

**INFLUENCE OF ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES AND THEIR
IMPACT ON LEADER DEVELOPMENT**

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Jenny Mae Pridemore

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The committee members below have recommended the dissertation: INFLUENCE OF ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES AND THEIR IMPACT ON LEADER DEVELOPMENT by Jenny Mae Pridemore be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree:

Doctor of Executive Leadership effective April 2023.

Robin McLaughlin Ph.D.

Dr. Robin McLaughlin, Chair

Matthew W. Lonam, Ph.D.

Dr. Matthew Lonam, Methodologist

Bruce D Reed

Dr. Bruce Reed, Subject Matter Expert

Kim DeVries

Dr. Kimberly DeVries, Peer

ABSTRACT

Much research has been published on leadership, leadership development, and strategic leadership relating to theories, styles, strategies, and practices. However, there has been little published research on the influence of adolescent experience and the impact those influences have on the leader they become (Liu et al., 2019). This study aims to determine how the impact of the adolescent experiences helps an individual develop through the lenses of self-efficacy, self-growth, and self-development. Bowers et al. (2016) argued that little information demonstrates the leadership qualities developed throughout life and the impact on adolescents, and this study aimed to bridge this gap in the literature by using a qualitative methodology and the analysis of narrative storytelling to identify trends, commonalities, and critical moments in the stories of leaders.

Keywords: adolescent, self-growth, self-development, leadership, ethics, decision-making, pre-adult, youthfulness, executive leadership, leaders

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation and its works to my son, Jess. I want you to know the great inspiration, encourager, supporter, and influence you are. I have learned more from you than I can ever explain. On your journey to being a productive leader, take time to practice reflection and reflexivity. Take time to know your subordinates and learn how they learn so that you can lead them in a way that will be helpful to them. You are a strong-willed man, and I know you will go far in life and your career. Thank you for being my son and my best friend and supporting me in so many ways on this journey.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An adolescent, one who is between the ages of 10 and 19 (World Health Organization, 2022), spends their adolescent years learning themselves, encountering experiences that are unknown to them at the time but will have an impact on who they become, the decisions they make, and the lessons learned. During these experiences, they will have many influencers, such as parents, mentors, and other authority figures. It is suggested that leader development takes place over one's life and that the factors of the environment play a part in leader development, which is my area of interest (Liu, Z. et al., 2019). This dissertation aims to discover what events leaders experienced during their adolescence that impacted their leadership style through the lenses of integrity, ethics, relationship building, and empathy.

In other words, the type of leader one becomes begins taking shape through the early influence of these individuals and experiences. Throughout my studies, I have learned that there are several leadership styles a leader may choose, including servant leader, relational and transformational.

General Statement

Personal challenges as an adult, including experiences such as struggling with education, serving in the armed forces, and family, have allowed me to learn, develop, and expand on my experiences of my adolescent years. As a result, these challenges aided in my development in becoming an authentic, charismatic, and transformational leader. The studies, conversations, and relationships developed throughout the Doctor of Executive Leadership program offered a new perspective on my formative experiences. As a result, I received opportunities to understand the tools in my 'leadership toolbox' and how important it is to reflect on one's past. My past led me down the road I am on today. Sokol (2009) discussed Erikson's theory of psychosocial

development, in which Erickson emphasizes that psychosocial makeup, social context, and culture all contribute to the development of an individual, which aided in my personal understanding about who I am and what influences contributed to that understanding.

Much research has been published on leadership, leader development, and strategic leadership relating to theories, styles, strategies, and practices. However, there has been little published research on the physical influence on adolescents and the impact those influences have on the leader they become (Liu et al., 2019). One might recognize, however, the impact of influences, lessons, and experiences in learning and understanding oneself.

This study seeks to understand the effects of adolescent experiences and how they helped shape leadership styles, strategies, and practices. Although authors such as Roberts (2008) suggested that college students are our future leaders, and others, such as Kuhn and Weinberger (2005) mentioned that the leadership roles held during adolescence aid in one's opportunity to enter college, this study aims to support the notion that development of a leader may begin in earlier life stages. Participating in school activities, sports, and religious activities and holding positions in programs such as the student council, DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America), and scouting will not only aid in developing the lessons learned, skills, and knowledge gained but may also become a consideration when applying for post-secondary education (Pizur et al., 2008).

Research Problem

This study aimed to research an area that has not been extensively researched, seeking to understand how one's adolescent experiences influence self-development and the leader one may become. Murphy and Johnson (2011) suggested that there is little research on leader development in one's younger years of life and the significance of that development. It is

essential to know and understand how the environment surrounding an individual in their critical years of gaining knowledge impacts the leader they become (Erikson., E., 1968).

It is a personal goal to understand and become a subject matter expert in the effects of one's life experiences and whether and how people allow the experiences to impact self-development and identity as a leader. Liu et al. (2019) suggested that there has been "little attention to early life influences on leader development" (Liu et al., 2019, pg. 1227). Though there are personal biases as to the purpose of this research, I will be putting those biases aside to realize my personal goal of learning, understanding, and growing from the information obtained from this research. While working towards my personal goal, it is possible that both the practical and intellectual goals can also be met. The practical goal is to aid leaders in becoming more effective by arming them with the knowledge of the research results the understanding of why and how people learn and develop the way they do. The intellectual goal of this study was to enhance the knowledge of the early stages of leader development and to ascertain which events during adolescence impacted leadership aspects to add to one's leadership toolbox. While simultaneously identifying key elements of adolescent leadership-shaping events, leaders can use these techniques to enhance and foster leadership in the next generation. The research may provide new information to help fill the literature gap on the influences on psychosocial adolescence and the impact those influences have.

Research Purpose

While critically reviewing the literature before beginning this study, I found an overlap in self-development, self-growth, self-efficacy, and ethics related to this study. The overlap suggests that these four attributes play a significant role in becoming a leader. Foti (2012) indicated that "people will tend to endorse those characteristics they believe themselves to

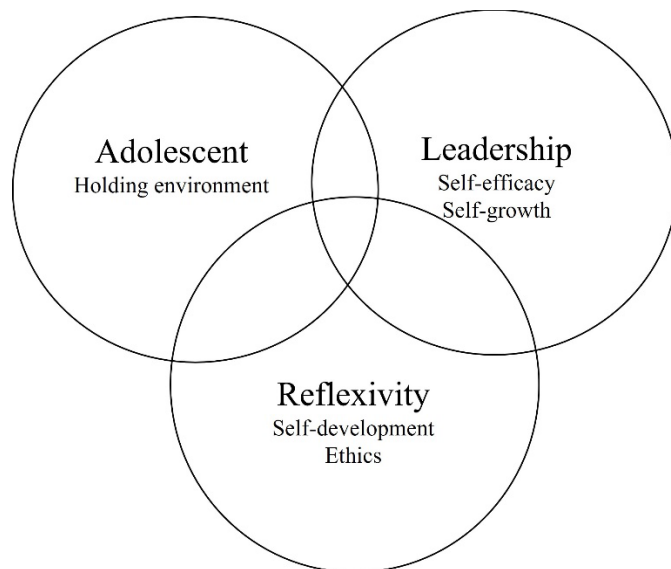
possess” (Foti et al., 2012, pg. 703). If one does not believe they possess inner growth, self-efficacy, or ethics, they may not see themselves as capable of self-development. There is also a gap in the literature as there is a dearth of information demonstrating that leadership quality developed throughout one’s life and the impact on adolescents (Bowers et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study helped determine the relationship between leadership development and life experiences, which leadership tools emerge from these experiences, and how self-development and leadership styles are influenced. Also shaping the theoretical framework of this study are the creation and formulation of values, concepts of emotional intelligence, developmental theories, and the views expressed by Burgenhagen (2012), Goleman (2006), Salusky et al. (2014), Sokol (2009), and Weingberg (2018).

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Research Questions

RQ1: How do the influences of one’s adolescence impact their leader development?

RQ1a: How do the experiences help shape them as an executive leader?

Overview of Research Design

I conducted qualitative research based on a narrative story-telling design, listening and asking questions as participants shared their stories. I recorded the story with a handheld recorder, and as shown in Appendix A, the Interview Protocol included probing questions to aid in the storytelling along with questions to confirm understanding of what the participant was relaying. Upon completion, the recording was transcribed and shared with the interviewees for their approval, a process referred to as member checking. Commonalities such as phrases, words, and experiences, as well as unique and individualized experiences among those interviewed were factors considered while analyzing the data.

Definitions

Adolescent: A phase of childhood that occurs from the ages of 10 to 19, where an adolescent will experience “cognitive and psychosocial growth” (World Health Organization, 2022).

Ethics: One's principles are based on moral beliefs that aid in life's decision-making (Plante, 2011) and recognize right or wrong behavior (Johnson, 2018).

Executive Leaders: For this study, executive leaders are those in the Senior Enlisted ranks of Sergeant First Class (E-7), Master Sergeant (E-8), Command Sergeant Major (E-9), Second Lieutenant (2LT), and Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) representing the senior leaders from both the enlisted and officer ranks.

Leaders: Someone who has the authority to condition one way of life; a coach, mentor, parental figure, or one who guides (Johnson, 2018; Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Leadership: Leaders (coaches, mentors, etc.) with the ability to influence those around them (Hughes, 2009).

Reflexivity: The examination of one's beliefs, judgment, and practices, what is done with the knowledge (University of Warwick Education Studies, 2022).

Self-Efficacy: The embracement of life's events and the ability to face challenges and, therefore, strengthen one's skills (Goleman, 2006).

Self-Development: Individuals increase in the capability of strengthening their attributes, knowledge, and skills (Day, 2000; Reichard et al., 2016).

Self-Growth: Individual development in items such as knowledge, skills, mindset, and learning and understanding who you are and that you matter (Sasson, 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

I assumed that all participants would tell their stories truthfully and were willing to better understand how the past aided in the development of who they are today. Understanding that some might find sharing their story difficult, maybe even emotional, efforts were made to provide a comfortable environment with breaks as needed and have Kleenex and water available. The interviewees were made to feel as comfortable as possible. Another assumption was that only some interviewees will complete their story as it might become too emotional and trigger memories that may cause the interviewee not to be able to continue. With my complete understanding and support, participants were welcome to stop the interview anytime to take a break or compose themselves. Individuals told their stories, so the assumption was that no two stories would be exactly alike; however, the paths might be similar.

The scope and limitations of the study were to focus on the influences of the adolescent surroundings and how those influences impact one's leadership development. The study consisted of five to ten individuals sharing their stories until data saturation was reached. The aim of the study was to better understand what influenced leadership development in adolescents

and add to the existing research. Qualitative data was based on the subjective experiences of each of the participants, and therefore it cannot be measured (Maxwell & Miller, 2008).

