the focus group sessions with a digital recorder. I also wrote out my thoughts about the data throughout the collection process and stored that information in a notebook, memoing what I was learning about the data. I transcribed every word of the recordings and transferred that data to my computer (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Since this study was a hermeneutic phenomenological design, I identified themes, found themes and aspects, isolated those themes and aspects, and utilized linguistic transformation composition (van Manen, 1997).

The Researcher's Role

Since I was the human instrument in this study, I explained my role in this study and the bias I brought to the research due to my lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). I grew up around music and songwriting. We were poor and lived in a rural, socio-economically depressed region
of the south, about an hour from the Mississippi River and a couple of hours from Memphis, Tennessee. When I was seven years old, my mother left my father, who worked on the riverboat and was gone for a month to a month-and-a-half at a time, and I moved in with my father’s sister. Shortly after this new normal, my grandfather passed away, my mother was remarried—I was not invited to the wedding—and I, along with my father’s older brother who was recently paroled after having spent some time incarcerated in the state penitentiary, moved in with my grandmother to keep her from being by herself. Three months later, that uncle was killed in a car wreck—a multiple vehicle drunk driving accident. I do not remember where I stayed after that, but a little over a year after his death, my father married my stepmother, who was mentally and emotionally abusive to me. My first memory of playing music was the month or so after my mother left. This all happened within a short time period; I retreated to music and to the Lord during this time, as an escape from my reality.

I remember spending eight to ten hours on Saturdays, after my chores were finished, playing the piano by myself. Music was what I considered to be my way out of that bad situation. Recently, I lost my mother again, this time to death. I spoke to her the day she passed, and her death was unexpected, completely. I am the first person in my family to attend college, my mother was a high school dropout who was married five times, and she and my father, who was married three times, worked blue-collar jobs throughout their entire working lives and lived paycheck to paycheck. Of my three stepbrothers, one is homeless; one is a felon, high school dropout, ex-con who—around the time of my mother’s death—had been recently released on parole, and one disowned the family for the past 20 years and will not allow his children to meet his mother—my stepmother. Neither of the two who graduated from high school attended college. Music was a welcomed creative outlet of escape.
I was the human instrument in this study (van Manen, 1997). The participants were chosen from professionals in my peer group. I worked in the same industry with them and valued them as individuals. I did not have any authority over them; they were equals and had never reported to me. My role at the research site--the Nashville music industry--was a professional singer, songwriter, musician, and producer. My lived experiences helped guide me to deeper discovery and understanding as I collected and analyzed the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sanders, 1982). It also helped me understand the participants' points of view more clearly. Because this was a hermeneutical phenomenology design, my biases and opinions assisted me in interpretations of what the participants revealed in the interviews and shared in the focus groups as we co-constructed and determined the meaning of the data together as equals. They interpreted what they meant in their statements, and this allowed me to have a better understanding of the data as I analyzed it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Van Manen, 1997).

**Data Collection**

No data was collected from participants until I gained all necessary approvals through Liberty University’s IRB. I also waited until I received informed consent. Data analysis began with data collection and occurred naturally at the same moment the first data were collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I collected data in this order: interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who had direct and indirect experience with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First-person, lived experiences provide the evidence for research when the study is qualitative phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). The research questions of this qualitative study were supported by questions that covered
wider or deeper issues and lead to more formulated answers to answer the primary research questions. All the questions guided the research and helped paint a clear, concise picture of the phenomenon. The participants were given the choice of conducting their interviews via face-to-face at my personal residence—or virtually through Zoom or FaceTime. Each interview, whether face-to-face or virtual, was held in a private setting, recorded with an iPhone digital recording app or through Zoom, stored on a hard drive. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. These interviews were completely confidential. The individual interviews consisted of the following questions:

1. If I knew nothing about you and we had never met, what would you want me to know about you?
2. Tell me about the time you first began creating something in your field. Include information about your age, environment, and training.
3. How does your first experience creating relate to your childhood trauma?
4. Tell me, specifically, about acquiring your medium or instrument for your creative art.
5. How did creating or performing help to heal or provide relief?
6. What made you decide to pursue a creative art for an occupation?
7. Please tell me about the most difficult time or memory of your life.
8. Please tell me about the happiest time or memory of your life.
9. Describe where you find your greatest artistic inspiration.
10. Who or what compelled you to become resilient?
11. Please tell me about ways your trauma has enhanced your ability to be creative.
12. Tell me about your perceived level of popularity in high school.
13. How has your creativity distinguished you or made you stand out from your peers?

14. Describe the creative ability of any siblings or family members who experienced similar childhood trauma.

15. What misconceptions about creatives have affected you throughout your life journey?

16. How would you describe your internal feelings while deep in creative thought and inspiration?

17. What else can you tell me regarding creativity, trauma, or resilience you feel will advance this study?

Question one helped identify answers to my first research question: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? It helped me understand where each participant believed they got their identity. I wanted to understand if it was their religious or relational beliefs, family, glory days, work, hobbies, their greatest pain, or greatest passion (Moustakas, 1994). It helped me determine what ideologies supported the rest of the questions. First-person, lived experiences are the basis of all phenomenological research, and they will make a difference in their perceived identity (Moustakas, 1994). The way they described themselves gave me tremendous insight because even description is interpretive (Heidegger, 1962).

Question two helped identify answers to my second research question: What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? Question three helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? Both questions helped me understand the participants’ homelife and childhood. I made a note of any emotional triggers discovered (Masten, 2018). I wanted to know what their
life was like the moment they decided to create for the first time (Vygotsky, 1930). Data collection was also when data analysis began, so I wanted to hear their story—their data, from their perspective of when creativity was initiated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Question four helped identify answers to my second research question: What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? Additionally, it helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? This question helped me understand how they began creating. Most musicians begin creating by using whatever is available or with an instrument they have access to, but many artists begin when they get their first paintbrush, kit, or art set (Rufo, 2012). I used this question to discover if someone gave them a guitar, if they played their grandmother’s piano, used whatever they had available, if their medium was a pencil and paper, and if they enrolled in lessons or were self-taught. This helped me determine phenomenological patterns of perceived creative priming and stimulation. I used this question to identify how everyone received the stimulus or desire to begin creating (Kapkin & Joines, 2021).

Questions five and six helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? Furthermore, both questions five and six allowed me to understand if they were released from anxiety, stressfulness, or anything unpleasant from creating, especially in the early days. Did they find comfort and release for anxiety and stressful situations (Masten, 2018; Vygotsky, 1930)? These questions also helped me understand what made them pursue music, art, writing, dancing, or any other creative passion as a profession (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962).
Questions seven and eight helped identify answers to my first research question: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? These two questions helped me understand if there was a perceived linkage between their hardest and most difficult memories and their happiest times. This allowed identification of how child risk factors predicted adjustments in individual behaviors (Rovis et al., 2021). Question nine helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? Also, question nine helped me understand the creative’s perceived source of artistic inspiration and whether the sadness of their childhood influenced or inhibited their creativity. It was important to identify the root of inspiration (Krebs, 2020; Lipschultz, 2015).

Question 10 helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma-derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? Additionally, this question helped me understand their perception of what compelled them to become resilient. There are multiple sources and predictors of resilience (Masten, 2018). This is especially true in youth who have been victims of trauma or maltreatment. Positive role models, strong parental relationships, and safety encourage long-term well-being, while ongoing abuse, neglect, or other forms of trauma diminish long-term resilience (Yoon, et al., 2021).

Question 11 helped identify answers to my first research question: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? It also helped me determine if there was a cognitive understanding of their trauma and what role hindsight played. This helped explain the methodology of the participant’s consciousness and grounded assumptions and understandings—namely their transformation (Husserl, 1970; Swart, 2014). Question 12 helped identify answers to my first research question:
What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? Also, this question helped me learn more about their childhood environment (Roden-Foreman et al., 2019). This was a question that helped me gain knowledge of the individual and allowed me to understand their perception of their popularity (Patton, 2015).

Questions 13, 14, and 15 helped identify answers to my first research question: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? Additionally, question 13 helped me understand if they felt standing out was good or bad. It was helpful to identify motivators and perceptions of standing out compared with fitting in, and whether the individual’s desire was integration or separation (Mo & Wong, 2019). Question 14 helped me understand if similar childhood experiences produced similar outcomes of creativity (Vygotsky, 1930). It helped me understand whether birth order, extracurricular activities, personalities, or any other factors played a role in differing sibling outcomes (Jensen & McHale, 2015). Question 15 helped me understand the things that have had the largest effect on them throughout their life. This gave me insight into how they were affected by stereotypes and disabling language (Gouvier & Coon, 2002).

Question 16 and 17 helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? Question 16 helped me understand their perception of what emotions they felt when they were inspired and creating. (Krebs, 2020; Lipschultz, 2015). Question 17 gave the participants an opportunity to tell me something they believed was important and I should know that I had not asked. This was a knowledge question and gave some of the best parts of the research (Patton, 2015).

Artifact Analysis
I asked each participant to bring something that was meaningful and related to their initial resilience experience to their interview. I took a photograph of the artifact. I asked them to explain why they chose this artifact, and we discussed why the participant chose this artifact with everyone else in the focus group. I asked them to describe how old they were when they first took possession of this item. I asked them what particular emotion they associated with it. I wanted the participant to help me identify something that promoted a memory and had special meaning to them and their situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008). I gained additional understanding of what prompted them to first become creative (Thomson & Jaque, 2018; Vygotsky, 1930). This helped identify answers to my first research question: What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing?

**Focus Groups**

My focus group questions were derived from a post-analysis of my interview questions and artifact analysis. The themes and patterns discovered in the participant interviews became the foundation that guided the focus groups. I utilized my focus group questions to answer any remaining questions I had about gaps in my interview questions. Patton (2015) described how to improve and enhance findings in themes and patterns of the primary data through the utilization of focus groups. Focus groups consisted of two groups of five participants. The participants were given the choice of conducting their interviews *via* face-to-face—at my personal residence—or virtually through Facetime or Zoom. Each interview, whether face-to-face or virtual, was held in a private setting, recorded with an iPhone digital recording app or through Zoom, stored on a hard drive, and lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The focus group recordings were confidential. The following questions were used to prompt discussion:
1. Please tell me everything you feel is important about the first time you felt compelled to create.

2. What did creating do for your emotional well-being (Patton, 2015)?

3. Describe the primary emotions brought about by your creative work.

4. What compelled you to share your creations with others?

5. Have you ever turned to a higher power for help before, during, or after experiencing trauma?

6. Describe any spiritual component that relates to your creative product.

Questions two, three, and four helped identify answers to my first research question: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? Question one helped identify answers to my second research question: What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? Questions five and six helped identify answers to my third research question: How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration?

Questions one and two helped me understand the beginning of their creativity, learn more about their motivation behind being a creative, and helped them self-identify resilience (Masten, 2018; Vygotsky, 1930). There is a complexity to creativity and artistic inspiration. These questions helped me discover the process, muse, and whether the artist had any rituals prior to creating to set the mood (Krebs, 2020; Lipschultz, 2015). Question three helped me understand if they created art that was more aptly associated with comedy—light and happy, or tragedy—dark and sad, for their pieces of work. I wanted to know the motivation behind their perception of artistic expression (Hospers, 1954). Question four helped reveal what motivated them to be
vulnerable enough to share their creative endeavors with others and how long—if at all—was their art done in private and primarily for themselves. I wanted to identify their initial thoughts prior to sharing their creations and discover with whom they first shared their art (Akinola & Mendes, 2008). Questions five and six revealed if they found their hope in God or a higher power and helped me understand if that belief had an influence on their resilience to childhood trauma (Berrett et al., 2007).

Data Analysis

Since this study was a hermeneutic phenomenological design, I identified themes, found themes and aspects, isolated those themes and aspects, and utilized linguistic transformation composition (van Manen, 1997). When considering data analysis, it was important to note that there would be no individual statement that could explain or capture the full foundational concept and mystery of a lived experience (van Manen, 1997). However, when working to identify the meaning of the data, I generated themes from significant statement analysis through clusters of meaning by transcribing the participant interviews and grouping thematic statements across participants. These themes helped me discover the degree of spatiality the participant felt as a child or the physical environment in which they resided by analyzing the major themes discovered through statements made by the participants. I analyzed the data through composite description—I reported the universal essence of the phenomenon, I identified trends of the essence that led to the essential, invariant structure of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1997). Some examples or descriptions of lived experiences were harder to collect and analyze than others, so I utilized three possible approaches to analyze the lived experience data I collected: holistic, selective, and detailed. With the holistic approach, I attempted to express the overall meaning of a reflection through sententious phrase formulation. When
utilizing the selective approach, I highlighted essential statements. When I took the detailed approach, I investigated each phrase or cluster to uncover the universal phenomenon. All three helped me uncover and isolate the thematic phenomenological aspects, such as their degree of unhappiness as a child or how much they enjoyed creativity to pass their time (van Manen, 1997). I understood the gathering and analysis of the data were processes that were iterative. I engaged in memoing throughout the collection and after the collection of my data. I made use of my ideas that were personal, conceptual, and theoretical by writing down reflections as they came to my mind throughout the collection and analyses process. I paid special attention to statements that revealed relationality and the way the participant viewed their community as a child—even as an adult (van Manen, 1997). I identified themes, manually, by grouping major thematic statements together in a Word document using manual coding. Coding is the process of raw data idea and concept generation compiled from the transcription of interviews and focus groups, notes taken in the field, archival materials, articles from newspapers and magazines, reports, and art. In essence, it was the steps taken by me—the qualitative researcher—to identify the ideas and concepts, then arrange and systemize them categorically as they were discovered in the data (Given, 2008). I worked toward concept development or concept relation in the final stage of my data analyses (Given, 2008). According to Given (2008), qualitative software should not be used due to its controversial influence over the analysis of data, therefore I did not use qualitative software to analyze the data.

**Step-by-Step Process**

Throughout the entire data collection process, I utilized memoing and continued until data collection was complete. The first step I performed after collecting the data from the interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups was I transcribed the data and returned it to the
participants, so they could check it for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016; van Manen, 1997). Then I organized the data into themes that pointed to the phenomenological aspect of the study. I was searching for the essence or eidos utilizing the method of thematic reflection (van Manen, 1997). I organized this data by keeping a spreadsheet of the information and where it originated—interview, artifact analysis, or focus group—and I discarded repetitive, overlapping statements from the same participants. Separating the data helped me discover meaningful statements, leading to trends. I began coding the raw data to discover the essence, as it was compiled and collected. I wrote the data and findings down as soon as possible to ensure an analysis that was profound, as I looked for new undiscovered concepts from the coding. I utilized many aspects of collaborative analyses in my focus groups by allowing other participants to respond to statements made by their peers in the group during the focus groups through triangulation and member checks. This allowed additional examination of each theme and provided deeper understanding and insight (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 1997).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, according to Given (2008), is the method used by qualitative researchers to ensure their research has credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability—tools that give them a way to show the project’s worth and value outside of the non-corresponding parameters of quantitative research. I addressed the credibility of this study through triangulation and member checks. I audited my research process to establish the dependability and confirmability of this research. Additionally, I ensured the transferability of this research by using a thick description (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Credibility**
Credibility is the sources and methodological procedures that create a strong amount of harmony between the expressions of the participants and the interpretations of those expressions by the researchers. Thus, readers and participants were able to understand the research design (Given, 2008). I used triangulation of multiple data sources, my methods, I utilized member checks, I had participants review and respond to the information garnered from interviews to help increase reliability, because I asked the participant the same question in different forms over multiple discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used time, established sufficient participant contact, angles—sought to understand the data from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and colleagues—used knowledgeable networks of support for data analyses findings review and critique. Additionally, I began my data collection with private one-on-one interviews and conclude the main body of my data collection with two focus groups of five participants. I provided the participants with follow-up interviews for any clarification they or I deemed necessary (Given, 2008). I included in the triangulation mix audience reactions using focus groups with reflexive triangulation and perspectives of the participants, my dissertation chair, my committee member, and me (Patton, 2015).

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability is attained once the study has repeatable, consistent findings. The researcher must consider relevant methodologies, when assessing the evolving context of research that cannot be understood completely a priori as a single isolated moment in time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Given, 2008). I tracked all nuances—however minor they seemed, if there was any degree of variance in the proposal design, and there was not any degree of variance. Confirmability is the incorporation of additional processes of truthfulness verification or meaning that is implied or asserted into the study in the research design. It provided a reliable
way to ensure goal verification through understanding the phenomenon from the research participants’ perspective and helped identify the experiential meanings implied by the participants (Given, 2008). I utilized rich, thick theme descriptions, interpretations, and member-checks of the findings. I kept a reflexive journal, and throughout the entirety of the study, I performed a research process inquiry audit. I worked to find multiple sources of the lived experiences of participants to help discourage glamorization of the details surrounding the creative’s lived experiences, and I practiced due diligence to discard all biases that could have potentially alter the outcome of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1997).

Transferability

Patton (2015) states the importance of rigor, as it supports reliability and validity. For transferability to be supported in a study, it must be rigorous, and in turn be valid and reliable (Patton, 2015). According to Given (2008) and Lincoln & Guba (1985), transferability suggests the research results will be transferable to other situations and contexts outside of the study’s contextual scope. I focused on the closeness of relation between the participants and the study context and boundary context of the findings. The two strategies I applied were: I had a thick description between the qualitative research participants and myself, which provided a full and purposeful description and account of the study’s context, and I used a purposeful sample by selecting participants according to their quality of representation of the phenomenological research design, and the study’s limitations and delimitations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Negative information could harm participants, therefore I used pseudonyms for all participants and identifiable names. I maintained a list, linking pseudonyms to participant
identities, in a password protected folder, stored separately from the raw data. I did not include any participants who were under my influence or believed non-participation could have resulted in a negative impact. I secured IRB approval prior to moving forward with data collection. All data gathered was kept confidential. Creatives may attempt to adapt lived experiences for more of a dramatic effect, and I practiced due diligence to document any verifiable information. I did not release any sensitive information without the consent of the participants. There was a signed consent form (Appendix B) which explained the protocols and study, this was signed by each participant. Since much of the data was extremely sensitive and personal in nature, all interviews and focus groups were held in a place where eavesdroppers could not overhear sensitive conversations easily from study participants. Additionally, there was a digital recording and transcription for all interviews and focus groups. These recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted in three years. As the primary and sole researcher, I am the only one who has access to these interviews and focus group recordings and files. I individualized my reports for a wide group of readers and utilized audience-appropriate forms of wording. I ensured I maintained a high-level of integrity in my reports. I followed American Psychological Association 7th Edition permission guidelines and only used original material for this publication (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Summary**

Chapter three explained the methods of this qualitative study. The design of hermeneutical phenomenology was the best utilization of drawing from my personal bias that surrounded my emotional connection to my lived experiences. The research questions helped me formulate and understand the level of trauma undergone by the creatives of this study while understanding creation triggers, resilience, and emotional health. Nashville—Music City was the
setting of the study. This setting was chosen due to the high concentration of occupational creatives. Additionally, I had a close connection to the music industry from my success as a singer, songwriter, and producer. The participants came from a purposive sample of 10 participants and a convenience sample from a sample pool of all the creatives in the Nashville area. I used the ACEs Questionnaire (Appendix C) as a prequalifier for each of my participants—who were required to self-identify with an ACE score of four or higher. I collected data in this order: interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. I recorded all interviews and focus groups, and the conversations were transcribed in their entirety. I stored the digital files on a password-protected computer and will delete all files in three years. I grew up around music and songwriting and began to turn to music and art as a form of escape and expression to alleviate the trauma from the neglect, loss, and loneliness I felt as a child, spending 8-10 hours per day on the weekends playing music by myself to an empty room on my small church’s piano, where my uncle had a key. Data analysis began with data collection and occurred naturally at the same moment the first data were collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since this study was a hermeneutic phenomenological design, I identified themes, found themes and aspects, isolated those themes and aspects, and utilized linguistic transformation composition. Additionally, I used many aspects of collaborative analyses in my focus groups by allowing other participants to respond to statements made by each participant in the group. This allowed additional examination of each theme, and provided deeper understanding and insight. I kept a spreadsheet of all information and discarded overlapping statements. I identified trends of the essence that led to the essential, invariant structure of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness, I used triangulation and member checks to address the credibility. I established dependability and confirmability through research audits, and I used a thick description to
guarantee transferability. Ethical considerations were addressed through pseudonyms, informed consent, password-protected digital files, and deletion of the files after three years. I held all interviews and focus groups at a site conducive to the safety of the participants and the confidentiality of the sensitive nature of the information. I am the only one with access to these stored files.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry. This chapter includes a list and description of the 10 participants in Table 1, and a presentation of the data in the form of narrative themes reflecting participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). After qualifying my participants—over the age of 18, professional, occupational creatives in the Nashville music industry, and an ACEs score of four or higher (Appendix C), I collected data in this order: interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. The data presented five primary themes—theme one: creating provided an escape and coping mechanism; theme two: trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective; theme three: resiliency was a byproduct of adversity; theme four: artistic inspiration came from everyday life; and theme five: creating was accompanied by a spiritual component; multiple sub-themes; one outlier data finding that warranted further attention; and the three research question responses.

Participants

The participants came from a purposive sample of 10 participants of professional, occupational creatives in the Nashville music business. The sample of participants were professional, performing artists, world-class musicians, and award-winning writers. Two of the participants were females and all the participants were Caucasian, ages 29-64. I had access to more males than females, and the Nashville music industry is infused with a much higher percentage of Caucasians than any other race or ethnicity. I would have preferred diversity in races and more gender equality, but I did not get much response from women. I sought out my
peers and colleagues of other races and ethnicities in the music and book industry who I knew had experienced trauma as children, but none other than Caucasian participated.