Summary

Little research was found that related to adolescents' experiences and their impact on the leaders they become. My goal was to have a better understanding of this impact and provide a better understanding to all leaders, as this might allow leaders to know where their team comes from, how they arrived at where they are, and how to assist them in preparation for tomorrow. There is a saying that today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow. An additional goal was to provide the leaders of tomorrow with guidance, understanding, and values to assist in their leadership development.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 provides an established literature basis for this study. The literature entails both theoretical and thematic foundations for a comprehensive understanding of historical argument and the current academic topic treatment, which also provides a link between the study and the existing literature and a background basis for conducting research. The concepts of adult influences and self-development are existing factors within the societal context that have been a focus for years. The literature review is a significant source of data and information for the research and is reliable in deducing the study's findings. It gives a synthesized and integrated body of knowledge that provides the reader context for the current argument that touches on the edges of the topic. The chapter offers seminal information that allows the contextual framework to define the research design (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015). Finally, it provides a basis for determining the research validation elements like reliability, relevance, and significance to the societal context. The literature review offers validation to the research analysis methods and the overall credibility of the research process.

The literature on significant research variables is endless, touching on some of the most ancient elements like leadership. The various research variables, like pre-adult experiences and influences, are broad topics that can provide a formidable challenge to any researcher who ventures around such topics (O'Connor et al., 2020). The adolescent experiences and influences on the development to make an executive leader can be pictured from various theoretical and conceptual perspectives. The life context of adolescence covers a wide range of elements that stem from growth, parenthood, schooling, children's leadership, and guidance to vital issues like mental and emotional development (Weinberg, 2018). Whether these factors have a role in shaping the leadership capabilities of an adolescent is essential in any leadership development

field. Additional elements vital to the topic are the roles of the various players in shaping executive leadership outcomes and self-development (Petrie, 2014). The relationships and influences are topics of discussion and elements that help form an argument when discussing the results.

Research Strategy

The primary strategy for conducting research was using the keywords vital to the research topic with the best search engines and sites for the most credible information. The information was available via academic sites such as ProQuest and Google Scholar. Keywords in the search process, such as adolescent, youthfulness, and self-development, were used to obtain suitable sources from the information sites (Knox, 2002). The other keywords used for research were executive leadership, leadership, and leaders. The sources applied in the bibliography were dated from 1968 to the present, as many of the earlier authors not only share knowledge gained from their work but also laid the foundation for future studies, upcoming authors, and researchers. The historical studies and theorists' writings were researched based on the keywords used in the search engines and limited to the timing of resources.

Childhood Environment

Childhood is not just about the adventures of playing on the playground or the memories from one's family vacations; it is about learning, developing, and becoming an individual. Throughout the stages of life, there are areas in which one will understand self-efficacy, self-growth, and self-development and embrace inner growth. For some, this may not occur until later, as one begins to recognize the lessons from the experiences and make sense of the lessons that have impacted decision-making and development. Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) suggested "that it is useful to examine leadership during childhood and adolescence as what

occurs during the development years can have an impact on the leadership” (p. 98). It is with this in mind that the stages of one’s lifecycle are briefly explained in the coming paragraphs, as this will offer a better understanding of the development at different stages. The literature also suggested that the parent influences attitudes and behaviors from childhood to adolescence and that traits in a leader, such as empathy, are learned through the emotional connection between parent and child (Ma et al., 2020).

Childhood Stage

Though it is understood that several environmental influences impact a person as an individual and as a leader, elements such as theories proposed by previous and continuous studies offer the opportunity to understand the framework. Batra (2013) suggested that Erikson’s theoretical framework connects stages between human development, the maturity of an adult, and an individual’s relationship with society. But Erikson (1968), Piaget (1970), Murphy and Johnson (2011), and Liu et al. (2020) suggested that there are stages within life that contribute to one’s leadership development, whether it be conceptual, cognitive, transformational, or psychosocial development. Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial development consists of eight stages from infancy to old age. Piaget’s (1977) theory of cognitive development consists of four stages involving intellectual development. Murphy and Johnson (2011) have a different approach as she does not adopt any specific theory, since, as she states, “there is not unifying theory of leadership development” (p. 459). Liu et al., like Murphy and Johnson, did not specify a particular theory as “developing effective leadership processes involves more than simply design which leadership theory is to be used to motivate effective development” (Day et al., 2014, p. 64). However, Liu (2020) mentioned that developing one’s leadership is a “life-long developmental process” (p. 2). Most successful leaders develop their leadership abilities through

life experiences, which are essential to leader development. The stages of one's lifecycle will be explored to express the importance of developmental psychology and leader development (Ma et al., 2020). The story of a leader can be described by the life journey suggested by Liu et al. (2020) and as a baseline of understanding, the nascent, externally driven, experimental, and self and opportunity oriented.

Nascent Stage 0-6 Years

Also known as the preschool stage, the Nascent is the stage where the caregiver's relationship is well-formed and achieved within the first three years. Lifelong leader development is achieved through various factors, such as attachment. Male leaders usually have an advantage as inherent theories of leadership support their ability to practice their traits and attributes (Giurge et al., 2019). The nascent stage explains how leaders start to form their own identity and the expectations that individuals usually have of them, especially how they think about their leaders and leadership. Various factors can support leadership theories of development, including influences experienced in early childhood, caregiver behaviors, and parental traits.

Attachment to caregiver refers to how the primary caregiver's emotions are connected to those of the infants. It helps create a social environment, thereby becoming an important symbol in creating a bond between the infant and the caregiver. Depending on the protection provided by the caregiver to the infant, the infant can either be securely or insecurely attached. Secure attachment is where the infant has total confidence that he/she will still be welcomed and comforted when they are back from exploring outside (Liu et al., 2020).

In addition to the infant building the relationship with their caregiver, they are also in the sensory and motor stage of cognitive development suggested by Piaget. During this stage, the

sensory and motor actions are developed, such as seeing, hearing, reaching, and touching (McLeod, 2007). This stage of cognitive development is important as it is the foundation of self-development, self-growth, self-efficacy, and basic methods of understanding. Individuals often understand things as they see for themselves, hear, and listen, and have a hands-on approach.

Externally Driven Stage (6-12 Years)

The second stage occurs typically around elementary school age. It is known as the externally driven stage when children are involved in activities at home and school that foster the growth of their cognitive and communicative skills. Cognitive and communicative skills act as building blocks in the development of leadership. The children tend to be dependent on external influences at this stage, such as parents, authority figures, and their teachers, who give them opportunities to gain leadership skills and thus make them driven externally. The experiences at this stage include cooperative learning experiences, participation in the household chores, forming relationships with siblings and peers, fostering cognitive development, and demonstrating the value of the contribution (Liu et al., 2020). Cooperative learning is the method of instructional learning where the pupils take in knowledge by collaborating on tasks as an individual or group. It is widely associated with child development outcomes like social cohesion and peer acceptance. Participating in household chores is traditionally viewed as part of children's socialization and plays a major role in psychological functioning. The children at this stage are instructed to do the tasks such as washing dishes and making beds; psychologists propose that participation in housework develops the child's sense of responsibility. The sense of responsibility gives the children a perception of leadership roles; they are viewed as servant leaders in some contexts.

Sibling interactions cultivate the development qualities which are leadership oriented. Liu et al. (2020) suggested that sibling relationships give the older siblings a more dominant role of teachers or leaders to the younger children, serving as role models to their younger siblings. Therefore, the order of birth can cultivate a sense of leadership, with firstborns being task-oriented and those born second, third, etc. being relationship-oriented, offering the opportunity to further foster leadership skills (Liu et al., 2020)

Experimental or Exploration Stage (12-18 Years)

In becoming self-conscious and conscious of the world, this stage comprises adolescents and acts as a transition between physical and mental emotions and changes. As they navigate through self-growth and independent decision-making, they encounter opportunities to develop their leadership skills. At this stage, typically, adolescents become involved with their community via scouting programs, sports, and youth activities, all of which offer leadership development. The activities play a vital role in learning about leadership and developing their potential to lead by strengthening cognitive skills (Karagianni & Montgomery, 2018). A longitudinal investigation by Karagianni and Montgomery (2019) revealed that membership of clubs such as scouts and sports affects the leadership skills and promotes leadership emergence. Peer interaction is another vital player in improving leadership roles by improving psychosocial development. Social interaction is found in dyadic relationships and social networks with vital components like companionships, emotional support, and stimulation associated with leadership development features and variables like an individual's emotional intelligence.

Parenting behavior is another vital element of this stage as it influences the development of the long-lens perspective of individuals. Parents and other authority figures serve as role models in leadership while taking care of the children and guiding them in their duties. The link

between teachers and parents is evident in support of parenting with potential effects on the future leadership development of the child, as shown in the implicit leadership theory (Liu et al., 2020). In addition, Cropanzano et al. (2017) shared an association of the specific behavior of parents with the performance of an individual's leadership. The various role models of an adolescent during this stage influence their transformation process. The implicit growth theory suggests that role model behaviors effectively guide or direct adolescents by influencing what they should do (Liu et al., 2020). They serve as motivators and maturely aid the leadership development of significant adolescents. On the interviews for this study focused on this age group.

Self and Opportunity-Oriented Stage (18-30 Years)

The adolescent hood is considered the “purpose-driven stage” (Liu et al., 2020, p. 3) and typically consists of those between eighteen and thirty years old. In the present day, adults are usually afraid to venture into important events of their lives, such as marriage and parenthood, and are now postponing these events into their thirties (Liu et al., 2021). Psychologists usually describe this stage as “limbo, instability, possibility, and self-focus” in adults (Liu et al., 2020, p. 7). Young adults tend to engage in various challenges to grow and achieve many things. Self-motivation and opportunity help in developing leadership skills at this stage. At this stage, leaders start making decisions alone, with little input or assistance, causing them to learn and grow from their decision-making.

Liu et al. (2020) suggested that the four or more years students spend at college are important to one's growth in learning leader identity and equipping themselves with knowledge and tools to aid in their mental development as a leader. Future leadership performance can be achieved when leadership courses are taught well, and learners effectively engage. Leadership

skills as a young adult can be learned through various activities such as student-run businesses, student government, and other campus-based opportunities (Liu et al., 2020). These activities help emerging adults gain skills and experience in leadership, shaping their identity and readiness while providing experiences. Internships, on-the-job training, and other workplace experiences provide young adults the necessary platform to practice and learn leadership through challenges and relationship building. Youth learn from their superiors who take the opportunity to be role models (Dose et al., 2019).

Adolescent

Affective Events Theory (AET), as shared by Dose (Cropanzano et al., 2017) and Nichols (2016), is a proposed new theoretical model in which both Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and AET and the roles they play in the development of an adolescent into their leadership role strengthened this study as it relates to the influence of the parental role (Nichols, 2016). The Average Leadership Style (ALS) also aided in explaining the many leadership styles and theories within leadership, allowing the further understanding of the impact of the influences of mentors, coaches, and role models (Yorks & Nicolaidis, 2012). Understanding and developing additional knowledge on LMX, AET, and ALS is important regarding how their roles may impact adolescent leadership development.