For this study, trauma was defined as the individual having experienced a score of four or higher on the Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ) listed in (Appendix C). Consequently, finding qualified participants was more difficult than I had anticipated. Upon taking the questionnaire, several willing participants self-identified as having experienced two or three ACEs, disqualifying them from the study. I identified other possible participants for my study through snowball sampling—my research started with collecting data from a convenience sample proceeded by new participants discovered through network linkages. I asked every participant to give me one or two referrals of participants who may have helped my research ( Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). However, none of the participants gave me any referrals who became participants in this study. I contacted 117 possible participants before securing my 10 participants for this study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of participants and locations. Pseudonyms were chosen by each participant to be realistic and meaningful to the participant. This helped reflect the culture of the participants, but not so much as to compromise their anonymity. Below concise, participant descriptions are listed in tabular form (Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>David is an award-winning performer and songwriter. His chart-topping success has spanned over five decades. His voice is soothing and beautiful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>Eugene has had success in multiple genres as an artist and writer. He has an epic loneliness to his voice and brings emotion to every note.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

There were five primary themes that emerged from the data collected. Additionally, multiple sub-themes surfaced that were connected to the primary themes. I have also included one unexpected outlier in this section. The themes and their subthemes emerged during the coding of the raw data collected through interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. I noted the origination of quotes as I developed the essence of each theme. I included whether the participant’s quotes came from their interview, the conversation surrounding their artifact analysis, or from a focus group. The triangulation of data collected was done to establish validity.
and trustworthiness in the findings. I begin this section with a list of artifacts chosen by the participants for analysis and the primary emotion associated with each in Table 2.

Table 2

*Artifact Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Reason for Choosing</th>
<th>Associated Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>1933 Wurlitzer piano</td>
<td>First instrument played/touched/experienced at five years old, taught himself to play</td>
<td>Magic, joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>Copyright of first song composition</td>
<td>Composed song on guitar after being sent to room due to an argument with mother</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucinda</td>
<td>Grandmother’s broken, pink, round plastic ashtray</td>
<td>Taken from grandmother’s house as an adult, after father passed away</td>
<td>Loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Elvis ‘Pure Gold’ vinyl album</td>
<td>first record I owned that wasn’t a hand-me-down, got it when he was seven years old.</td>
<td>Discovery, escapism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>All About Me book</td>
<td>the only thing she has from her childhood, one of the first writing pieces she shared with anyone, remembers being very proud of it, she wrote it in eighth grade when she was 13 years old</td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>Father’s vintage sunburst Lotus Les Paul copy</td>
<td>was not being used by his father, and he taught himself to play on it at 15 years old after watching a documentary on Eric Clapton</td>
<td>Joy, discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>1974 Gibson Hummingbird Custom acoustic guitar</td>
<td>first good guitar bought from a collector on payments before moving to Nashville when he was 22 years old, and it was the nicest thing he had ever purchased</td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buddy</strong></td>
<td>Collage of photos from first recording session</td>
<td>was 17 years old playing two different instruments with a professional bluegrass group, he was excited to be living his dream of playing music full-time</td>
<td>Excitement, a little sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Griff</strong></td>
<td>Stainless-steel cross necklace (and a stainless-steel Grand Ole Opry charm)</td>
<td>represents Christianity, he started out as a Christian singer, reminds him of how he never lost his faith, it was like ‘the church’ lost their faith in him</td>
<td>Validation (of his faith), extreme determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Papa</strong></td>
<td>Hand-carved, wooden, pocket watch holder with a small carved guitar at the base on each the side</td>
<td>made by his grandfather, for his father, took it from his father’s house after his funeral, one of the only things he has that belonged to his father, reminds him of the good and bad parts of growing up without him</td>
<td>Thankfulness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme One: Creating Provided an Escape and Coping Mechanism**

The first theme that emerged was creating provided the participants with escape and a coping mechanism. This promoted self-worth and gave validation to their efforts and feelings. Additionally, creating promoted ownership and control over what often seemed uncontrollable, and strengthened their resilience as children. Participants identified creativity as having a soothing effect over their mental health and emotional well-being. Each creative attested to the escape and healing achieved through creating. This escape and healing became evident through most discussions surrounding the artifact analysis, as participants reminisced about past experiences and missed opportunities from their childhood. While discussing the reason he chose the vinyl Elvis Presley record for his artifact analysis, Chuck recalled,
After you asked, I realized how special it must have been to me, because I’ve kept it all these years. I’m now 52. I got rid of all my vinyl many years ago except for about five special records. The emotions I associate with it are discovery but more importantly escapism. It transported me to another world.

Art had the power to separate the participants to a world in which they created—a world in which they had choices. It provided them with a way to cope with their reality. During one of the focus groups, Joe identified his reasons for creating as, “I figured out that I could pour out my emotions and what I was feeling in a lyric much easier than I could in a conversation” While conducting his interview, Joe highlighted the value, escape, and self-worth he felt while performing on stage,

It gave me an alter ego. It gave me a second character that I could go into and I didn't have to think about what I was [trying to get away from] even back in high school and right after [high school] playing the dive bars, and the honkytonks, and the VFWs and all that—even being around all the drinking, which is why I didn't want to be at home. I was still able to be somebody else. I felt value… I felt like I was of value when I was on stage performing.

David shared with the focus group how special creating was for his healing,

It helped a great deal to provide relief and healing, because I didn't know it at the time, but the effect—I did feel this effect that I’m about to tell you, but I didn't know why it worked. But I had a very sad story that was my life, and I realized that when I owned my story, and told it hidden in the lyrics of a song I’d write… it was my way of getting this poison out. And it was very healing, and I noticed more and more that when you tell your
story, it no longer owns you… you own it. But when I when I didn't tell my story. I could hear people whispering about me.

**Negative Feelings were Replaced with Positive Feelings**

Creativity promoted healing and escape through distraction, expression, and replacing negative feelings with positive feelings. Even though all participants had been victims of childhood adversity, all creatives in the study identified themselves with positive descriptors and had a positive self-worth. Nearly every participant felt a connection between their identity and their creativity. This was revealed in the emotive responses I received from each participant during the artifact analysis—especially, as they described their first time creating. While responding to one of the interview questions, Joe spoke of the healing, therapeutic benefits of creating for the first time, “I didn't realize it then as much as I do now, but I guess that would be the first time that I felt the therapeutic value of creating… I guess, subliminally, in writing that song.” David lit up in his artifact analysis when he described the first time he ever made music on that 1933 Wurlitzer piano, “I was five years old, and I pulled myself up on the piano bench and began to feel the magic of those sounds and was thrilled by it.” When Forrest attempted to describe this process during his interview, he stated, “It’s mystical, you know; it's like being a magician and knowing nothing about magic.” In the focus group, Lucinda explained how she felt initially after performing her songs in public, “it was probably two or three months of wondering, what am I such a masochist? Why do I keep showing up every night and making myself play,” She explained to the focus group how she discovered the beautiful attributes that accompanied creativity and performing—even though she suffered from extreme stage fright and “a terrible, absolutely, horrible fear of performing” due to mistreatment as a child. She continued to the other participants and said,
At some point I remember opening my eyes and there was love coming from the crowd. And there was this beautiful energy and I just kind of went, oh, and I could tell that the song that I was singing was helping some of these people and I kind of went boy it's selfish to give in to my stage fright. I have to get over this. And I just remember that being such a beautiful healing thing because it was beyond it was way bigger than myself and being judged because I was so used to being judged and criticized and it was all love, and it was a beautiful, beautiful moment.

**Creatives Recommended Outlets for Expression**

Most participants believed everyone should be encouraged to create—no matter their level of talent or creative ability. During both focus groups, many claimed the therapeutic benefits that accompany creativity, and each participant agreed. Additionally, nearly all participants voiced the opinion that everyone experiences at least some level of trauma or adversity—whether as children or as adults. There was a strong consensus from the participants in the focus groups that the creative arts could assist in healing and resiliency. Chuck argued to focus group, “Exposing children to the arts is vital for their growth and sometimes survival.” David also articulated in his interview,

Creativity is so important, that even people who do not come by it naturally, should be introduced to it to help them begin to heal. They should be taught how to write—even bad poetry—and be taught that it’s not—we’re not doing it to make money here, we’re doing to make people whole again. It’s a powerful thing. When people can find a way to write their story and share it with people, they own it from then on and they no longer are a victim of whispers or anything else.
During the artifact analysis, Eugene brought his first song copyright (Table 2) and explained how his first song was written as a response to a big argument he had with his mother. He chuckled when he recalled what she told him,

> If you can't talk civilized, don't talk at all. Now go to your room... So I went to my room, and I closed the door, and I grabbed my little guitar—which I only started playing just a couple years prior, you know, but I could chord it. And I grabbed that guitar almost immediately, and I sang, I can't talk to you civilized, with these sad and aching blue eyes, [be]cause I know I will never forget... all the things you’ve done to me, and all the things you’ve done to me. And I can’t love you with these sad and aching eyes. And then the chorus came, he sang, when I close my eyes, I see happiness inside, [be]cause I can’t see all the hardships I’ve survived. We can’t go on believing lies, if you told the truth I’d be surprised, and I can’t love you with these sad and aching eyes.

**No Barriers to Becoming Creative**

The participants’ natural, untaught creativity began on a medium, such as a household instrument—guitar, piano, mandolin—that was available in or around their environment. During the two focus groups, some participants stated they began creating on a different medium than music—sketching, writing poetry, painting, theatre, sculpting, or on a different instrument than their primary instrument. This motivation to create developed naturally into pursuing their creative art as an occupation. Basically, every participant explained creating and creativity in their interviews as the only thing they ever wanted to do. It occupied and consumed their thoughts and free time. Chuck described in his interview how nothing—especially not his abuser—could keep him from playing and creating,
I first got a guitar at around thirteen. My abuser made fun of it and I quit. Later, when I was seventeen, I took some money that I was supposed to get clothes for graduation with and bought a guitar. I just decided to rebel and do something I had always wanted to do.

All participants viewed the creative process as something at which they never had to work. Most claimed it did not even feel as though they had an option to pursue anything else. Prior to becoming a country singer and songwriter, Griff traveled the country performing with a Christian group. He explained his love for the Lord, but how he was also drawn to country musicians, such as Randy Travis, George Jones, and Merle Haggard. In his artifact analysis, Griff explained his reasons for choosing the cross and the Grand Ole Opry charm around his neck, he remembered the way the church did not support his pursuit of country music, and said, “I never lost my faith, it was like they [the church] lost their faith in me.” Initially, in his interview, Griff simply stated, “It chose me. I didn’t have another option, Bubba.” In the focus group, Chuck explained, “It was the only thing that I had ever found that made me really want to work at it.” David offered to the focus group participants,

I was just never really interested in much of anything else. Every time I worked at trying to work at some other job, I just always felt like I was wasting my time and I was shorting myself… because if you let there being too much of a plan B, you'll end up doing Plan B and not doing what you're really focused on. You're not realizing your dream. I wanted to do music for some reason, even if I was going to be poor.

Papa proclaimed in his interview,

When I started working on it. I realized I felt like I had a gift in it with words, in particular, and so I think that's what made me start doing it was, I liked the way that, in
particular, the words… the stories came out and the way they made me feel writing them and sharing them.

**Theme Two: Trauma Enhanced Creativity through Awareness, Empathy, and Perspective**

Adverse childhood experiences helped increase awareness of the motivations of others and helped creatives identify when others around them were hurting. Most identified as empathetic and viewed life and circumstances through a different lens than their peers who had not experienced trauma. The consensus of the participants was that their personal trauma shifted their perspective of their environment and the people that made it easier for them to create and tell stories—personal, situational, and environmental—through their art, emotively. In her interview, Anna claimed, “It’s given me multiple perspectives to life, characters - and how they might feel or react to circumstances, and the escape from reality. It’s easy for me to pretend I’m someone else and live in that world for a while.” In his own words during his interview, Griff claimed his story was,

Just truly, riches to rags. My dad was the richest man in [my home state], corruption—[I] didn’t’ know that at the time, [I] had no clue—and truly seeing [that] what my daddy did, should have had nothing to do with me… but it always did. Even in baseball, I can remember one year I made all-stars, and daddy was in prison… and they wasn’t gonna let me play. One of the boys had ripped his britches, and they came in [to the dugout] and wanted me to [take off my pants] and give him mine… instead of putting me in [the game].

He explained how he viewed life differently, because of the trauma he experienced as a child. When Lucinda was 10 years old, she moved with her parents to a cult commune over 4500 miles
from her birthplace and relatives, and eventually was abandoned by both parents at 11 years old. They left her at the commune. During her focus group she said,

I watched my mother board a boat and slip away from me—literally disappearing, I watched as the ocean took her, and it was months before I saw her again. I remember something happened to me while she was gone, and I just went into survival mode. I never trusted her, again. I never really trusted anybody.

Lucinda elucidated this further during her artifact analysis by saying,

I lived through a lot, and it's made me very compassionate and very quirky… and you can tell me just about anything and I will listen without judgment. I love people just as they are, especially if they can be vulnerable and honest. And that's what I aspire to be.

When asked in the interview how his trauma influenced his ability to be creative, David explained,

It made me very aware. When I was in fifth grade, a teacher pulled me aside in this silly little library we had in this ancient elementary school and she said, David, ‘do you know what awareness is?’ and I said, ‘I think so… I don’t know,’ and she said, ‘you have it and you need to take care of it… cause people will try to talk you out of it.’ I never forgot that.” David continued this sentiment in his focus group, “I could tell there was something going on, because I saw things other people passed by, and I noticed them as important—what people overlook… and that was because of my trauma.

**Creativity had Ties to Childhood Adversity**

All occupational creatives claimed they began creating as children. Strong memories were attached to their adolescent experiences and creativity emerged as a result of their lack of control of the circumstances associated with their childhood. About half of the participants in
this study had creative parents and family members who they observed picking and singing from as early as they can remember. The other half had no recollection of anyone in their family line who played music. All participants grew up in extreme poverty, except one. Many self-identified as scoring higher than the required minimum score of four on the ACEs questionnaire (Appendix C). Participants explained how they used creativity to process their trauma. Their sadness in childhood was a fountain of inspiration for their art. As she explained her reasons for choosing—what may have seemed like an odd choice for the artifact she chose for analysis, Lucinda shared her sad insight as she recalled her childhood, beginning with the description of her artifact,

It’s a pink plastic ashtray, and she smoked Camels… and I just felt like, you know, I was kind of taken away from my extended family when I was a little girl and we moved [to the commune] and we left them [behind]. So, I felt like a lot of those missing pieces of my childhood—you know, I don’t have memories of grandparents, really—and I always felt… I just always felt like something was missing… that I couldn’t quite figure out. I think as years go by, I wanted to connect and make peace with family that I just kind of left in the dust. You know we were told family is everything, but we weren’t shown that. Moving away from their parents [who] died while we were [at the commune], I felt like it was just kind of the trauma and the loneliness and the disconnect that I felt as a kid, I just never got to know the people that could’ve filled in some of those places, you know, in [my] heart, in [my] soul. And it’s been cool as an adult going back—after my dad passed—and getting a few key things that kind of make me feel connected to them. I feel like it’s just a lot of trauma as a kid that drew me to music—that pushed me to it—it kind of saved me. And then as I got older, I was terrified to get on stage sometimes, I was just terrified… And I think a lot of that was I just felt like I had no real tribe. Anyway, I look
at that pink ashtray and I think, ‘man, I just wish I could’ve had some more conversations with her…’ I don’t know at the same time it makes me feel like, I do—even if I didn’t physically grow up knowing her—I feel a connection, you know, a spiritual connection to her. I just feel like being the youngest of five kids, it was probably hardest on me because dad was never really there. He was rarely part of my childhood, and I was kind of nervous when he was, and mom, I just watched her get taken out [of my life]. So, I just felt like everything was kind of fragmented—days, months, years passed by on that commune. And I just felt like there were there were pieces of me that I'll never get back… And I look at this ashtray. You know, you can see it's a little crumbled on the side and I just feel like there's so much now that, you know, you can't go back and change anything, but I think the thing that always healed me was music and horses… My guitar and horses. And those are the things even now that I'm going back to. I feel like I've always known what helps bring me back to life, you know? So, I'm still I'm still picking up pieces.

Buddy explained in his interview, "You can speak through your art when you don't have a voice in other places.” In one of the two focus group session, Forrest connected childhood adversity and trauma by stating,

I don't think you even gravitate towards anything creative if you don't understand how the world works, and world runs on trauma. Yeah, I’m pretty convinced to that anyway. So, if you're exposed to some kind of trauma at an early age, I think that's when you wake up and you go, ‘Oh life ain’t a cartoon.’ You know, you're a kid. You think you think life should be like a Bugs Bunny cartoon, you know, laughing, fun, hilarious. You know? I mean, like, that's kid world, you know? So, when you have trauma around you, being
committed on you, it just wakes you up. You go, oh, this isn't a nice, friendly, funny, happy world. You're shown the reality of things very early. And I don't think you have any choice after that, except to try to process that somehow. Whereas somebody else who has a great childhood with no problems whatsoever, they don't have to think about adult things until they're an adult. Unfortunately, I think that’s the reason we have the world we have right now is because, it used to be that fewer children had traumatic childhoods, than most. Now, I think traumatic childhoods are the norm in society, and I think that's a source of every problem we have. The problem is these kids are growing up being traumatized, and they have no idea how to process it. They are not being creative and trying to process it.

**Theme Three: Resiliency was a Byproduct of Adversity and Creativity**

Creatives credited themselves, their parents—even abusive ones, or God/Jesus for compelling them to become resilient. Most participants said they were told they would not succeed in the pursuit of their dreams or that they would never amount to anything. Many credited their oppression and adversity as making them pursue creativity and later to make them stronger and more resilient. The statements “pressure turns coal into diamonds” and “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” both came to my mind as I memoed while the participants talked about their source of resilience, during the focus group sessions. During his artifact analysis, Joe described his 1974 Gibson Hummingbird custom acoustic guitar and how seeing it brings back good memories of creating, and bad memories of little of no support at home,

This was the ‘good’ guitar I bought when I was still driving back and forth to Nashville; before the move. I bought it from a collector on payments. It was mint condition then. 1974 Gibson Hummingbird Custom. That was in 1997. I was 22. I’d never bought
something so nice. Pride is what I associate with it. Every time I look at it. It’s been on
big stages, small stages, writing couches and mostly on my wall nowadays. It’s been
rebuilt and rebuilt again. I’m proud of leaving everything for a dream with little to no
support from home and most of my cuts were written on that guitar.

When explaining in her focus group session what made her resilient, Lucinda stated, simply,
I think the most honest answer would be me. Sin rolls down the generations, you know,
we all have these things that we fight, that’s programmed in our DNA. It’s in our
marrow. It’s in our, you know… the gray matter. It’s… it’s the curse. I always felt like
there was a curse on my family. As a kid, I felt like, oh my gosh, I’m bringing this on.
You know, I felt responsible. I felt worthless as long as I [can] remember, and I just felt
like my family would be better off without me… and I really realized, I cannot ever think
of that as an option, because it’s something I’ve fought for years. And just that loneliness
and feeling like I didn’t belong anywhere, like what is the point of sticking around? So,
I’ve worked really hard, and that’s not an option. I wanna stick around and see what
happens, what’s left to say, what’s left to learn. So, I just think I’ve done a lot of work
and I’ve been brutally honest in a way that my family was not able to be. And I think, it
took a lot of brave to get this resilient. It would’ve been a lot easier as some point to
check out, [be]cause it’s been a brutal, ragged road, but it feels beautiful now.

In his calm, soothing baritone voice, David stated the following in his interview when asked
about the healing caused by creativity, “When I told my own story in a song, it not only moved
people, but it stopped their whispering and they begin to say kind things to me, which created
healing.”
Creativity Gave Them a Voice

Creativity provided an outlet and a safe place to express themselves, even when they believed no one would listen. Most participants in this study felt they had no one in which they could confide or share their story. Creativity offered the ability to write—or re-write—their own story. All used it as a vehicle of escape, and as an outlet to express the thoughts and ideas they did not feel safe enough to share with anyone. During her artifact analysis, Anna brought her All About Me book (Table 2), and described how she was left alone every day from the age of 13 and neglected. She was left to raise her younger sister. Her absent parents would give her $20.00 a week to purchase food at the grocery store, cook, clean, and help her sister do homework, tuck her into bed, and get her ready for school. She was physically, mentally, and emotionally abused, and no family members, neighbors, or teachers checked on her or her sister. Anna was emotional during the interview as she recalled, “Writing was my only voice because my trauma was deep, ongoing, and very oppressive. My voice was actively shut down by my abuser—physically, not just metaphorically.” During the focus group, Papa described the voice and expression provided through his creativity as something greater than himself,

I think it gave me something to pour into that was greater than myself. It was greater than my family and greater than my situation… that I felt like could take me somewhere, because I didn't… we weren't going anywhere. And it gave me something that was mine, that was uniquely mine, that I could spend my quiet time, I could dream about want to do and that I felt like I could pursue, so I think that's probably how it gave me relief at least from the beginning.

Theme Four: Artistic Inspiration Came from Everyday Life
All the creatives in the study claimed their primary source of inspiration was everyday life. They observed what happened in their lives and the lives of those around them and wrote about what they saw. Each explained how they put everything, from the heartache to the happiness, down on paper or to a melody. This was healing for them and gave them control over the harmful memories that wanted to consume them. During his focus group session, David told the participants,

I studied my own human nature and patterns and other people's human nature. It became very clear to me that people make the same mistakes over and over again. From a distance, you don’t notice, but if I just examine my own life, there's plenty to write about… what I did, lessons I've learned or lessons I should have learned, and the things that I wish I’d done, and things I'm glad I did. There's plenty, it's just, you mine your own—like a coal miner—you mine your own heart. It’s a deep shaft.