Holding Environment

One important role in one's leadership development is the role of relationships. The first relationship is between parent and child and can be one of the most influential relationships throughout one's life. Donald Winnicott developed a theory based on the concept of "the holding environment" (Buckley, 1986, p. 150), referring to the objective relationship development. During one's life cycle, the tools are learned that aid in the development of oneself, but with that

is the ability to be objective and understand that though some may share in the path of their backgrounds, the perception of and the growth from the experiences can differ immensely. For example, two mothers may raise their children on the same street, in the same town, or in a small school; however, one mother might be highly involved with their child's life, and the other mother may refrain from being as involved. Therefore, one child might experience an over-involved mother, and the other child may perceive their parent as less caring. Perception is a reality; however, each parent parents differently and for their reasons. The results, however, can impact the way a child interacts with others by either engaging with others or sitting quietly in the background. In the adolescent years, the involvement of those in the parental role can have a grand impact on the self-efficacy, self-growth, and self-development components of one's individual growth. Due to this, the holding environment appears to be one of the most significant influences.

Leadership

As the research topic and questions developed, two essential aspects of leadership were integrated into the overall topic: the social influence of adolescents and the impact it has on the leader one becomes. Johnson's suggestion that "leadership is based on the exercise of influence" (2018, pg. 211) strengthened the thought process and encouraged the pursuit of the topic. The exploration of how the social environment and youthful experiences help shape an individual's leadership style added to the literature. Using the knowledge gained throughout the research strengthened the ability to assist future leaders in understanding themselves. Understanding the importance of self-growth, self-development, and ethics, may help others understand them and strengthen and apply them. Many youths are in leadership roles but may not realize the importance of the impact of their role (Karagianni et al., 2017). Using the knowledge gained

from both education and research will help shape future leaders for job opportunities, allowing them to take part in developing themselves and their future.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy speaks of a transformational leader; Jaiswal et al. (2015) suggested that "researchers have established that leaders can have a deep contextual impact on an employee's performance to deliver creative and innovative results" (p. 31). Leaders influence youth's creative and innovative pieces, who then use these tools to become better, stronger leaders. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), "self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's motivation, behavior, and social environment" (Carey & Forsyth, 2009, para. 1).

We learn that "creative self-efficacy has been defined as the degree of an individual's belief about his or her ability to produce creative outcomes" (Jaiswal et al, 2015, p. 33). Therefore, self-efficacy involves behavior and self-driven motivation. Liu's study examined "the influences of leadership style on self-efficacy and how feedback influences this relationship" using the keywords "cognitive evaluation theory, feedback, leadership style, self-efficacy" (Liu et al., 2020, p. 289). One question developed during the literature review may be answered throughout the study: How does feedback influence us as leaders?

Self-Growth

Characteristics in a leader such as integrity, honesty, humility, expressing care and concern, and listening responsively can aid in understanding one's self-growth as a leader (Fernando, 2011). This provides the opportunity to appreciate your subordinates and help strengthen their weaknesses and help develop them into the future leaders they are meant to be.

As individuals grow within their self-growth, their type of learner will also be identified, such as spiritual, charismatic, and transformational (Conger, J., 2011). A transformational leader is a person who can be inspiring, works to adapt to situations, and has self-management (Diaz-Saenz, 2011), which are areas of development that continue to evolve.

Reflexivity

Allowing oneself to learn from these influences and experiences and understanding how or why one reacts the way they do is a form of reflexivity, which is the basis of this study. “Reflexivity is essential in qualitative research because this field is heavily dependent upon information that participants provide” (Delve et al., 2022). The study consisted of participants and their perspectives on how their self-development and leader development evolved based on their stories and their influences. Throughout the stages of development, these researchers suggested that one’s skills and knowledge develop at different points of one’s life; however, the literature indicates that there are many elements and components that influence and impact the shaping of the leader one might become. Lessons can be learned throughout each experience and can be shared with and aid in the development and growth of future leaders. As suggested in Kolb’s learning style (McLeod, 2013), maturity is evident at different developmental stages. First, one will have the concrete experience. Second, one will be reflective on said experience based on current knowledge. Third, one’s experiences are considered using abstract conceptualization. This reflection continues with acknowledgement that there are multiple possible concepts involved and the realization of the lesson that was learned; therefore, gaining newly developed knowledge and understanding. Lastly, the fourth stage is active experimentation, where one applies the lesson learned, freshly found knowledge, or idea (McLeod, 2013). Using Kolb’s learning style, one can understand that through every experience, there is a lesson, and with

every lesson, there is something for a leader to learn and grow from and share with those they lead. As this occurs, the self-growth, self-efficacy, and self-development continue to evolve.

Self-Development

Tichy et al. (2007) suggested that “leadership is built on a foundation of self-awareness” with the skills, knowledge, and lessons from life’s experiences gained, fostering the next generations of leaders will be less challenging (p. 299). Often individuals may question who they are or where they belong. Badaracco (2013) suggested that leaders are asked to “step back and ask, why have I chosen this life? What aims and ideals am I pursuing?” (p. 151). Though the questions have not yet been fully answered, with reflection, an additional question has been added to the list that will be answered with further research and study: “how well do we know ourselves?” (Tekleab et al., 2008, pg. 185). Through knowing self-growth and developing as a leader, it became more evident just how much of an influence “memories, experiences, relationships, and values” (Psychology Today Staff, n.d.) impact a person. As an executive leader, one needs to understand oneself to understand others around them, which consists of learning and understanding the different learning styles, leadership styles and theories, and the impact our experiences have on this learning process.

The personal growth experienced throughout life’s journey continues to be learned and understood as growth is ever-evolving (Odom et al., 2012). Self-growth is one continuous development element, as life is ever-changing and offers experiences to learn from, people to gain knowledge from, and tools to aid in our individual growth. However, one’s season of growth does not truly end as people learn something new each day (Odom et al., 2012).

Leaders adapt to the situations and learn from experiences, allowing leaders to use the proper leadership styles needed at that time or with that person or team. Each person has several

different roles in life; each role has grown and developed as life experiences are embraced and learned. Investing in oneself and others allows us to share and develop our knowledge and inspire and encourage others, just as we have been inspired and encouraged (Bolden, 2013).

Developing one's knowledge, skills, and values can be perceived as challenging; however, with proper training, leadership guidance, and development, one can succeed in self-growth (Day, D., 2000). As these skills develop, the lens will change, allowing a different perspective and additional growth, which relates to situational leadership theory and “suggests that the behavior of the leaders need to be adjusted in accordance with the maturity level of the followers” (Kapur, 2022, p. 52).

Ethical Beliefs

Ethics are typically learned in the child, teenage, and adolescent years, though they further mature as adulthood provides opportunities to enhance the thoughts and processes of the different means of ethics. Leaders demonstrate their ethical leadership by acting with morals, courage, and compassion (Johnson, 2018). Executive leaders face situations that will involve personal, professional, and community, and often the impact of those decisions go further than what the eye might see. Having compassion allows a deeper understanding of the impact and the courage to stand up for ethical decisions. Ethical leadership begins from within and is based on personal knowledge, belief, and lessons from experience. The learning of ethics typically starts at a young age and often within the home, from parents, grandparents, and other family members. One's ethics may change or develop as there is growth based on education, religion, life experiences, and other environmental factors. Throughout the process of gaining knowledge of ethics, one might create a personal code of conduct. As one enters the workforce, college, and communities, one will learn that the organization will have a code of conduct. Understanding

different codes of conduct may change a new perspective of ethics. Hackman suggested that our behavior can be seen as being either appropriate or inappropriate, so leaders should set the stage for what is accepted under the ethical leadership silently held. (Hackman, 2002).

Leadership may coincide with one's code of ethics, both in what is said and done. One way to accomplish this is by doing, as Johnson suggested, being just and fair (Johnson, 2018). One of the better definitions of "just and fair" is explained by Goldman when he suggested that justice is when one follows a certain standard, and fairness is how one might respond to the perception of the standard (Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015). McVea (2007) suggested that ethical deliberation should grow out of the everyday experience, liberate our intelligence and imagination, and be seen as a process of self-realization.

Complexity Model as the Context of Strategic Learning

Complexity can explain the mindset development concept in conceptualizing what entails self-development in an individual. It is possible to draw complex adaptive systems thinking as a strategic context for confronting organizations for leaders. The complexity model is embedded in a larger context of agents who interact in a more dynamic environment characterized by interdependence, ambiguity, multiplicity, and flux. It is important to understand that non-linear feedback is vital for allowing the emergence of adaptation, learning, and various other concepts with thinking complexity. However, looking at the four dimensions put forward in the complexity leadership defined by the leadership development model consisting of network conditions, shared leadership, organizational learning, and leader skills and knowledge (Clarke, 2013) play a vital part of understanding the dynamic environment that shapes a leader. The dynamic environment and practice of the four dimensions aid in building strategy development. Strategy development is needed under increasing complexity generating less and less linear

development execution processes in terms of planning, action, adaptation, and analysis (Lim et al., 2020). However, strategy development and implementation intersect and parallel action strategy.

The increase in individuals and organizations in developed societies face consequences of intensifying complex-driven globalization and technology. While complexity is often perceived as a liability, some complex consequences are considered an asset used for productive ends (Axelrod & Cohen, 2005). Past knowledge is driven through experience and can be useful when analyzing the emergence and changes experienced when undertaking actions when leaders take advantage of the opportunities that complexity provides.

Constructive Development Theory

According to Bugenhagen et al. (2012) when referring to Kegan's constructive development theory, one's ruling complexities. Parenting during adolescent life also dramatically influences the later outcome of leadership in an executive. The level of parenting greatly influences how many leaders emerge going into the future. Leader emergence is closely linked with childhood experiences. In circumstances where parents over-parented their adolescents, it was realized that leader emergence was greatly hampered. Ultimately, the adolescent's self-esteem and leadership efficacy are significantly reduced. The overparenting phenomenon was based on parent, peer, and teacher ratings (Bowers et al., 2016). As a result, it was concluded that the male received more overparenting than their female counterparts. In such circumstances, the resultant logical conclusion was fewer leader emergences. On the contrary, adolescent leader emergence in females was closely linked to innate leadership efficacy.

The self-esteem and self-confidence taught at an early stage greatly influenced leader efficacy during adult life (Djourova et al., 2020). Individuals primed to engage in motivational

talk at a tender age were ultimately found to be influential leaders, especially when organizations were going through challenging times. Self-talk and psychological motivation became a means of encouraging and pushing one towards achieving desired goals. Persons with childhood problems with negative self-talk were more pessimistic in their executive leadership roles. Childhood fears often crept up in their adult life, especially when tough decisions were made (Weinberg, 2018).

As a child, many experiences require the use of creativity. The leaders who were primarily influenced by this creativity often brought that training into adulthood, thus influencing the performance of general employees. As a leader, one's efficacy is generally affected by the average creativity level on individual biostability to solve a problem in a creative way (Colby et al., 1983). As children grow into an adult, they can solve increasingly more complex problems as time goes on. The same is the case for being an influential corporate leader in challenging circumstances and leading employees to turn challenges into opportunities for growth. Pre-adult experiences, as far as learning is concerned, were discovered as occurring very fast and in quick succession. However, when adult developmental experiences were observed, it was slow (Dubois et al., 2015). A lot of effort had to be employed in learning, implying that self-development as a leader in advanced age required more effort and dedication, almost double portions of the requirement needed during childhood.

Problem-solving acumen develops at a young age and increases with time and complexity as a leader grows and advances in age. According to Albert Einstein (Cited in Innes & Booher, 2020), the current problems one faces can only be solved by superior levels of consciousness in which the issues were created. Both horizontal and vertical developmental pre-adult experiences determine the level of success a corporate leader will attain (Nisan &

Kohlberg, 2020). Horizontal development is primarily what one learns in pre-adult life, while vertical development is leadership development measured in terms of complex and systematic thoughts.

Habits and behaviors cultivated at a young age are prevalent and evident in the way one leads an organization. For instance, when one leader is complacent during childhood, the trait would be transferable to the workstation, and like cancer, it would spread throughout the entire organization.

Empirical Literature

As some authors suggest, the concept of leadership and self-development is portrayed as a product of an entire lifespan commitment of an individual, typically beginning at birth. Liu et al. (2020) suggested that decades of research show that leaders are both made and born; just as portrayed in the psychology nature/nurture debate, a leader is a function of environmental and genetic influences. For example, a study by Chaturvedi et al. (2011) suggested that heritability shows that only approximately 24% to 30% of the variant leadership occupants had a variance with potential environmental influences. Chaturvedi (2011) discovered additional studies that found enriched social settings in different societal contexts attract executive leadership development. Weinberg (2018) mentioned how positive and negative self-talk may impact an athlete. The context helps when viewing how negative self-talk might influence an adolescent who later becomes a leader. The negative self-talk could potentially have been the "motivation" needed to push the once adolescent to strive to be a more effective leader Weinberg, 2018, p. 76).

In another study, van der Aar suggested that other factors such as "motivation," "personality," and "academic self-concept" are also important variables (van der Aar et al., 2019,

p. 185). These attributes also make a person and help form the habits of mind and establish what adolescents take from their youth into adulthood. Youthhood or adolescence plays a vital role in the formation of personality. Karagianni mentioned that “secondary school students can develop leadership skills via decision-making, getting along with others, learning the organization of self, self-awareness, and working with groups through taking part in many youth leadership organizations in school and /or community activities" (2018, p. 87). Karagianni specifically stated that secondary school suggests leadership roles can begin very early in one's life. In another study, Bowers et al. suggested that sharing with the youth who will be the future leaders and how the adults continue to criticize them for their lack of leadership skills, such as "selfishness," "professional work ethic," and "laziness" (2016, pg. 2). The study was to gain a better understanding of how adolescents describe their leadership growth and the processes by which role models facilitate or constrain their leadership development (Bower et al., 2016). One of the key prevailing factors is the development in one's leadership when given the space and skills to do so and having a mentor who encourages the proper learning environment and skills. Bower’s study had two research questions that may contribute to my research regarding additional resources or critical concepts to review. The study found that participants trusted, respected, learned, and listened most to role models who displayed a professional work ethic.

Giurgiu et al. (2019) spoke of a theoretical framework that will continue to aid in the growth and understanding of the framework as my research continues. The most interesting elements of the framework are moral reasoning and moral development. According to Giurge et al. (2019), Kohlberg argued that the individuals' abilities “to reason about moral issues develop from childhood onward, following a well-defined hierarchy spanning six sequential and irreversible states" (p. 2). The statement alone speaks of one key factor in my research: the

influence on youth as they develop into executive leaders. Giurge et al. (2019) suggested that power increased unethical behavior when it benefited the self but decreased unethical behavior when it benefited others (p. 3)

The unethical piece falls in the habits of mind and the executive leadership development within the concept map. Leaders cannot be successful, positive role models, leaders, or mentors if they are unethical. Self-interested behavior is suggested "as the decision that leaders made in terms of payouts for themselves and their followers" (Giurge et al., 2019, p. 5). The author concludes that "moral issues are the most prevalent and among the most difficult challenges those organizational leaders have to deal with" (Giurge et al., 2019, p. 11)

However, Liu mentioned research done on a set of twins that a specific gene was found that is related to leadership role occupancy (Liu, 2019). Liu also appeared to agree with Giurge et al. (2019) and Nichols (2016) in suggesting that "leader development is a process that can occur across the entire life span" (Liu, 2019, p. 1226). Liu (2019) also agreed with Murphy and Johnson (2011) regarding the influence of individual traits, parenting behaviors, and learning experiences contribute to how well one can perform behaviors required to be a leader.

Youth are developing and learning from their mentors. Out-of-school programs "provide youth with opportunities to develop and sustain positive relationships with adult mentors, develop important life and leadership skills" (Hershberg, 2015, p. 2). Salusky et al. (2014) discovered that, in life, humans embrace different youth programs that help shape the youth and guide them down a road that will be beneficial. Programs such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, military camps for kids, being responsible for household chores, and after-school programs aid in the development of leadership skills. The author mentioned sociological theory and continues with "a person's performance of increasingly varied and demanding roles helps him or she

develops knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (Salusky, 2014, p. 13). Much of the social environment impacts who and what leaders are.

Iijima et al. (2020) performed a study consisting of a "191 community-dwelling adolescents aged 12-15 years old completed the rating scale" (2020, pg. 53) and found "differences in response style bias between the rating scale method and the paired comparison" (Iijima et al., 2020, p. 54.). From Iijima's study, Table 1 on page 55 may aid this study, as it lists the items such as beliefs, social influence, and stable lifestyle, items which would fall in the realm of the influence from youth and development (Iijima, 2020).

Kyeong et al. (2020) suggested that self-respect, self-talk, and self-criticism aid in an individual's satisfaction of life and psychological needs. However, it is important to question how self-respect has aided our leader development, the lessons learned from our youth, and how we view ourselves and others. The study emphasized life satisfaction, which led me to ask what influences or values have kept our roles satisfying to what we set out to be or do. The study was also focused on the "behavioral and neural correlates of self-concept and self-esteem in individuals who experience problems with educational decision-making" (van der Aar, 2019, p. 186), which offers a grand perspective for this study as it identifies attributes, and values that make up an attractor basin in decision-making.

Martin suggested that one's income can impact who one becomes or play a part in it as he mentions a theory in which "parental income relates to the behavior and effectiveness of leaders (Martin, 2016, p. 2158). One of Martin's study hypotheses is "parental income is positively related to future narcissism," as narcissism relates negatively to engaging in a task, relational, and change-oriented leadership behaviors, and reduced engagement in these behaviors relates to lower leader effectiveness (2016, p. 2159). Martin also suggested that "narcissism is

characterized by grandiose self-views, impulsiveness, reduced empathy, beliefs that one deserves special treatment, strong feelings of uniqueness, and a dominant orientation toward others" (Martin, 2016 p. 2159). Narcissism might explain the lack of empathy from some leaders and the relational-oriented behaviors, which could be a factor as this study progresses and data is collected.

Nicholas advocated that the "leadership experience is available throughout life and comes in many varied forms" (Nichols, 2016, p. 658), a thought process encompassing the attributes expressed by MacKeracher (2004) as she discussed learning styles and "basic ideas about how to work with adult learners in a variety of formal and informal settings" (p. xi). In all aspects of life, experiences impact decisions, who people are, and whom they work to become. Nichols (2016) continued to explain how the study "examining the effects of leadership experience; students demonstrated increased understanding and acceptance of young people's behavior after a leadership experience" (p. 660). He mentions desirability throughout the article as it relates to what we desire as leaders, scholars, and mentors, such as self-growth, the sharing of knowledge, or both. Nichols (2016) identified 12 traits in the study that are traits participants selected as a trait or traits that they desire in a leader (Table 1, p. 664).

Individual Differences are the Foundation for Leader Development

For many years, the role of individual differences between leaders and non-leaders has been examined by leadership researchers. In the first two decades of the 21st century, the dominance of trait theory has indicated that traits are one of the basic principles of leadership emergence and performance. As learned from the authors mentioned throughout this chapter, an individual attribute provides a basis for personal leadership development. While scientific studies on trait-based leadership increase research, to emerge and develop as a leader mainly comes

from the genetic tendency and positive foundational traits within an individual (Liu et al., 2021). Historically, developmental theorists depended on nurture and nature in understanding genetic and environmental aids for human psychological traits throughout life. Still, various approaches are being used to incorporate the connections between genetics and innate characteristics.

Different approaches and findings on genetic and environmental origins of individual differences support that genetic factor considerably increase the greatest psychological traits. A study sample on twins suggested that heritability explains about one-third of the difference in attaining a leadership position (Liu et al., 2019). In addition, De Neve (2013) suggested that a specific gene has been identified to be associated with the role of occupying leadership positions. Leadership can be related to heritable personal traits such as social abilities, friendliness, and extraversion (van de Aar et al., 2019). Moreover, the tendency to emerge as a leader can be described by the motives, values, cognitive ability, gender, and physical features. Additional studies have been done on elite American individuals, including top leaders in politics and businesses, which shows that a bigger percentage of these elite leaders have cognitive ability at an early stage of life. Highly heritable natures of cognitive ability and physical attributes have made researchers propose an update on the traditional phrase "leaders are made, not born" with "leaders are born, not made" regarding leader development (Liu et al., 2021). The studies mentioned throughout this study suggest that no traits are 100% heritable because environmental changes can drive the difference of genes and change the gene expression in early-stage development and throughout an individual's lifespan. It is essential to recognize the considerable effects of genetic and environmental influences on leaders' development. First, individuals may realize the phenotypic differences described by genetic factors and appreciate that not everyone is born to be a top leader, nor can they become one, regardless of efforts placed (Mersin et al.,

2020). Furthermore, organizations need to develop leaders who can lead without a strong genetic disposition to be effective in leadership roles.

Conclusion

The literature, theories, and authors shared within this study bring forth a foundation of understanding for how experiences, behaviors, attributes, and influences play a significant role in the leader one becomes. The many theories shared within the literature also support the earlier suggestion that no single theory fits one leader. As adolescent experiences are understood and the influences offer guidance and support, the theories, such as psychologist development, constructive development, cognitive, and situational leadership, provide basic knowledge for leaders to understand themselves and those they encounter. With the knowledge gained during the literature review, the study, the data collection, and the interviews, this study expands the understanding of why one becomes the leader they become and what inspired one to become who they currently are.

Adolescent experiences and practices may relate to an individual's mindfulness and attitude of the individual to be a self-leader and, ultimately, a leader. Mindful persons were observed to be capable of keenly observing facts presented before them to make rational decisions. In the later part of the adult life of mindful persons, they were self-leaders (Xue et al., 2020). Mindful self-leaders use rational decision-making, which means in the later part of adult life, mindful persons influence their performance and the performance of others. With an upbringing of mindfulness, one can teach, monitor, and evaluate corporate practices as a leader. Mindfulness as a child and growing into the corporate world help individuals achieve their goals.