Eugene shared where he finds his inspiration as we continued our discussion in the artifact analysis with the focus group,

So often my songs come to me, due to frustrations in life. My grandpa and grandma used to tell a lot of stories about tragedy. I used to think they just liked those sad, old songs, but looking back on it now, they had certainly been through more than their fair share of hard times. So, there was something comforting in those old stories that they heard and knew personally about. And they loved to sing those sad, old songs of tragedy and heartbreak, train wrecks, and even death, you know, betrayal, murder, all of it. They loved singing those songs, because there was something in that, that there was such a truth in them. And a reality that I think helped them deal with everyday life. I was always drawn to those songs. I saw a lot… I saw some violence as a child, certainly. And the
songs and the violence at home, and the violent outbursts that I would see would all mix
together [and] help form things that I needed and wanted and related to, and I spent a lot
of time trying to recreate and deal with things—through all that trauma that I saw and
experienced—and I tried to find solutions for that pain… in my songs.

Some Creatives were Inspired by Pain and Suffering

Although to a lesser extent, some of the participants were inspired by the dark side of
society. The brokenness and sadness some would avoid, increased their desire to create. When
creating, Anna told her focus group she experienced, “Sunday afternoon melancholy.” When
trying to describe the emotions he felt inside while creating, Papa voiced in that same focus
group, “Tears, painful joy, my daughter calls it sad happy. I’d like to think that I make people cry
for a living. It’s… It’s what we do.” In his interview, Forrest described it in this way, “But the
curse is that you know there is a little bit of darkness in a creative person—a true creative person.
I think there's darkness there. Such a blessing and a curse to be a creative; it is not an easy path.”
When asked in his interview what inspired him to write, Chuck remarked, “The underbelly of
society. Adult themes and emotions. For me, that is the deepest well. It is a hard place to live,
and I don’t mine those feelings much anymore. I once lived there.”

Positive Emotions Accompanied Artistic Inspiration

Most participants reported feeling joy when they were deep in creative thought or
inspiration, though some claimed their emotions were dictated by the emotion associated with
the creative work. In the focus group, Buddy described the emotions he felt while experiencing a
moment of deep artistic inspiration as, “pure ecstasy, better than better than any drug… there’s
nothing like it.” In a different focus group, Eugene stated, “it’s joy and excitement.”
Additionally, David agreed, “magic… joy. It’s just a lovely feeling. It’s a feeling of floating and
being more alive than normal.” While in his interview—discussing the primary emotions he feels while inspired, Griff described his feelings as, “intense joy.” During his interview, Papa conveyed his emotions as, “It feels like what I'm supposed to be doing and where I'm supposed to be… and I should be here more often than I am.” When asked during his interview about the internal feelings and emotions that accompany his artistic inspiration, Chuck offered, “It depends on what I’m writing about. I would say I always go back in time in my mind. I’m mining feelings or memories that would pertain to a particular song. It could be negative or positive.”

Forrest expressed to the focus group, “Empathy plays a big role in songwriting to me.” While I interviewed Joe, he explained, “I think my emotion takes on the emotion of whatever song I'm trying to create that best fits.” Lucinda told us during her focus group session, “my creative process is much like the rest of my life… both extremes.”

**Theme Five: Creating was Accompanied by a Spiritual Component**

Most participants found themselves turning to God in times of trouble, but all believed creating came with a spiritual component. Some described it as a calling on their life to be used through their creative works as an expression. As stated earlier, it was something they believed they had to do. The consensus was that creating—both the process and the product—was bigger than themselves. When asked during her interview about the one thing she would want others to know if they knew nothing about her, Anna simply said, “But, God.” Additionally, Anna shared with her focus group, “I fought the idea and calling to it for many years, but I was internally dying. Writing for a living was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done because I had to give up control and trust that God would grant provision through that creativity.” During his interview Papa stated it this way, “I need God's help to help me. Make it something bigger… and more special… and more heartfelt… and more honest than I could do on my own.” Anna shared with
the focus group, “I was in worship, singing, when my heart exploded and the Holy Spirit broke through the intense struggle I’ve always had inside of myself and revealed that I was trying to fix a little girl that was dead. I heard, ‘You are a new creation.’ For the first time an incredible weight was lifted and from that time I’ve been able to feel real emotion.” Not all the participants had a healthy view of God—some had trouble even saying His name, but all of them felt their creative process was more layered in the spiritual realm, than merely the physical realm.

**Outlier Data and Findings**

As may be expected with data collection, there were a few findings and themes that were unexpected and did not align with my specific research questions. I have highlighted one that warranted further attention of anyone interested in this study.

**Outlier Finding #1**

During the interviews and focus groups, participants reported three primary misconceptions associated with creatives. Throughout their lives they were told that creatives led reckless lifestyles, creative occupations were not real jobs, and many were led to believe that fame always equaled fortune. Most participants had tried to live up to these stereotypes at some point throughout their lives. While in the focus group, Lucinda smirked and said, “I mean, how does society look at a lot of creative people… kind of unstable and flighty and tend to be a little reckless? I feel like I fit so many of those things. And I would try so hard to stay on the straight and narrow, you know? And I never, I never did.” While I interviewed Papa, he exposed another misconception by saying, “the biggest misconception was that the trophy was the trophy… the spotlight and adulation was what we desire… that money and fame would be fulfilling… but they’re not. They are not a good goal. They are part of the process, but they are not the goal. That’s the biggest misconception.”
Research Question Responses

In the following section, I am going to answer the research questions through direct quotes from the raw data collected from the participants.

Research Questions

While seeking answers from participants for each research question, I used triangulation of all three data collection methods. I collected data in this order: interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. I pulled quotes while coding the raw data that formulated the essence of the themes and sub-themes, which also led to the answers to the three research questions.

Research Question One

What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? All themes and their sub-themes addressed this question. The lived experiences of the creatives were sad, abusive, neglectful childhoods, and most were from broken homes. They all were lonely for extended periods of time. This effort to escape from their loneliness is how each participant said their first experience creating related to their childhood trauma. It should be noted, only three of the 10 participants said the most important thing they wanted anyone to know about was that they were creative. The other participants wanted to be identified first as empathetic, compassionate, generous, optimistic, fearless, and authentic. Only one participant said the most important thing anyone could know about them was Jesus Christ. Eighty percent of the participants identified the most difficult memory and the happiest memory of their entire lives as being family related. Most creatives did not perceive themselves to be popular in high school but stood out due to their creativity. Additionally, eighty percent of the participants identified family members—not always
siblings—who became creative after experiencing childhood trauma. In his interview, David explained the initial resilience found in his creative journey like this,

I was a lonely guy… [Creating] was the only time in my life that I felt as if I had more worth. It was like I was carrying around some gold nuggets in my pocket and everybody was looking at me as if I was just a kid with no gold, yet I had all this hidden wealth inside of me, because creativity is beautiful… It made me happy to be sad.

Eugene pointed in his interview to the effect music had on him and those around him by declaring,

I think all my life, music was a mixed bag [of tools]. I used it to express pain, filter pain through [it], and just my love of it. I found all kinds—every—emotion in my music. But I think every time I’ve picked or sang a song—even before I could play an instrument, I have done my best to channel every person, and experience, and memory, that I’ve endured in my life. And I used that as a moment to heal anyone around me—including myself. And it helps… always.

When discussing creating with the focus group, David also noted, “You’re the closest you get to the real you you’ll ever get to be. You get to see who you are… not just who you think you are… and sometimes, it makes it okay and you say, that’s what I am, I’m gonna embrace it.”

Research Question Two

What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? All themes and their sub-themes addressed this question, also. The turning point (trigger) for creatives to being creating was that creativity began from childhood or adolescent experiences and was attached, sentimentally, to their strongest memories and emotions. Creating was a release and brought magic and joy,
fearless expression, fun, release, newness, unfamiliarity, adventure, anxiety, scared, nervousness, and a sense of accomplishment. They were all in desperate need of resilience. When Papa attempted to describe to the focus group how he first began creating, “the main thing I would say is that there was something inside of me that just seems to have wanted to be and I was following that.” Anna explained in her interview how she began writing for the first time,

I was around age 11 and began to write letters to myself, at first. It turned into poetry later as I was learning that type of writing in Literature classes in school. The only time I wrote was when I hit an impassable deep sadness or anger. It was mostly a last attempt to make plea of some sort before physically hurting myself. As I’m thinking about it, the writing came after a huge altercation with my family when I was alone in my room. The writing and feelings of desperation always went hand in hand for me. The writing was always personal.

**Research Question Three**

How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? Additionally, all themes and their sub-themes addressed this question. Their trauma made them more aware and empathetic toward others. Buddy made this statement to the focus group,

It was such an outlet, you know, from frustration, or lack of attention, or lack of food, or [lack of] somebody caring about you, [it] just gave me an outlet where I could lose myself. You know, you can express yourself and all the emotions through playing music. You can express the whole gamut from joy to anger, the blues… it’s introspective. The best way to put it is just looking at your own life, and trying to interpret that into music, I guess.
Anna while discussing her artifact analysis with me, connected these ideas with a simple—yet profound—statement, “I think what creativity, trauma, and resilience have in common is: a lack of control, big emotions that are far reaching, they each become a part of what makes up a person… and they aren’t easily separated.”

**Summary**

The themes discovered from the data in this study pointed to the positive influence creativity had on resilience. Not only did it provide victims of adverse childhood experiences with an escape and coping mechanism, but it gave them a voice—even when times were darkest, and it seemed they had no one to talk to and no one was listening. Since trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective, it is no surprise their artistic inspiration came from everyday life. I identified five primary themes in the raw data: creating provided escape and a coping mechanism; trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective; resiliency was a byproduct of adversity; artistic inspiration came from everyday life; and creating was accompanied by a spiritual component. Additionally, there were multiple sub-themes that surfaced, including one outlier data finding that warranted further attention; and the three research question responses were addressed and answered from participant quotes mined from the raw data. The findings of this study identified an answer to each of the three research questions. 1) What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? The trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them lonely for extended periods of time. 2) What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? The participants of this study were in desperate need of resiliency, due to the trauma they experienced. 3) How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood
resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? The trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them more aware and empathetic toward others.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry. In this final chapter, I will discuss the interpretation of findings: childhood adversity reinforced creativity, creatives found resilience through escape and artistic inspiration; and trauma derived creativity increased awareness toward others. Additionally, I will discuss the implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. This chapter closes with a concise summary of the entire study.

Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed in this section. Considering the five developed themes, this study’s findings reveal three major interpretations. Childhood adversity reinforced creativity, creatives found resilience through escape and artistic inspiration; and trauma derived creativity increased awareness and compassion toward others.