To be a good executive leader, one may develop collaborative skills from quite an early age, mainly through extensive communication skills in the most simplistic language one was

exposed to as a child at a tender age. The self-development of any executive leader is significantly molded from adolescent experiences, which range from the child's motivation, delegations of activities, innovation room, and collaboration with parents (Furtner et al., 2018). From these circumstances, the children could develop technical and soft skills that would come in handy in their future life as corporate leaders.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative narrative study explored how adolescent experiences and influencers impact the self-development of the executive leader one becomes. Qualitative research is a way to understand situations and their uniqueness in context (Merriam, 2009). In this study, my goal was to understand how the lessons learned from our experiences and influencers impact our growth, development, and the leader we may become. Leaders should understand that everyone has a unique story, though they may have things in common, and hearing one's story is a "source of understanding the meaning of human experience" (Merriam et al., 2016, p. 34). The narrative inquiry allowed the participants to tell their stories and enabled the research data to be obtained. In addition, from a constructivist perspective, it offered an opportunity for the participant to understand their life stories better and make the connection between their past, present, and future based on their story. A qualitative narration allowed me and the participants to stay within the reflexivity arena, meaning the time and effort was taken to understand how the experiences influence the situations endured and the importance of understanding the thoughts, reflections and decision making that other methods would limit (Delve et al., 2022). A qualitative narrative study, one's life story, is best suited to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the influences of one's adolescence impact their leader development?

RQ2: How do the experiences help shape the executive leader?

Population and Sample

This study consisted of six executive leaders from the Army National Guard in an Eastern state who have gone from being a unit member to leading individuals within the unit or leading the unit. All participants have attended leader development courses offered through the National Guard, all are male, and each held or currently holds a rank of Sergeant First Class, Master

Sergeant, Command Sergeant Major, Second Lieutenant, or Lieutenant Colonel. In holding these ranks, the positions include but are not limited to platoon leader, first sergeant, command sergeant major, and commander, reflecting executive leadership roles in our Armed Forces. The selection of the participants was due to the relationship established with individuals and the convenience of the location for the participants. The relationship also allowed for trust and comfort between me and the participants. The stories were personal and appeared to be easier to share with someone they were familiar with, which allowed for transparency during the interview.

I met the participants in person, and as a means of recording, I used a handheld recorder with a USB, which allowed the recording to be easily downloaded to the computer. Once downloaded, the recording was imported into Otter.ai (a transcribing platform), where it was then transcribed and exported into a word document. The word document was emailed to each participant for confirmation of intent. With the confirmation of meaning from each participant, the transcriptions were imported into MAZQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software and printed for the coding process to begin. The relationship also allowed for trust and comfort between me and the participants. The stories were personal and possibly easier to share with someone they were familiar with, allowing the participants to be transparent during the interview.

Selection, Access, and Recruitment

Due to the nature of the narrative story study and the possible discomfort when sharing our life stories, I decided to ensure the participants were individuals I had a connection with and who felt comfortable with and trusted me enough to share their stories. Because of the relationships with these service members, I know them as leaders, their duty positions held or are currently holding, their basic roles, and have their personal contact information. I reached out to

these individuals and asked if they would be interested in participating in my research and sharing their stories with me to be used as data for this study. The areas of selection for service members were from those who have served or currently serving as Senior Leaders (Sergeant First Class (E7), Master Sergeant (E8), Command Sergeant Major (E9), Second Lieutenant (2LT), and Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) ranks).

To determine who might be eligible participants, I made a list of those I knew and their positions, after which I contacted each via phone or in person. During the conversation, I shared with them the reason for the call, broke down the purpose of the study, and asked if they would be interested in participating. If they agreed, I emailed or provided a hard copy of an informed consent document. Informed consent included being made aware that the interviewee (their story) would be recorded, then transcribed, and sent to them for review of their intent. I had three individuals decline an interview and one cancel due to an emergency, resulting in six interviewees. To keep anonymity and confidentiality, participants were identified by a number, not their names. The consent form was also identified by number and locked in a filing cabinet in my home office.

Interview Site

I wanted the participant to feel comfortable in the environment when sharing their story, so the location of each interview took place in an area where the participant felt comfortable. Participants chose to be interviewed at their home or their office, which also offered the confidentiality and quiet for the ability to record. I provided a bottle of water to each participant, and though it was not needed, I had Kleenex available.

Data Collection

I wanted the participant to feel comfortable in the environment when sharing their story, so the location of each interview took place in an area where the participant felt comfortable. Depending on the participant, the interview was either held at their home or their office; this allowed the participant to be in their comfortable environment and offered the confidentiality and quiet for the ability to record.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection took place during the interview process as the participants told their stories; however, I paid attention to the influences of their self-efficacy, self-growth, and self-development on the road to the leader the participant became and how their life story impacted the leader they became. As part of the data collection, I ensured the research question was answered by eliciting the elements related to the following:

1. What are some of your experiences during adolescence that you think helped you to grow into the leader you are today?
 - a. Sub question: How do you think this impacted your ability to be successful?
2. Whom do you feel was your greatest influencer in becoming who you are today?
3. What would you say was greatest influence or experience of your adolescence?
4. Did it impact the leader you have become?

These questions allowed me to collect my data but also allowed the participant to reflect on how their past experiences impacted their development as a person and a leader.

Data Analysis and Coding Procedure

For the data analysis, I first uploaded the recording using the USB from the handheld recorder, after which the download was imported to Otter.ai for the transcription to be

completed. The transcriptions were then sent to each participant for review of the intent of their story and to ensure the intent was met. Once the response from each participant was received, the transcript was imported to MAXQDA and printed for both software and manual data coding to be completed. Each transcript was read, and notes were made in the margin to note initial thoughts. After this, the transcripts were read a second time with open coding to identify units of analysis and coding for “redundancy and overlap” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 197). The codes were grouped into categories and then grouped into themes to aid in identifying the common themes throughout the narrative storytelling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While highlighting the coding analysis, I tagged the codes in the category tabs (in MAXQDA), which began to develop into five themes, and on paper. While working the second coding cycle, I kept in mind that this is their story, but I focused on the research questions and how their story answered the questions. In doing so, the coding analysis elements fell into a couple of different categories based on the tab name; however, during the review, I focused on the research questions and the questions from the interview guide to place the codes into their categories properly. The categories were broken into five themes based on the category and the interviewee’s context. In addition, patterns and relationships such as commonalities and uniqueness to better develop and formulate categories and themes developed. A composite of each individual story was written to summarize and capture each participant’s perspective. After this, a summary to paraphrase the participant stories and the data was completed to better represent the data collection.

Participants were identified by number rather than name, such as Participant One (P1). The coding, categories, and themes were identified by highlighting with different colors both with the data software and with highlighters for the manual copy. The use of several colors

allowed for quick reference, identification, and ease of corresponding the commonalities and differences. As the process continued, the coding process evolved; for example, I opted out of using NIVO as it was not as user-friendly as I initially thought, so I went with MAXQDA, and the highlighting function in MAXQDA and highlighters for the manual piece the coding process evolved.

As the data was reviewed, the answers to the two research questions were not as easily identified as I thought: “How do the influences of one’s adolescence impact their leader development?” and “How do the experiences help shape them as an executive leader?” This study was an opportunity to understand how individuals learn, grow, and develop from each of their experiences. While coding assisted in identifying the personal, practical, and intellectual goals set in chapter one, listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts also helped to gain new knowledge, a better understanding, and a continuous effort to close the gap in the literature while also understanding that the lessons learned from our experiences do continue to develop future leaders further.

Trustworthiness

There is a personal bias to this study that I had to be aware of, and it was necessary to maintain a separation between my opinion, feelings, and concerns and that of the participants. Experiences and influences greatly impacted my life, the path I took, and the person I was. However, throughout life, there are several opportunities to make decisions that will change thought processes and the path chosen. The study intended to listen to these participants’ stories and understand the significance of opportunities and decisions. To ensure that all stories provided were not amended to fit the study's intent and to perform member checking properly,

each participant received an exact copy of the interview transcript and was asked to confirm the intent of their story and its impact.

There were a few times throughout the interviews that perspectives were different. Still, like personal bias, I kept them separate, as each person's life story has been impacted differently. Sometimes life stories are similar, but the lessons learned are personal.

Ethical Considerations

My full intent was to ensure that I remained ethical throughout the study for the study's purpose and the participants' continued trust. To ensure all ethical matters were met, the following took place. Each participant knew the purpose of the study, participated voluntarily, and knew they could withdraw at any time. All identifying information will be kept confidential, and all communication, written or otherwise, will be confidential and secure. Data are and will continue to be password protected via my computer; the recordings, printed copies, and consent forms are locked in the safe for a period of five years. In addition, I have taken the necessary steps to eliminate any data that could potentially compromise all participants' identities.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore how adolescent experiences and influencers impact the self-development of the executive leader one becomes. A narrative analysis was appropriate for this research to better understand different perspectives concerning the impact of negative and positive adolescent experiences. The perspective of the participants of this study provided an understanding of the impact that influencers, such as parents, coaches, peers, and teachers, have on the development of the leader one strives to be. The two research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How do influences during one's adolescence impact their leader development?

RQ2: How do the experiences help shape the executive leader?

Chapter 4 will highlight the problem statement, methodology, and the research questions. This chapter will also present the data obtained from the six participants' narrative stories and the semi-structured interview data. The interviews were transcribed utilizing Otter.ai followed by data analysis using both manual coding and MAZQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software.

Participants

The participants were selected with a purposeful personal invitation to participate in this study either in person or by phone call. The invitation to participate was offered to those who served or currently serve in the National Guard located in an Eastern state and holding the ranks of Sergeant First Class to Lieutenant Colonel. Each participant has held or currently holds a leadership position that affords them the opportunity to have several subordinates who may learn from them personally and as a leader. Each participant is someone I have known. Participant selection was conducted this way to ensure they would be comfortable sharing their story. The

participants collectively have 120 years of experience in a leadership role, ranging from a Sergeant First Class to a Lieutenant Colonel. Years of experience range from 30 years (P3) to 5+ years (P6), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Rank	Status	Years of service
P1	Sergeant First Class	Currently serving	20 + years
P2	Sergeant First Class	Currently serving	18 + years
P3	Command Sergeant Major	Retired	30 years
P4	Master Sergeant	Process of retiring	23 years
P5	Lieutenant Colonel	Retired	24 years
P6	Second Lieutenant	Currently serving	5 + years

Interview Data

Eight interview questions guided the narrative discussion, with additional prompts and clarifying questions used when necessary to confirm intent and understanding of the participant's comments. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with consent from each participant. The first question allowed each participant to share their story as they felt comfortable doing so; questions two, three, and four were either confirmed after the story was complete or asked at the end of the story if the participant did not provide the answers when telling their story. Questions five, six, and seven were asked specifically because none of the participants' stories touched on them initially. The eighth question asked whether the participant had any questions for me, and all but one did not. One participant asked if his story was helpful to me or if he needed to expand on anything. None of the participants offered suggestions for an alternate way I could have conducted the interview, worded the questions, or approached them for their participation. Each participant thanked me for the opportunity to assist in my study.

Data Collection

Once each interview was completed, the audio recording was downloaded to my computer then imported into Otter.ai for transcription. The transcription was then sent to each participant for review and validation. Participants were offered the opportunity to edit their interview transcript for any points that needed clarification. Once the confirmation was obtained, the transcript was imported into MAXQDA and printed for both software and manual coding. The length and time of each interview has been noted in Appendix C, with an overall total of 298 interview minutes, averaging 49 minutes per interview, with an average of 9 transcript pages per interview.