Interpretation of Findings

A hermeneutical phenomenological method of research was used to discover the results of this study as van Manen (1997) described. Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity and Masten’s (2018) resilience theory were the two theories utilized in the guiding framework. This research design collected data from participants in the form of interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. Ten participants who were 18 years or older, professional, occupational creatives in the Nashville music industry, and self-identified as having a score on the ACEs questionnaire (Appendix C) of four or higher were identified through purposive, convenience sampling.
attempted to discover more participants through snowball sampling but was unsuccessful due to their not being willing to participate, or not qualifying for the study’s parameters. Member checks were used to ensure accuracy of the raw data (Birt et al., 2016). Collected data was analyzed through coding and theme identification. This approach was utilized to discover holistic, overall meaning of a reflection through organization of the participants’ opinions and viewpoints. Important phrases were highlighted while using the selective approach, and the universal phenomenon of each statement or cluster was uncovered with the detailed approach (van Manen, 1997).

I gained understanding and answered the three research questions from quotes taken from the raw data. The three following research questions and answers were addressed in this study. (1) What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma, but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? According to the data, all of the participants were lonely, lived in poverty, and experienced trauma in their childhood. They identified as needing an outlet and safe form of expression. (2) What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? The participants described their initial experience with creativity as being compelled after a sad, frustrating, or emotional experience in which they felt they had no voice or control. (3) How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? The participants explained how their trauma exacerbated their need for an outlet and escape. It also increased awareness and they gained joy, identity, and resilience from the times they were inspired to create.

The thematic findings discussed in chapter four are as follows: (1) creating provided an escape and coping mechanism, with three sub-themes—negative feelings were replaced with
positive feelings, creatives recommended outlets for expression, and no barriers to becoming creative; (2) trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective, with one sub-theme—creativity had ties to childhood adversity; (3) resiliency was a byproduct of adversity and creativity, with one sub-theme—creativity gave them a voice (4) artistic inspiration came from everyday life, with two sub-themes—some creatives were inspired by pain and suffering, and positive emotions accompanied artistic inspiration, and (5) creating was accompanied by a spiritual component. The findings were demonstrated through participant quotations and answers discovered in the themes and sub-themes.

**Summary of Thematic Findings**

The 10 participants who took part in this study were authentic and vulnerable, which allowed for a substantial amount of data collection. Most of the participants told me the entire data collection process was healing and therapeutic. The following section contains three significant interpretations of the major thematic findings of this study.

**Childhood Adversity Reinforced Creativity.** The trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them lonely for extended periods of time. This extended and corroborated the research of Callaghan et al. (2019) that claimed the emotions creativity stirs inside of survivors of adversity strengthened internal and communal trust and feelings of safety—allowing a sense of freedom even outside initial circles of comfort. The extended loneliness allowed time and brainpower for creative flow which is related directly to complete absorption—such as all-consuming tasks and the height of intellectual stimulation (Panero, 2019). Victims of childhood adversity turned to creativity, initially to escape, but quickly learned—in addition to providing an outlet for expression—it gave them a voice. Individuals who have undergone traumatic, adverse experiences, especially children, may find expression
through creativity more comfortable than traditional communication (Desmond et al., 2015). Some participants of this study claimed they were punished by taking away their instrument or being told to keep silent, but this only seemed to increase their desire to create. Therefore, the adversity they experienced as children set off a chain reaction toward creativity and resiliency—adversity begat creativity, and creativity fostered resiliency. All participants provided raw data that led to the essence of theme one: creating provided an escape and coping mechanism, and its three sub-themes: negative feelings were replaced with positive feelings, creatives recommended outlets for expression, and no barriers to becoming creative. Additionally, the raw data led to the development of theme two: trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective, and its sub-theme: creativity had ties to childhood adversity. Aspects and clusters of meaning supporting these themes reinforced my interpretation that childhood adversity reinforced creativity.

Each participant had a different story, but there were many similarities. Though they were not asked to provide details about their trauma—other than self-identifying with a score of four or higher on the ACEs questionnaire (Appendix C), many were neglected, abused, and witnessed circumstances that affected their perspectives forever. Relying on the data collected from participants, this perspective—shaped from early childhood, gave them a reason to create a better—healthier, safer—future and life for themselves. Their childhood trauma propelled them to desire an outlet of expression and a safe place to voice their concerns and their hurts. One of the tragedies of trauma is the way it can alienate those affected by adverse experiences. The creative arts allowed the participants to release their problems and trauma using concrete storytelling or abstract ambiguity. As their skills and expertise advanced, they experienced further-reaching healing and self-worth. This was due to two primary factors: as their technical
ability increased, so did their personal enjoyment, and their experience led them to greater opportunities and larger audiences. Victims originally known for and identified by their childhood trauma—even if only in their minds—became known for something beautiful. This was conveyed over many of the interviews and especially prevalent in the focus groups.

Creatives who grew comfortable to share their art with others through public performance were able to express, outwardly, their internal thoughts and emotions (Swart, 2014). As their creativity grew, so did their confidence and association with their creativity.

Creatives Found Resilience through Escape and Artistic Inspiration. The participants of this study were in desperate need of resiliency, due to the trauma they experienced. This adds to the empirical findings that artistic endeavors have a positive influence on resilience, namely as an outlet for expression (Reed et al., 2020). Creativity was beneficial to individuals who had fallen victim to all levels of adverse childhood experiences. It promoted healing and offered escape through imagination, which continued to raise the resiliency of the individuals throughout their lives as adults. After they began creating, creators felt an immediate increase in their self-worth and saw themselves as valuable—often for the first time. Theme three: resiliency was a byproduct of adversity and creativity, its sub-theme—creativity gave them a voice, and theme five: creating was accompanied by a spiritual component. Naff (2014) identified the beneficial effects creativity has throughout the course of an individual’s lifetime. Eight of the ten participants claimed they turned to God for help before, during, or after their adverse childhood experiences. However, all of them believed there was a spiritual component to their creativity. A large consensus was that resiliency came from themselves, but most participants gave credit to God or Jesus of Christianity. A couple participants simply referred to a nondescript ‘spirit’ or ‘higher power’ as the spiritual aspect of their creativity. Many identified with a common belief
that creativity chose them and was inevitably in their pathway, forever. The emotions and feelings they experienced while inspired and creating was addictive and made them never desire to stray too far from that well of internal healing. This is also the essence behind why they chose to pursue their creative art, occupationally. Additionally, during the development of theme one’s sub-theme—creatives recommended outlet for expression—participants identified how fame and fortune are not the best possible parts or outcomes of creativity. None of the participants allowed their adverse childhoods to define them, permanently. As alluded to in the interpretation of how childhood adversity reinforced creativity, the participants of this study created a new reality for themselves—escaping to a place of safety and self-worth.

This interpretation of the feelings the participants described while deep in artistic inspiration surfaced from a theme I did not expect as I coded the data. As I have claimed, already, my personal experience with artistic inspiration was in the minority when compared with the participants of this study. Based on my own experience of the heaviness and longing I experience while creating, I did not expect to discover this from the data. Initially, when I began my creative journey, I was seven years old, my parents had filed bankruptcy, my mother had just left—she literally went from volunteering in church to being a cocktail waitress in a bar, and my father worked as a riverboat first mate pushing grain and coal barges up and down the Mississippi River. His job required he be gone 24-7 for 30-45 days at a time. The courts awarded my father full-custody, and I stayed with my aunt, my grandmother, or whomever else was willing to feed and shelter a skinny and confused second grader. I began creating to escape the way sadness and extreme loneliness I felt and my artistic inspiration—though still a very enjoyable experience—feels more like a return to that sadness and extreme loneliness. However, I was surprised when I discovered the participants of this study identified joy as the number one
emotion they felt while creating and deep in artistic inspiration. Thankfully, I did not allow my bias to lead the participants in my questioning, or I may not have discovered this in the research. I kept my opinions to myself in the data collection and learned from the participants as they described the joy and positive feelings most of them felt while creating. Maybe I feel the same, however, I do not believe joy would have been the word I used to describe it. Either way, the resilience described by the participants who created all pointed to escape through creativity and artistic inspiration as the trigger for their initial safety and healing.

**Trauma Derived Creativity Increased Awareness and Compassion Toward Others.**
The trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them more aware and empathetic toward others. All the creatives in this study identified with a high-level of empathy, compassion, and awareness of the people, places, and things that others might look over or pass by. Their trauma increased their awareness of pain and suffering and made them more empathetic toward others who were hurting around them. This interpretation developed from theme two: trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective, and its sub-theme: creativity had ties to childhood adversity, and theme four: artistic inspiration came from everyday life, and its two sub-themes—some creatives were inspired by pain and suffering, and positive emotions accompanied artistic inspiration.

The participants all claimed everyday life, whether good or bad, as one of their primary sources of inspiration. Artistic inspiration reaches outside of mere enjoyment to developing identity and community (Garcia-Dia et al., 2013; Hendon & Sandino, 2018; Shauck, 2017). Overall, the data pointed to how they wrote and created to gain control over their personal circumstances, and to tell the stories of others. Creating was how the participants provided solutions and dealt with adversity in their own lives and in the lives and through the experiences
of others. The one outlier finding was that nearly every participant believed creativity was accompanied by so many therapeutic benefits, that it should be more available to persons who would consider themselves as non-creatives, especially children and survivors of all levels of childhood trauma and adversity. These findings highlight and support the interpretation that trauma derived creativity increased awareness and compassion toward others. The participants wanted others to heal and flourish from the benefits of creativity in the same way they had healed and flourished.

**Implications for Policy or Practice**

There has been an increase of childhood trauma due to major world events such as human trafficking, violent crime, terrorism, war, loss of life, racial injustice, cyber-bullying, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since this study revealed the strong impact creativity had on victims of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), there are implications for policy and implications for practice in both the classroom, the organization, and society. School administrators, school boards, military organizations, directors of human resources, social workers, the foster system, and many other community and child advocacy groups, can use these findings to help individuals who have experienced childhood trauma. Understanding how the trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them lonely for extended periods of time, and the participants of this study were in desperate need of resiliency, due to the trauma they experienced. Stakeholders should be aware of the detriment mobile devices and social media will have on present and future generations. School boards, administrators, and teachers must be educated to understand how creativity can be utilized to help students. Not only should this occur in traditional areas of creative arts such as music, dance, drama, and art, but also in traditionally non-creative focused academic areas such as humanities, language arts, and the sciences. This would require a new
type of professional development for educators. In its structure, music is mathematical, but music theory may be too advanced and intricate to serve as a form of self-expression. Since the trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them more aware and empathetic toward others, this would be a benefit to more than just the individual; it would benefit all of society. Considering the self-identified effect reported by participants, this study identifies the value and therapeutic benefits of creativity, particularly music and the arts.

**Implications for Policy**

Considering the lifelong negative effects adverse childhood experiences have on the health, well-being, growth, and development of those affected, federal, state, and local organizations—both school and employers—should include programs focused on the creative arts in their allocation of time and resources. According to Mutch and Latai (2019), arts-based therapy can lead to the restoration of the emotional equilibrium of children who are survivors of neglect and abuse. This study supported and extended that literature. These findings can impact the social emotional competencies of children and influence the educational pedagogies of using the creative arts to foster resilience in K-12 students. Imagine reaching at-risk children through the public school system and providing them with a creative outlet early in life. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of connection between the education and creativity, especially concerning cognitive neuroscience and structural and functional plasticity (Zhou, 2018).