Data Analysis

In collecting the data, I utilized the first and second cycle of coding as described by Saldana (2021); he suggested the first cycle is “analyzing” and the second cycle is “synthesis” (2021, p. 6). In this way, the data were coded, categorized, and placed into themes (Saldana, 2021). During the process of qualitative narrative coding, I kept the thought process, as suggested by Saldana, that the “narrative analysis is particularly suitable for such inquiries as identity development: psychological, social, and cultural meanings” “and documentation of the life course” (Saldana, 2021, p. 196). While working the first coding cycle, I read the transcripts and listened to the audio recording, listening for tones and emphasis on specific elements spoken by the participants while keeping in mind that this was their story of how their experiences impacted them. While highlighting the coding analysis, I tagged the codes in the category tabs (in MAXQDA), which began to develop into five different themes, which were also tabbed in MAXQDA and on paper. While working the second coding cycle, I kept in mind that this was their story, but I focused on the research questions and how their story answered the questions. In

doing so, the coding analysis elements fell into a couple of different categories based on the tab name; however, during the review, I focused on the research questions and the questions from the interview guide to properly place the codes into their categories. The categories were broken into five themes based on the category and the interviewee's context.

Data Results

Through the narrative stories, data was provided that met saturation for the data analysis portion of the research. During Participant 3's interview, I began to see commonalities; however, I had six interviews lined up with a seventh one confirmed but not yet scheduled. The week of September 3rd, the seventh interview fell through due to a family emergency. Since saturation had been reached, I closed out the interview portion of the research and began the data analysis. Using both manual coding and the assistance of MAXQDA, both the first and second coding cycles were completed, and themes were created.

Theme Development

Themes began to develop as the coding process continued. Coding and categorizing ran somewhat parallel with each other as the themes began to identify themselves. All participants spoke of development, impact of experience, leadership, characteristics, activity influence, and influencers. Other areas spoken of by some but not all consisted of career, adolescence molding (shaping), stepparents, single family, relationships, environment, responsibility, being self-sufficient, memories, illnesses, and appearance. All of these had either a positive or negative impact on the participant speaking, aiding in their decision to become the executive leader they became. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of each theme individually while sharing the perspectives and thoughts of the participants.

Table 2

<i>Themes</i>		
Theme	Categories	Participant
Reflection on experiences	Develop	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Career	P2, P4, P6
	Impact of experience	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Adolescence molds (shape)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Impact of family	Time with family	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Stepparent	P1, P4
	Single-family	P1, P4
Leader Development	Leadership	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Relationships	P1, P2, P4, P6
	Characteristics	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Forms of Influence	Environment	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Activity influence	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Influencers	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Lessons Learned	Responsibility	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Self-sufficient	P1, P2, P3, P4
	Memories	P1, P2, P3, P6
	Illness,	P1, P4
	Appearance	P1, P4

Reflection on Experience Theme

The reflection on experience theme developed as the participants shared how their adolescent experience, whether negative or positive, impacted their decision on their life path and what they wanted to do. Some wanted a better life than what their environment offered; others wanted to ensure they were able to provide for their family and be able to spend time with their family. While reviewing the transcripts and the recordings, I reflected on the *Holding* portion of Chapter 2. Buckley (1986) spoke of the “holding environment,” ranging from a mother holding her infant to the child holding the mother’s hand, and the impact this portion of one’s life has on their growth both emotionally and cognitively. Table 3 represents data for the reflection on experiences theme.

Table 3*Theme: Reflection on Experiences*

Theme	Categories	Participant
Reflection on experiences	Develop	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Career	P2, P4, P6
	Impact of experience	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Adolescence molds (shape)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6

As participants shared their stories and began reflecting on their experiences, categories such as develop, career, impact of experience, and adolescence molding (shaping) began to develop. First, I would like to look at the category develop as P2 shared that his baseball coach had a different coaching style than his wrestling coach. He said that “they were there to mentor you to make you better and develop you as players” (P2., lines 65 & 66). However, P1 had a different outlook as he related development to his environment, saying, “no child is gonna develop, you know, in an ideal fashion, in that kind of environment” (P1 lines 64 & 65). Both participants learned a similar lesson but from two different backgrounds.

Career also played a role in the reflection on experience theme; though not all participants used the word “career,” each referred to their status and how their experiences helped them get there. However, participants 2, 4, and 6 shared their views of their careers. P2 learned from his parents that he wanted to ensure his career allowed time for his family but realized “it’s always a tough balance of your career and your personal life” (P2 line 256). P4 mentioned that “one of the things I think as you develop in your career in the military, you figure out that you learn as much from bad leaders as you do from good leaders” (P4 lines 161 & 162). They were followed by P6, mentioning that “early on in my career, there was a very major focus on the fundamentals of basic soldier tasks and drills” (P6 lines 163 & 164). These participants bring the realization that leaders try to not only balance their lives with their careers but continue to learn from their careers and those they encounter as well as the tasks they are given.

This leads to the impact of the experiences portion of the reflection on the experience theme. P1 summed it up the best when he shared that he had a job that was “one of the worse jobs I’ve ever had,” but goes on to say, “but as far as just the experience of people experiences, I think it was one of the most invaluable experiences in my life” (P1 lines 223-225). Past experiences demonstrate, over time, the lessons and knowledge gained, and understanding that this experience was invaluable was something this participant smiled about when he shared it with me.

It was when reflecting on how the experiences impacted each participant that the adolescence molding (shaping) was identified. When reflecting on the work ethic his father taught him, one participant said, “it definitely molds us to what we are now you see things, you may not realize them at the time” (P2 lines 122 & 123). Through this participant’s story, he reflected on his father’s work ethic and the support his mother gave to his father, whether it was working with him at their place of business or raising the children at home. Their dedication to their business and their employees, at times, took them from their children, but the impact of their example, “it’s really molded my parenting style, but also my leadership style” (P2 line 270).

As described in Chapter 2, children learn from external influences, whether they be parents or authority figures, demonstrating that leadership skills learned through various activities assist adolescents in gaining skills shaping their identity. This further demonstrates that youth do learn from their superiors who take the opportunity to be role models (Dose et al., 2019).

Impact of Family Theme

Within the holding environment, it is understood that the first relationship is based between parent and child, which is where the impact of family theme developed. Each

participant shared how their family played a role in their development, whether positive or negative.

Table 4

Theme: Impact of Family

Theme	Categories	Participant
Impact of family	Time with family	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Stepparent	P1, P4
	Single-family	P1, P4

P1 and P4 share a similar story regarding being raised in a single-family home and having stepparents. P4 shared that later in life, he (in his 30's) thanked his stepfather for being as hard as he was, telling him, "Thank you, because the things that you were trying to teach me back then stuck, and I found myself teaching them to my son" (P4 lines 302 & 303). As the interviews continued, P6 supported the theme by stating that "family members played a part in who I am as a leader" (P6 line 90). Whether the participant was from a single-family home, had stepparents, or had both parents, each shared that the family was a significant factor in the path they chose to follow. P3 shared that as a parent, he has tried to "set an example and lead the kids to have a good independent life," but what resonated with me during this interview was the opinion P3 expressed when he said, "People that don't have a family, that's a void of experience that they don't have" (P3 lines 173 & 174). It is within this statement that the suggestion from Weinberg (2018) that the life context of an adolescent covering a wide range of elements that stem from growth are guidance to vital issues like mental and emotional development, which became clearer regarding the importance of family and their impact on who one becomes.

Leader Development Theme

Leadership, relationships, and characteristics formed the leader development theme, as each participant demonstrated a form of support for Johnson’s suggestion of leadership being “based on the experiences of influence” (Johnson, 2018, p. 211).

Table 5

Theme: Leader Development

Theme	Categories	Participant
Leader Development	Leadership	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Relationships	P1, P2, P4, P6
	Characteristics	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6

The influence one has on another can often go unnoticed, as P2 mentioned that “you never realize the effect you have on people” (P2 line 106). As discussed previously, it does not matter if the experience is negative or positive; they both have an impact. P6 shared that though he was bullied during his adolescent years, had he not had those experiences, he does not think he would care about his self-growth, but because of the experiences of being “an Army brat” (P6 line 21) he had the opportunity to grow surrounded by leadership who demonstrated the importance of self-growth. The participant continued to express the characteristic, though different from leader to leader, that they stuck with him and provided an example of what he wanted to be as he developed as a leader.

The relationships built during the adolescence of each participant brought an understanding of how one learns to strengthen their skills; P5 expressed this influence saying that one mentor “always practiced what he preached” (P5 line 79). Day’s (2000) suggested that with proper training, leadership guidance, and development, one can succeed in self-growth, which was supported by what the six participants shared regarding characteristics, relationships, and leadership. Throughout the interviews, characteristics such as trustworthiness, hardworking,

encouragement, advocate, honesty, proactiveness, empathy, and being strong were mentioned 67 times, which was the highest frequency for any of the categories identified during this study. This supports Liu's suggestion of one's leadership being a "life-long developmental process" (Liu et al., 2020, p. 2) as well as demonstrating that leader development influences one's growth during their adolescent years.

Forms of Influence Theme

Throughout the interviews and listening to the stories, it was expressed how one's environment, activity influence (i.e., sports, band, etc.), and influencer (parents, authority figures) played a role in the development of self-growth, self-efficacy, and being a leader. The characteristics and relationships mentioned in the above section represent how the forms of influence theme developed, as the characteristics and relationships were built around these influencers.

Table 6

Theme: Forms of Influence

Theme	Categories	Participant
Forms of Influence	Environment	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Activity influence	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Influencers	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6

Each participant was influenced by one or more parent, stepparent, grandparent, coach, band leader, counselor, or sibling. However, just as an individual influenced these participants, so did activities they were involved with, such as band, sports, hunting, fishing, youth groups (i.e., scouts, YMCA), their community, and the environment. The environment stemmed from being home with a sick parent to the town they were living in. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5 all expressed that their environment played a part in their decision to be a better, more decisive leader than what they were experiencing within the communities, such as the drugs, living conditions in the community, and the environment. Though the home life may have been a good one, the influence from their

surroundings may not have been. P3 said that at one point, he moved from one state to another to live with his grandparents, one reason being the environment and community that he was surrounded by where his parents lived. Living with his grandparents placed him in a safer, well-rounded environment, which aided in his appreciation for his family, the knowledge his grandparents shared, and the respect members of the town had for his grandparents.

Collectively, the participants had 59 influencers, 20 activity influences, and 37 environmental influences that impacted who and what they decided they wanted to work towards. To be specific, all have become senior leaders within our Armed Forces, The Army National Guard. All have become an influence on individuals or groups of people themselves. Bolden mentions that investing in oneself and others allows us to share and develop our knowledge and inspire and encourage others, just as we have been inspired and encouraged (Bolden, 2011). Their stories show that Bolden could not have been more accurate.

Lessons Learned Theme

Chapter 2 mentions that “the leadership experience is available throughout life and comes in many varied forms” (Nicholas, 2016, p. 658). The lesson-learned theme is developed with this thought process in mind and comprises categories such as responsibility, self-sufficiency, memories, illness, and appearance. One might ask how lessons are learned through these elements, but listening to these incredible interviews, I would argue that participants did learn from them.