Some of the creative aspects that could be included are as outlets for expression art—sketching, painting, graphic design, sculpting, woodworking, music—vocal and instrumental, writing—prose, poetry, songwriting, drama—opera, dance, theatre, and non-traditional forms of arts such as clothing design, cake-decorating, culinary arts, interior design, cosmetology, automotive customization, architecture, gardening, landscaping, robotics engineering, web
design, video game design, branding, marketing, and product design. When discussing policy implications, there is always the issue of funding. Whenever there are budgetary cutbacks, the arts are the first to be eliminated. Since childhood trauma is experienced by many individuals in many different forms, removing creative endeavors from our schools should not be an option. There was a strong consensus from the participants in the focus groups that the creative arts could assist in healing and resiliency. Chuck argued to focus group, “Exposing children to the arts is vital for their growth and sometimes survival.” David also articulated in his interview, 

Creativity is so important, that even people who do not come by it naturally, should be introduced to it to help them begin to heal. They should be taught how to write—even bad poetry—and be taught that it’s not—we’re not doing it to make money here, we’re doing to make people whole again. It’s a powerful thing. When people can find a way to write their story and share it with people, they own it from then on and they no longer are a victim of whispers or anything else.

During the artifact analysis, Eugene explained how his first song was written as a response to a big argument he had with his mother. Even outside industries such as the music business, child protective services, or non-profit after school programs could form a partnership with schools to provide funds and personnel for creative arts curriculum, classes, or creative arts therapy. Additionally, the findings of this study can influence the makeup of organizations and corporate teams, especially the structure of their executive leadership. All branches of the military and the Veterans’ Administration can utilize the findings of this study when formulating policy for their servicemembers and veterans. Therapy utilizing the creative arts has a positive impact on resiliency in adulthood (Reed et al., 2020). This study reveals the need for the arts in curriculum, and the potential impact it has on learners of all ages.
Implications for Practice

The findings of this study are potentially transferable to teachers in a classroom setting. Goessling (2020), the NCTSN (2008), and SAMSHA (2014) all stated that 25% of all children will be victims of some form of trauma strong enough to impact their learning, development, and behavior—and continue to do so throughout the course of their lifetime. Creativity serves individuals in an experiential form of resilience contribution through the promotion and fostering of safety and happiness. In addition to the direct benefits associated with artistic creativity, participation has even been known to increase short- and long-term resilience to the trauma associated with school violence (Kim, 2015). In light of the findings of this study, educators could set aside a predetermined block of time for every student in their classroom to focus on creative expression. For example, there could be 10-15 minutes set aside at the beginning of the school day, or 10-15 minutes set aside at the end to allow students the opportunity to express themselves through creativity. Even small amounts of creative arts-based therapy—moderate time spent painting every other day, can improve the imaginative and creative mental cognition and socioemotional health of individuals (Hu, et al., 2020). Planned assemblies could focus on creative expression and be followed by guided sessions in the classroom setting. Musical creativity is a factor of resilience building, and traumatic healing, even relationship building; however, it is difficult for some children to gain access to creative opportunities (Sullivan, 2021). Creativity leads to a higher self-esteem in children victimized by traumatic experiences, accompanied by promoting trust and overall identity development benefits (Hallam, 2015).

Expression through the creative arts could also be introduced to military members and veterans as a safe and healthy outlet for expression. This would not have to cause additional budgetary strains, because it could simply be included in a whole health or whole person
approach—per the guidelines and at the discretion of the organization. It empowers creatives, improves the community’s social culture and it also improves the personality health through the creativity of the participating individuals (Kim, 2015). Additionally, employers could incorporate creativity into their time management, communication, and required—or optional—training. This approach could be accomplished through creative arts that were audio focused—music or singing, visually focused—sketching, painting, sculpting, dancing, acting, or as simple as writing, poetry.

One out of every four children will experience trauma that will affect their learning, development, and behavior; therefore, trauma has a strong influence on its victims throughout the course of a lifetime (Goessling, 2020; National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), 2008; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), 2014). Teachers can use the creative arts to foster resilience in their students, especially those who have experienced high levels of childhood adversity. Organizational leaders can also use these findings to vary their executive leadership teams. Another potentially transferable benefit would be using creativity to reduce the overall stress levels of all employees—entry level through upper-level management—in corporate America and academia. Instead of a reactive program intended to assist in the rehabilitation of those who suffer from addiction, the creative arts could be a proactive way to increase the resiliency of anyone interested.

**Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

This section will begin with theoretical implications and will close with empirical implications. The theories that guided this study were Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity and Masten’s (2018) resilience theory. The significant findings from the empirical literature review of this study are: God’s creative nature and finding joy in the trials, adverse childhood
experiences (ACEs), trauma derived creativity, and two sides of resilience: imaginative and inspirational.

Theoretical Implications

This study corroborates Masten’s (2018) theory of resilience by identifying the many layers that function together to sculpt living things and systems through their functional and developmental stages. This study focused on the individual—namely the creative individual—while Masten (2018) maintained his focus on the family, primarily, giving these findings theoretical implications (Masten, 2018). Vygotsky (1971) revealed the link creativity has to early childhood. Another theoretical implication is this study identified the connection creativity has to adverse childhood experiences (Vygotsky, 1971). Masten (2018) understood the wide-range of factors that affect—even shape—living things and systems as they function and develop. Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity revealed how emotion is linked to thought and understands the existing linkage and connection of reality and imagination (Lindqvist, 2003). Vygotsky (2004) suggested time and environment were the two primary things that shaped creative individuals (Vygotsky, 2004).

Since Vygotsky saw artistic expression as emotional liberation and an unconscious social release, this helped inform the significance of further study on this topic (Lindqvist, 2003; Vygotsky, 1930). A novel contribution this study added to the field of research was how many linked their identity to their creativity and were convinced the creativity chose them—not the other way around. An additional novel contribution of this study revealed trauma, creativity, and resilience become woven into the fabric of what makes a person who they are—and who they perceive themselves to be—and these are not easily separated. Humans are tied to the distant
occurrences that occurred during the formidable, developmental years of early childhood, in the most complex forms of creative action, tangible and intangible (Vygotsky, 1971).

**Empirical Implications**

As discussed in the summary of thematic findings, the interpretations of this study revealed childhood adversity reinforced creativity, creatives found resilience through escape and artistic inspiration, and trauma derived creativity increased awareness and compassion toward others. The phenomenology explored throughout this study examined how, in the early-stage, creativity provided resilience through escape—imagination, fantasy, but eventually provided artistic inspiration through returning to the heaviness of that emotion, pain, and sadness, as a trigger for artistic inspiration. This was not revealed in any previous studies and was a gap I discovered in the literature. Furthermore, there had been minimal literature regarding even a perceived connection between trauma, creativity, and resilience. What small amount had been published made some connection of childhood trauma to creativity, creativity to resilience, or resilience as a result of arts-based therapy, but there was a gap in the research concerning the link or perceived causation of creativity being born from childhood trauma as a need for resilience (Beebe, 2018; Lindqvist, 2003; Mutch & Latai, 2019, Thomson & Jaque, 2018). Also, I found no studies explaining the creatives’ need to return to the positive or negative emotion induced from earlier trauma as a muse or catalyst of creative flow.

The findings of this study supported the rewards Jesus associated with enduring hardships (Kgatle, 2019). “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4, Christian Standard Bible). Additionally, this study adds empirical support that expression
through creativity clears a pathway for healing as music and creative writing helps individuals express their internal feelings through introspection and reflection (Oehlers, 2020). According to Thomson and Jaque (2018, 2017, 2015) adverse childhood experiences can be a common catalyst prompting professions such as performing artists in adulthood. Unfortunately, many of the childhood adversity markers co-occur and therefore increase the chances of psychopathology showing up later in life (Thomson & Jaque, 2018). Recognizing the linkage and the reasons behind it can make a difference by providing a quicker pathway to healing and support (Beebe, 2018; Ioannou, 2016; Mittal et al., 2015). Creative persons learn to adapt cognitively to stressful environments, and trauma enhances adult executive function. (Thomson & Jaque, 2016). Lucinda supported this during the discussion surrounding her artifact analysis, I think the thing that always healed me was music and horses… My guitar and horses. And those are the things even now that I'm going back to. I feel like I've always known what helps bring me back to life, you know? So, I'm still I'm still picking up pieces.

According to Beebe (2018), creativity can ignite resilience through escape—fantasy—and return—realism. Following a traumatic event, music and art makers can suffer at first; then the creative act can transform the individual and restore their well-being through the added resilience brought about by the creative act (Swart, 2014). In his interview, David explained the initial resilience found in his creative journey like this, I was a lonely guy… [Creating] was the only time in my life that I felt as if I had more worth. It was like I was carrying around some gold nuggets in my pocket and everybody was looking at me as if I was just a kid with no gold, yet I had all this hidden wealth inside of me, because creativity is beautiful… It made me happy to be sad.
The findings of this study that were not found in empirical research was that prior to becoming creative, every participant in this study was lonely for an extended period of time. Empirically, there has been very little research regarding the perceived correlation between trauma and creativity, but—according to the findings of this study—it goes much deeper than that. Each participant said their first experience creating was an effort to escape from the loneliness they felt because of their childhood trauma. Adverse childhood experiences caused extended periods of loneliness, and extended periods of loneliness was the blank canvas that provided margin—and necessity—for escape through creative expression.

This study extended and corroborated research that childhood trauma and physical and mental health in adulthood have a strong relationship (Martín-Higarza et al., 2020). ACEs reveal a higher percentage of future depression in adulthood (LeMasters et al., 2021). Additionally, adult diseases, life quality, hospitalization and visits, and mortality rates are all increased with an individual’s ACEs score. (Martin-Higarza et al., 2020). Survivors of childhood trauma can experience serious, negative effects on well-being, and their lifespan can be shortened by as many as 20 years (Shakoor, et al., 2021). However, once the participants were introduced to creativity, the trauma experienced made them more aware and empathetic toward others and even enhanced their creativity. This adds empirical support to previous research that implies an increase or decrease when there is an associated relation. The aptitude for resilience through creativity materializes from a forbearance of the unknown occurring from trauma. However, this may be increased or decreased whenever there is a relational association (Wehle, 2016). Anna was emotional during the interview as she recalled, “Writing was my only voice because my trauma was deep, ongoing, and very oppressive. My voice was actively shut down by my
abuser—physically, not just metaphorically.” During the focus group, Papa described the voice and expression provided through his creativity as something greater than himself,

I think it gave me something to pour into that was greater than myself. It was greater than my family and greater than my situation… that I felt like could take me somewhere, because I didn't… we weren't going anywhere. And it gave me something that was mine, that was uniquely mine, that I could spend my quiet time, I could dream about want to do and that I felt like I could pursue, so I think that's probably how it gave me relief at least from the beginning.