Table 7

Theme: Lessons Learned

Theme	Categories	Participant
Lessons Learned	Responsibility	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Self-sufficient	P1, P2, P3, P4
	Memories	P1, P2, P3, P6
	Illness,	P1, P4
	Appearance	P1, P4

During P1's interview, he shared that he learned to be self-sufficient through his mother's illness, as he had to get himself up for school, fed, and finish his homework. At a young age, his mother passed away, and with the impact of the rollercoaster of events that took place after her passing, he learned that he had to be dependent on himself and take responsibility for his actions. Towards the end of our interview, P1 shared that because of all that he has been through, all that he has learned from his experiences, and now as a leader himself, he believes leadership is "having the right mindset and personality, to be able to figure it out" (P1 line 417).

P2 speaks of the work ethic and time his father, and at times his mother, spent at their business to be sure their employees, customers, and business were taken care of. This left him and his brother to take the responsibility of ensuring chores, homework, and additional duties were completed. However, P2 did share that he never questioned his parent's love for them, he just wanted more family time with them, and as such, he has made the conscious effort to make sure his job is done and done right at work, because if the job is done right the first time, it allows him more family time with his wife and children. P2 commented, "I would not call anything negative, because even if it was maybe a negative experience, it helped most me into a positive thing" (P2, Lines 304 & 303). This comment was probably one of my strongest takeaways from this interview.

Listening to P3 brought a better understanding of why he became the leader that he did, regarding how he carries himself. His grandparents were respected in the community, and often, if someone needed help, had a question, or any need, they were the ones people would turn to. He learned that earning respect is not just doing something sometimes, but doing something all the time, as one's actions, words, and appearance all play a factor in the person one is. P3 worked to take the lessons he learned to be a better person and leader, be an involved father and

member of the community, and help those in need. He chose to take what he has learned and made a goal to “make things better” (P3 line 161), and he clarified by saying, “I wasn’t one to make things better for myself; I wanted to make it better for all of my people” (P3 lines 163 & 164).

P4 had a story that was more in-depth than any of them and was one of the most powerful moments of the study. He came from a life that many rarely work themselves out of. His parents were divorced, he struggled to get along with his stepparents, and he had difficulties at school, which involved fights; there were drugs and other activities that surrounded him, but he knew that was not the life he wanted. P4 worked with his mother and father to change schools, which involved moving from one parent’s home to the other parent’s house, a change in environment and an overall different atmosphere. It was during this move that he realized that he had to take responsibility and make changes if he was going to be successful. He had an uncle he looked up to who inspired him to play music, go to school, and even have a part in his decision to join the military. P4 said that “you figure out that you learn as much from bad leaders as you do from good leaders, sometimes more” (P4 lines 161 & 162).

This leads to P5, who discovered at a young age that in the community where he lived people were either going to have a life of coal mining, go to college (which many could not afford), or join the military. He also had family members in the service who were a great inspiration in his decision to join the service. P5 had a good family foundation, parents who taught him to be self-sufficient, take responsibility, and be independent, and he knew he wanted to be more than what the coal mining town offered at that time. So, he joined the service; then, with military benefits, he went to college. Later, due to their experience in the one branch of service, he knew he wanted to share his knowledge and become a leader, so he joined the Army

National Guard. P5 stated, “just basically setting your goals high, and if you achieve half of what you set out to do, you’ve done something” (P5 lines 142 & 143). From listening to his story, this is where I believe his life’s experiences impact his lessons learned and began to show within the leader he became.

Unknown to the first five participants, they all had an impact on P6. I found this interesting as none of the participants knew who was being interviewed, but as P6 told his story, the previous participants and others were mentioned by name. P6 was the youngest of those interviewed and the one with the least number of years in service, yet he was the most vocal about the examples that were set and demonstrated such growth through the lessons he learned while observing those around him. He shared how, because he was an “army brat” (P6 line 21), he was surrounded by both “good and bad experiences” (P6 line 49), which allowed him to be exposed to different “leadership styles” (P6 line 51). P6 shared that though he came from a home with both parents and was taught values, he did not think he would be who he is today without the experiences and leaders he had grown up around. Dose et al. (2019) shared that youth learn from their superiors who take the opportunity to be role models; P6 demonstrated that there is truth to this.

Conclusion

Throughout the interview process, it became more apparent that environment, authority figures, and life experiences truly impact the leader one becomes. The impact is far greater than just becoming a leader as it also shapes the leader. The experiences shared with me demonstrated both the ability to learn and the capability to implement those lessons. Each of the participants shared positive and negative experiences. Still, both played a significant factor in the choices

they made to have their life led down a path they thought was better for them and, ultimately, those around them, including their family.

Johnson mentioned that “leadership is based on the experience of influence” (2018, p. 211), a common theme throughout the interviews. Johnson’s words were a constant thought while reviewing the transcripts and had a role in shaping the pieces as the coding process evolved. Five of the six interviewees are fathers, and all six are husbands; and though their stories were different, they were similar in that all their stories brought them to the Army National Guard. Each has sought to be a better leader and help shape those coming up the ranks behind them. They have set out to be that role model for their families and the communities they are a part of. Each has been impacted by their adolescent experiences and chose how they would utilize that experience to better themselves and those around them.

The experience of influence took place through the themes discussed. Reflection on experiences by our participants demonstrated how they developed, their careers, the impact of experiences, and how their adolescence shaped them into who they chose to be. The impact of the family was influenced by the experiences and time with family, whether it be parents, stepparents, grandparents, uncles, single parent, or two-parent homes. Much of the impact of family also relates to leader development, as the relationships aided in shaping the characteristics and leadership skills gained during the adolescent experience. However, moving into the forms of influence theme, we learn that family is not the only form of influence. Many were also influenced by their engagement with activities such as scouting, sports, band, and their overall environment. One’s environment can include community involvement, church, YMCA, and other authority figures such as counselors, coaches, mentors, and friends.

These themes all tie together with the lessons learned theme, as it was through these themes that responsibility, self-sufficiency, and memories were remembered. Some foundations of these lessons began with an illness, a separation, a move, or observation, but no matter the foundation, the outcome for each was the path they chose to take for themselves. The decision was made to define the experience and push to be what they thought right looked like and what they considered a leader should be. Collectively, the participants used words such as empathy, example, encouraging, understanding, practicing what they preach, and one who admits when they are wrong.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study was a qualitative narrative study to better understand the impact of adolescence in leadership development and to answer these research questions:

RQ1: How do the influences of one's adolescence impact their leader development?

RQ2: How do the experiences help shape the executive leader?

The research utilized Karagianni's and Jude's (2018) suggestion "that it is useful to examine leadership during childhood and adolescence as what occurs during the development years can have an impact on the leadership" (p.87). Though there were stages of development described in Chapter 2, the interviews focused on the experiences during their adolescent years (10-19) as they told their stories; however, each participant concluded their story with how the experiences helped in their self-efficacy, self-growth, and leader development.

Implication for Theory

Throughout this study, it became apparent that there were several forms of influence during adolescence. When the study began, the thought process was based around influences such as parents, coaches, and counselors; however, while conducting the research and the interviews, it became apparent that individuals, groups, communities, environments, and situations all make an impact. As Weinberg (2018) suggested, these elements offer guidance to mental and emotional development.

The knowledge gained while listening to the participants was both enlightening and educational. Their stories answered how the influences of their adolescents impacted their leader development as each spoke of their growth from the experiences. One participant shared that once he became a father, he thanked his stepdad and apologized for acting the way he did. As a father himself, he now realized that his stepdad was trying to teach him and guide him (P4, Line

302-303). The impact this participant had from these experiences confirms Karagianni's suggestion "that it is useful to examine leadership during childhood and adolescence as what occurs during the developmental years have an impact on the leadership behaviors exhibited later in the workplace as an adult" (Karagianni, 2018, p. 87).

The study strengthened the original observation of there not being a lot of literature as it relates to the adolescent experience and its impact on the leader one becomes. However, it has also supported the literature regarding stages of development. Specifically, the externally driven stage and the fostering of the cognitive development demonstrate the value of the contribution (Liu et al. 2020) one's experiences play in this development. This leads to the self and opportunity stage, where leaders begin to learn and grow from their decision-making. P6 suggested that many of the decisions of the leader he is working to be had a lot to do with the experience of being an Army brat and observing the leaders he observed growing up. Now, as a developing leader, he has implemented the lessons learned in how he leads.

Conducting this study made my desire for others to learn from their adolescent experiences stronger. The shared stories reiterated that there is a lesson to be learned from each experience and that every influence throughout the adolescent years impacts the decision made, the path chosen, and the leader one becomes. P2 mentioned how his parents, coach, and sports helped him decide on the leader he wanted to be and the type of father and mentor he wanted to be.

There is much literature available about leadership development but not much on the influence of adolescent experiences and their impact on leader development; this is an area of leadership research that needs to be enhanced. Understanding the development allows one to understand themselves, the way they learn, and the way they led before, which would be of

benefit before filling a leadership role. Johnson suggested that “leadership is based on the exercise of influence” (2018, p. 211), so it makes sense that one would take time to understand those influences as a leader to be more effective in a leadership role.

This study provides a better understanding of the senior leaders who participated and why they lead the way they do. Though experiences can be challenging for anyone “due to differences in developmental readiness” (Day, 2009, p. 47), one might find the experience overwhelming and negative, while the other sees it as positive development. Though there were six participants in this study, and each had a different story to share, each found a way to make the experience positive and set their mind to becoming a stronger individual and a good leader.

Throughout the study, it was clear that some found that their influence came from not only influencers such as parents, coaches, and other authority figures, but they were also influenced by the activities they were involved in, their environment, and one or more experiences. It was evident that none of the participants allowed the experiences to define them but for them to define the experience. Within the data analysis and the research, the answer to RQ1, “How do the influences of one’s adolescence impact their leader development?” depends on each individual. The individual has the ability to decide with each experience, but it is up to them to take the accountability or responsibility to make the right decision for them.

Listening to the journeys of how each became a leader and continue to improve on being a productive and effective executive leader, also answered RQ2, “How do the experiences help shape the executive leader?” The two answers support each other because the decision lies within the individual. To become a leader, one needs to have influence, self-confidence, trustworthiness, emotional awareness, values, and integrity (Day et al., 2009). These are shaped by the impact of the adolescent experiences and how, whether negatively or positively, the

individual chooses to allow the experience to impact them. This study discovered that the experiences of an adolescent could stem from a multitude of environments, including a parent being ill, coming from a single-parent home, the community, the overall environment, and the multiple other authority figures and activities one can be a part of. Successful adolescent leaders' development depends upon good decision-making and judgment. This includes taking the time to step back and realize the path one wants to be on and understand that ability is not the only thing they have in their favor, but they have the capability to make any experience, and it's influence positive.

One of President Abraham Lincoln's principles says, "coach and counsel a new executive so that he or she may get off on the right foot. Remember, you want him to succeed" (cited in Phillips, 1992, p. 136). The leaders I interviewed may have unknowingly represented President Lincoln's principles through their actions and examples.

Implications for Practice

Practicing leadership starts from within, as one reflects on the development of their self-efficacy, self-growth, and self-development. The six gentlemen who participated may have had different experiences in their adolescence, but they were similar in that they each took their experiences, whether negative or positive, and grew from them. Each chose to learn from the experiences and implement changes in their own lives to improve both themselves and the road for others. They became an influencer by incorporating their development in how they lead; therefore, they defined the experience instead of the experience defining them.