The empirical research revealed that trauma often increases creativity (Oehlers, 2020). Creativity through the arts provides persons with a safe place, fosters mindfulness, and promotes their overall well-being—especially when dealing with depression, anxiety, and other common issues of mental health (Atayero et al., 2021). Other studies have claimed a person with a mental illness and a person who is creative are in almost the exact state of mind (Snapp et al., 2018). There is a nature and nurture side of creative resilience. The connection between intelligence and creativity—the “nature” side, and as both relate to cognitive neuroscience, creativity and creative thinking, can be triggered by specific traumatic events—the “nurture” side (Zhou, 2018).

However, this study filled a gap in the research because the findings discovered creativity sculpted individuals into aware, resilient, empathetic, overcomers. David stated the following in his interview when asked about the healing caused by creativity, “When I told my own story in a song, it not only moved people, but it stopped their whispering and they begin to say kind things to me, which created healing.”

Previous empirical research identified that artistic expression brings with it the freedom to release pain and sadness while taking control of and mastering the trauma that could otherwise
control them (Lougheed, 2019; Meyer, 2019; Wright, 2016). Thomson and Jaque (2017) identified creative flow as being higher among creators who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences. Additionally, Gracie, et al. (2018) identified music has a perceived linkage to identity through the manifestation of a sense of inclusion and a feeling of belonging. This study also identified the ongoing, lifelong benefits of artistic inspiration. In the focus group, Buddy described the emotions he felt while experiencing a moment of deep artistic inspiration as, “pure ecstasy, better than better than any drug… there’s nothing like it.” In a different focus group, Eugene stated, “it’s joy and excitement.” Additionally, David agreed, “magic… joy. It’s just a lovely feeling. It’s a feeling of floating and being more alive than normal.” While in his interview—discussing the primary emotions he feels while inspired, Griff described his feelings as, “intense joy.” During his interview, Papa conveyed his emotions as, “It feels like what I'm supposed to be doing and where I'm supposed to be… and I should be here more often than I am.” Most returned to feelings of joy and magic every time they were lost in creativity. This extended and corroborated the empirical finding that positive emotional outcomes are common in creative individuals (Diamond et al., 2020).

Creativity becomes a tool victims of childhood trauma can utilize to build resilience through expression and release (Clay, 2017). Inspiration is an ineffable characteristic of creativity (Hendon & Sandino, 2018). The findings of this study extends and corroborates that imagination creates a bridge from inner—mind and spirit to outer self—body and social environment of the external world (Dowd, 1989). In his interview, Forrest described it in this way, “But the curse is that you know there is a little bit of darkness in a creative person—a true creative person. I think there's darkness there. Such a blessing and a curse to be a creative; it is not an easy path.” During his interview Papa stated it this way, “I need God's help to help me.
Make it something bigger… and more special… and more heartfelt… and more honest than I could do on my own.” This adds to the teachings of well-known philosopher, Plato, who claimed madness—whether recognized as mental illness or creativity—is a gift from above and the channel of most blessing (Snapp et al., 2018).

**Four Beneficial Existentials for Reflection**

Spatiality—lived space, corporeality—lived body, temporality—lived time, and relationality—lived human relation are four beneficial existentials that can be used as reflection guides while conducting and analyzing the data (van Manen, 1997). The space one feels, the distance from others, whether lost or at home, is something van Manen (1997) referred to as spatiality. Corporeality, also known as living bodily in the world, reveals and conceals simultaneously. Temporality is the subjectiveness of how time seems to fly by while enjoying oneself and their circumstances but slows drastically when anxious or bored, and communality, namely, relationality, is the way one lives relationally with others from their neighbors to God Almighty. All four of these existential considerations must play a part in hermeneutical phenomenology data analysis (van Manen, 1997).

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of this study were the setting of the Nashville music industry. I would have liked to have had access to a large sample of New York and Los Angeles. This would have allowed me the opportunity to study occupational creatives from other genres of music. Additionally, I would have liked to have had more participants who were female and more diverse ethnically. The Nashville Music Industry is made up of many genres, but my sample of willing and available participants was made up of mostly male Caucasians.
The delimitations that defined the boundaries of this study was the decision to only include participants who were 18 or older, professional, occupational creatives in the Nashville music industry, and who were given the ACEs Questionnaire (Appendix C) and received a score of 4 or higher. The design of this qualitative study was hermeneutical phenomenology because of the bias derived from my lived experiences. The rationale behind this decision was founded on my having gone through the experience, at least to an extent, prior to researching this phenomenon. I hoped to ascertain what type of traumatic lived experiences triggered victims to create and whether there was a perceived positive or negative effect on their emotional health brought about by the creativity. The setting was the Nashville Music Industry, and the participants were occupational creatives and peers from my experience in the industry. The rationale behind the setting and participants was based on my access and background. I used the ACEs questionnaire (Appendix C) to pre-qualify the participants, because I wanted to study the perceived connections between trauma, creativity, resilience, and artistic inspiration.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

When I began this study, I assumed I would have discovered a link between adverse childhood experiences and creativity. There is a link, however, not the one I was expecting. The findings revealed the childhood trauma resulted in extended periods of loneliness as children. The participants of this study grew up in an era before the widespread usage of modern-day conveniences, such as mobile devices, on-demand content streaming, and social media. Their version of loneliness was occupied with nothing to do—boredom. The modern version of loneliness is occupied—with noise. This noise comes in the form of convenience and gives them the ability to search anything—day or night. Today, children who experience trauma—leading to loneliness—no longer feel the need or margin to reach to creativity in the ways they did in past
generations; streaming platforms and social media on mobile devices have become the noise that by which the world is occupied. Lonely children who would teach themselves to play guitar only dream of learning to sing one song on a publicized, televised talent show. This does not negate their desperate need for resilience; however, it disguises—muffles their loneliness. I believe this should guide—even drive—future research. My first hit on the Billboard charts was a song asking questions about the cause of a teenage suicide called, *How Do You Get That Lonely*. It seems one way is to disguise the loneliness of the world, and making them forget their desperate need for resilience.

While qualifying and disqualifying participants, determining the sample size, and collecting and interpreting the data, it occurred to me there should be future research conducted on populations who became creative after experiencing other levels of trauma, adversity, and PTSD as adults, but did not experience four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as children. I would like to see research that differentiates between the effect differences comparing audio-based and visual-based creative art. Additionally, creative children should be studied—while they are still under the age of 18, military members and veterans with PTSD, and ethnicities and racial groups other than Caucasian, should be studied. Ethnographic studies of economically depressed regions, both rural and urban, would shed more light on the ways creativity mitigates trauma and increases resilience. I found it interesting only two or three of the 10 participants identified sad, lonely or broken internal feelings while deep in creative thought. When I create, it feels like a Sunday afternoon feeling of melancholy loneliness—which I enjoy, and I would like to know if other studies reveal this. Lastly, the impact creativity has on children’s ability to learn and retain knowledge in a school setting should be studied, namely victims of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry. The theories guiding this study were Masten’s (2018) resiliency theory and Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity as they informed the literature on my topic by understanding the link early childhood, especially trauma, had on creativity and the link trauma had on resilience and the life courses of individuals. The qualitative design of this study was hermeneutical phenomenology. The purposive sample consisted of 10 participants who qualified from a purposive sample pool of 117 occupational creatives who were performers, musicians, and writers, and the setting was Nashville, Tennessee. The research questions were: What were the lived experiences of people who suffered childhood trauma but found relief and resilience through creative endeavors? What was the turning point (trigger) for creatives who experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences to begin creating or performing? How did trauma derived creativity foster childhood resilience and adulthood artistic inspiration? I collected data in through interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. The five themes that emerged from this study were: creating provided escape and a coping mechanism, with three sub-themes—negative feelings were replaced with positive feelings, creatives recommended outlet for expression, and no barriers to becoming creative; trauma enhanced creativity through awareness, empathy, and perspective, with one sub-theme—creativity had ties to childhood adversity; resiliency was a byproduct of adversity and creativity, with one sub-theme—creativity gave them a voice; artistic inspiration came from everyday life, with two sub-themes—some creatives were inspired by pain and suffering, and positive emotions accompanied artistic inspiration; and creating was accompanied by a spiritual component. The trauma experienced by the participants of this study
made them lonely for extended periods of time, the participants of this study were in desperate need of resiliency, due to the trauma they experienced, and the trauma experienced by the participants of this study made them more aware and empathetic toward others. The most important takeaways from the results of my research were: childhood adversity reinforced creativity, creatives found resilience through escape and artistic inspiration; and trauma derived creativity increased awareness and compassion toward others.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A - IRB Approval Form

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 18, 2022

James Teachenor
Floralba Arbelo Marrero

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-651 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TRAUMA, CREATIVITY, RESILIENCE, AND ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

Dear James Teachenor, Floralba Arbelo Marrero,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration. Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
Appendix B - Consent Form
Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Trauma, Creativity, Resilience, and Artistic Inspiration
Principal Investigator: James Teachenor, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be eighteen years old or older, a professional, occupational creative within the Nashville music industry, and have scored a 4 or higher on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the perceived resilience of creativity derived from childhood trauma for professional creatives employed in the Nashville music industry. The theories guiding this study are Vygotsky’s (1930) theory of creativity and Masten’s (2018) resilience theory.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a recorded interview of predetermined questions (1 hour). Each participant will have the opportunity to choose either a virtual or an in-person interview. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.
2. Bring an artifact that is meaningful and related to your initial resilience experience to the interview (10 minutes).
3. Participate in only one of two audio and video recorded focus groups with one-half of the ten (10) research study participants (60 minutes). Participants can choose to attend their focus group either virtually or in-person. Famous, well-known participants may choose to remain unknown to everyone except me through the use of text chats. I will read their discussion responses to the rest of the participants using their pseudonym(s).

How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

A potential benefit participants may experience from taking part in this study is understanding how their creativity may have therapeutic benefits when related to overcoming trauma. This may help them focus on harnessing their creativity to relieve anxiety caused by childhood trauma.

Benefits to society include new methods of resilience therapy and creative arts that can be introduced early to trauma victims to speed up recovery efforts.
**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is James Teachenor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at jteachenor@liberty.edu. You can also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor Dr. Floralba Arbelo Marrero at farbelomarrero@liberty.edu.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record, video-record and photograph me and my artifact as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date
Appendix C - Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ)

Prior to your 18th birthday:
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn’t have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
7. Was your mother or stepmother:
   Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or
   Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or
   Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __
10. Did a household member go to prison?
    No___If Yes, enter 1 __

Now add up your “Yes” answers: _ This is your ACE score.
Appendix D – Mental Health Resources

- Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services
  - Crisis Services & Suicide Prevention – [Phone Number Redacted]
  - Behavioral Health Safety Net – [Website]
- Centerstone of TN – [Website]
- Mental Health Cooperative – [Website]
- TN Voices – [Website]
- Volunteer Behavioral Health – [Website]
- Enrichment House – [Website]
- Our Place – [Website]
- Peer Support Services – Nashville – [Website]
- Music Health Alliance – [Website]