The influences that surround an adolescent, as this study demonstrates, can positively impact the leader one becomes; however, it is up to the individual to decide for themselves. P3 shared how people turned to his grandparents with questions and for help. Observing this helped

him decide that he wanted to be that type of person, not just a leader, but a person. One that others could turn to, who took care of others, and made decisions that resulted in better things for others, not for him.

This research argues that a leader should be a person who understands themselves, the road that they have been on, the road they chose, and the choices made to get them there. If one understands themselves, they are going to be more in tune with how to mentor, influence, and lead others. The data analysis is clear that executive leaders are influenced by their adolescent experiences in ways that the literature has not fully captured. This study has expanded the research as far as the adolescent experience and its impact on the leader one becomes, but it also supported the realization that there is a gap in the literature as it relates to the development of a leader. While conducting this study, there was much found on leadership development, development of leadership styles, and leadership theories, but little on the development of a leader.

To share the knowledge gained through this study, I plan on sharing the results and the lessons learned. Though the stories told were personal both in the experience and lessons, the takeaways will help shape upcoming leaders. The study helped me understand myself as a person, a mother, a wife, and as a leader. It also helped me see that people often do not see themselves as a leader when others do. It is my intent that others grow from this study as well, they understand that adolescent experiences do have an impact on the leader they become, and at one point, an experience was lived, a decision made, and a path taken. Decisions could be “I want to be like him one day” or “I will never be like that person.” No matter the decisions made, the impacts of those decisions result in who one chooses to be. How can one use what is learned—why is this important?

Recommendations for Research

Future research is needed to explore the impact adolescent experiences have on not only the leader one becomes but how these experiences build leadership skills and styles. This study was based on leader development, not leadership; however, the impact of the adolescent experience may affect both. A few questions that could strengthen this study consist of the following:

- What is the difference between leader development and leadership development?
- What knowledge is gained during adolescents that shape one's leadership skills and style?
- How does one's adolescents enhance the leader within and develop leadership ability?
- Why were males more willing to share their experience than their female counterparts?
- Do leaders reflect on their past experiences when making decisions?

It is my judgment that these questions may enhance not only the ability to understand how one's past affects both the person and leader one becomes but how the lessons learned from these experiences impact the leadership roles one may hold. Throughout this study, it became clearer that there is a stepping-stone process to having a leadership role. One learns from experiences, develops into a leader, and then into an executive leader and continues to grow and develop into the leadership roles they may hold. It has also become evident that leader development differs from leadership development. One gains the knowledge and skills to become a leader while simultaneously shaping their leadership styles and theories.

It would benefit this specific study to expand the research to other branches of the military and involve all executive leader ranks of those who currently serve and those who have retired. Expanding to all organizations and their executive leader positions will enhance the literature and the study. This is an area of study that is of interest to me and will continue to add to the literature gap.

Limitations of Study

The limitations discovered during this study fall back on one of the proposed future research questions: the hesitation of the female soldiers asked to participate. Though the three invited to participate said no, each stated they would if no one else could participate. Two of the three were transparent in sharing that they did not want to revisit what they had worked to overcome. This limitation goes back to the questions above regarding future research on why men were more willing to share their stories than their female counterparts. Have the men been able to leave the experiences alone, or have the females dealt with things differently and feel sharing their stories will reopen a wound?

The second limitation of this study was the population chosen for the study. Staying with the National Guard was successful regarding the purpose of the study; however, expanding to the Reservist, Active Duty, and all five branches may have added to the coding as well as a more robust understanding of the impact of the adolescent experience across the Armed Forces. Knowing the participants may have been a limitation to an extent, but I saw it as an opportunity as it allowed the opportunity for the participant to feel more comfortable about sharing their stories, as well as it offered me the chance to understand them more and why they lead the way they do.

Conclusions

During this study, I found the data supported the premise that lessons are learned from adolescent experiences, and they impact the person and leader one becomes. Having the opportunity to challenge myself, step out of my comfort zone, and explore this path allowed me to understand not only those who participated but myself as well. As leaders, the effort to understand our team and our colleagues are always there, but the goal to be a better person, better parent, and a productive individual is also something to strive for. The research supports Jaiswal's suggestion that "creative self-efficacy has been defined as the degree of an individual's belief about his or her ability to produce creative outcomes" (Jaiswal et al, 2015, p. 33). The six participants took experiences from their adolescence and empowered themselves with the goal to grow from the experience. While working towards such a goal, the leaders who participated also showed self-growth as they took each lesson from the negative or positive experience, developed their strengths, and strengthened their weaknesses while becoming the leaders they are. While working on their self-growth, they have also shaped their self-development; as stated by Tichy, "leadership is built on a foundation of self-awareness" (2007, p. 299). Often, a leader does not sit and reflect upon their choices; however, during the interviews, it was clear that these leaders, as Badaracco suggested, took a "step back and ask, why have I chosen this life? What aims and ideals am I pursuing?" (Badaracco, 2013, p. 151).

It is important that while leaders take that step back, they practice reflection and reflexivity. This can be achieved if the time is taken to step back and practice reflection and reflexivity. Reflection allows the opportunity to learn from an event that took place as one ponders the facts of the event; however, reflexivity allows the chance to understand the

reflection, explore the “why,” the actions taken, and the values gained, which all together allow for the development within oneself and whom one becomes.

My findings support Johnson’s suggestion that “leadership is based on the exercise of influence” (2018, p. 211). P1 expressed this by stating, “I don’t have to necessarily relive the past to tell it, you know, there were experiences and were things that molded how and who made me who I am” (P1 lines 463 & 464). Lessons are learned from the experiences of the adolescent years, and they impact the leader one becomes and help shape the executive leader one strives to be. It is how the individual chooses to allow the experience to impact them that makes the difference; one can allow the experience to define them or learn a lesson and define the experience.

This study added to the literature gap as it relates to the influence of adolescent experiences and the impact on leader development; however, it is also my judgment that further study could benefit the literature gap. Though there remains to be a gap in the literature as it relates to the development of a leader, this study has offered data to expand the literature and possible future research questions that will add to the literature.

In closing, I would like to share my most significant takeaway, which is a result of asking each participant: How did your experiences impact your self-efficacy, self-growth, and self-development? Based on my literature review and knowledge gained through the interview process, the answers provided are answers that many leaders can relate to. Below is a segment of each response:

P1 said that for his self-growth, he is “always wanting to seek out the next opportunity” (P1 lines 387 & 388)

P2 responded to self-efficacy by saying, “A lot of the experiences helped make me more self-aware. Looking at the whole picture and knowing you are a piece of the pie and do everything to fill that piece” (P2 lines 333 & 334).

P3 replied to self-development by saying he “always evaluates the system, always trying to make things better” (line 156). He continues to say that he had a goal “to make things better, and I wasn’t one to make things better for myself; I wanted to make it better for all people” (P3 lines 162-164).

P4 took the self-development approach with self-evaluation, saying that, “Self-evaluation is huge, and with that comes self-accountability and responsibility. So, when you are willing to become accountable and responsible for yourself and your actions, and you’re willing to accept that responsibility and accountability solely, and not blame other people, you begin to grow, and begin to recognize your faults” (P4 lines 607 – 610).

P5 learned of his self-growth in his community experience, saying, “I wanted to try something different, so that experience taught me to go into college” (line 106). He continues, “I was not going to go into coal mines, so that was my determination; I was going to find something I could have a career in” (P5 line 122).

P6 approached self-development by addressing mistakes saying, “Even the worst of mistakes can teach you, they can teach your colleagues, your subordinates, or even your boss, but at the end of the day, it’s teaching yourself how to get stronger, and how to avoid making that same mistake again” (P6 lines 118 - 120).

Though not every response to each question was shared above, each response added immensely to my takeaway and understanding of the impact of individual adolescent experiences. The stories and information shared in this study also adds to the literature as it

relates to the influence of adolescent experiences and the impact on leader development.

Experiences are similar in many ways, and people have more in common than what meets the eye, but every lesson, every takeaway, and every thought are based on the individual. There is an opportunity to develop one's self-efficacy, self-growth, and as a leader, if one takes time to be both reflective and reflexive.

This new knowledge and the gaining of a better understanding will add to my individual development and the literature and future research in understanding how individuals make decisions to learn from their experiences and teach others to do the same, understanding that there is a difference in developing as a leader and leadership development.

The study has been a great learning experience in understanding the literature a bit more clearly, bridging the gap in the literature, understanding better the participants interviewed as a person and a leader, and learning more about myself through the process.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

RQ1: How do the influences of one's adolescence impact their leader development?

RQ1a: How do the experiences help shape them as an executive leader?

Good day and thank you for participating in my study as part of the Doctor of Executive Leadership Program. I appreciate the time you have taken to tell me your story and how your adolescent experience has influenced and impacted you as the executive leader you have become.

I may periodically pause to ensure I understand what you are saying and perhaps to ask a follow-up question. I truly appreciate you and your time.

RQ1: How do the influences of one's adolescence impact their leader development?

RQ1a: How do the experiences help shape them as an executive leader?

Primary open-ended question	Probing questions
1. As you think back to when you were an adolescent, what comes to mind about how your experiences from that period has influenced you as an executive leader?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you expand on that? • Say more • Help me understand...
2. What influences played a part in those experiences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think that impacted you? • Would you like to share more about that?
3. Who were the people that influenced those experiences?	
4. What about your parents, teacher, coaches, or peers?	
5. How do you think your experiences impacted your self-efficacy? (Embracing of life events and ability to face challenges, therefore, strengthens one's skills)	
6. How do you think your experiences impacted your self-growth? (Individual development in knowledge, skills, mind-set learning, and understanding who you are and that you matter)	
7. How do you think your experiences impacted your self-development? (Increase in capability of strengthening attributes, knowledge, and skills)	
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?	

I will follow up with you once the recording is transcribed for you to review the document for accuracy. Do you have any questions for me? Thank you so much for your time, have a great rest of the day.

APPENDIX B: FREQUENCY TABLE

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Total
Impact of experience	9	5	9	14	5	9	51
Adolescence molds	2	6	2	5	2	4	21
Leadership	7	6	8	13	1	6	41
Time with family	1	6	4	4	1	1	17
Appearance	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Responsibility	3	1	1	17	1	1	24
Stepparents	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Develop	4	12	4	22	2	8	52
Environment	14	0	3	14	4	2	37
Relationships	4	2	0	2	0	1	9
Activity influence	3	5	8	2	1	1	20
Career	0	5	0	3	0	1	9
Characteristic	10	9	7	31	3	7	67
Illness	7	0	0	2	0	0	9
Memories	1	1	1	0	0	1	4
Self-sufficient	5	2	3	1	0	0	11
Single-family	4	0	0	2	0	0	6
Influencers	14	20	5	11	3	6	59

APPENDIX C: TIMETABLE

Participant	Time	Transcript
P1	52.0	11 pages
P2	51.18	9 pages
P3	45.50	7 pages
P4	67.37	15 pages
P5	39.28	6 pages
P6	43.07	7 pages