Social and Career Development

The Tentacles of Bullying: The Impact of Negative Childhood Peer Relationships on Adult Professional and Educational Choices

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Barbara Coloroso (2001) states that: "Bullying is a life-and-death issue that we ignore at our children's peril" (p. 1). Many human beings bear the scars of being mistreated by a bully in childhood. Recent manifestations of violence in primary and secondary schools by students who were continuously mistreated by their peers indicate that this is an alarming occurrence that must be addressed. Moreover, the adverse impacts of being bullied in youth do not necessarily come to an end once children reach adulthood.

Research surrounding many aspects of bullying has been conducted through the years. At the outset, Lynch (2004) states that: "Being bullied at school can result in long-term and social effects" (Paragraph 6). From a socio-emotional standpoint, some of the innate developmental constructs of individuals can be altered as a result of having had negative peer relationships in childhood. Some research has also shown that childhood bullying can be linked to future aggression, criminal behavior, depression, and even suicide (Patterson, 2005; Thompson, Cohen, & O'Neill Grace, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). In instances where reconciliatory justice measures are not undertaken to aid the aggressors and their victims, a stage is set for the adverse effects of childhood bullying to continue into later life. In turn, numerous studies have been conducted to examine the immediate impacts of bullying on children (Coloroso, 2002; Gottheil & Dubow, 2001; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001; Voors, 2000). However, the research conducted in regards to the long-term impacts of bullying and their materialization once adults make their vocational choices is limited.

Consequently, this study first examined the childhood environmental conditions of ten adult participants whose ages ranged from 26 years to 42 years. Seven were female, and three were male participants. All were victims of bullying at some point in their youth. It was conducted in a small, northerly, Canadian community. An attempt was made to determine how these conditions, in combination with childhood victimization in the form of peer aggressions, impacted the selections made the participants in regards to their employment and post-secondary educational choices.

Methodology

Instrumentation

Two measurement instruments were utilized to gather data for this study. The first was a resiliency inventory called the *Resiliency Quiz*. The second is a series of interview questions pertaining to demographic information, family environment, childhood bullying, and adult resiliency traits. These sources are further explained below.

resiliency inventory. The Resiliency Quiz was developed by Nan Henderson, who is an international trainer and renowned author on building and fostering resiliency, and who has given permission for its use in this study (Henderson, 2002). It was created to assist individuals in measuring and identifying the conditions in their lives that would assist them in further developing their level of resiliency. The inventory consists of a series of eighteen statements that require an affirmative or negative response. By identifying the areas where there are more negative responses, the individual can then concentrate on these particular areas to build his or her resiliency levels. This ability, in turn, can have an impact on the extent to which the participants were and are still affected by being victims of childhood bullying. Individuals who demonstrate higher resiliency levels, for example, may have a greater chance of being impacted positively, or of not being impacted as negatively by being victimized by peers in childhood as individuals with lower levels of resiliency.

interviews. In turn, the interview questions were developed by the researcher, and were designed to gather additional data specifically in regards to certain areas of the participants' lives. The interview comprised four categories: Demographic Factors, Childhood Family Environment, Bullying, and Personality Dynamics.

The questions addressed demographical information about the participants, their level of parental and environmental support in regards to personal and professional choices, their motivations for their professional and academic choices, the quality of their relationships with their family, the nature and extent of bullying they endured as children, intervention measures undertaken on their behalf, as well as their adult defense and coping mechanisms. Accordingly, the specificity in their design permitted the collection of data that was geared towards areas that were thought to be the more common areas that would potentially impact the vocational choices made by the participants.

Summary and Discussion of Results

Resiliency Quiz Summary

Administration of the resiliency inventory was conducted verbally by the researcher. This permitted clarification of ambiguous items by allowing the researcher to explain certain statements to the participants that could have had dissimilar meanings in different contexts. Clarification was given on the meaning of the items if required, and probing, non-leading questions were used only if the participant was unsure on how to respond. This was also noted during the administration of the inventory. The Resiliency Quiz (Henderson, 2002) encompasses five categories: Caring and Support, High Expectations for Success, Opportunities for Meaningful Participation, Positive Bonds, and Clear and Consistent Boundaries. The following table demonstrates the number of affirmative responses in relation to the number of items for every category on the Resiliency Quiz.

caring and support. The first category on the Resiliency Quiz, *Caring and Support*, addresses conditions in regards to the support received by the participants, their consequential achievements, as well as their ability to take care of themselves physically. These also represent other significant environmental influences. The

results were elevated in this area. Two of the participants responded affirmatively to two of the items, and the remaining eight responded affirmatively to all three items. This suggests that the participants in this study have had many individuals in their lives who supported their endeavors.

Table 1

Resiliency Quiz Responses

Participant Number	Caring and Support	High Expectations for Success	Opportunities for Meaningful Participation	Positive Bonds	Clear and Consistent Boundaries	Overall Resiliency Level
1	3/3	3/3	1/3	1/3	5/6	14/18
2	3/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	6/6	15/18
3	3/3	3/3	2/3	2/3	6/6	16/18
4	2/3	3/3	0/3	3/3	3/6	11/18
5	3/3	3/3	2/3	2/3	5/6	15/18
6	3/3	2/3	3/3	2/3	3/6	13/18
7	3/3	3/3	3/3	2/3	6/6	17/18
8	3/3	3/3	2/3	0/3	5/6	12/18
9	3/3	2/3	3/3	2/3	5/6	15/18
10	2/3	2/3	1/3	2/3	4/6	11/18

high expectations for success. Successively, the second group, *High Expectations for Success*, can be related to adult conditions that are thought to foster resiliency in their workplace, with the people in their lives, and with their internal sense of self. In this section, all of the participants had at least two of the three conditions thought to develop resiliency. In actuality, four of the ten had two affirmative responses, while the remaining six responded affirmatively to all three items. This also represents generally elevated workplace, environmental, and familial conditions in these areas of the participants' lives.

opportunities for meaningful participation. The third category on the Resiliency Quiz, *Opportunities for Meaningful Participation*, addresses whether the participants' have the opportunity to participate in community groups or extra-curricular activities in which they feel that they are contributing positively. It also addresses whether they feel their opinions and choices are valued by their family, friends, and others in their professional or social connections. This section therefore describes some of the pertinent current environmental influences of the participants.

The resiliency levels in this area were varied. Of the ten participants, one did not respond positively to any items on this section of the resiliency inventory. Two of the participants responded affirmatively to one of the three items, and four of the participants possessed two conditions of the three. Finally, three of the participants responded affirmatively to all three items in this category. This signifies that less than half of the participants had all of the conditions in their lives that provided them with prospects to participate meaningfully in their environment.

positive bonds.   The participants in this study were bullied for varied durations. The fourth grouping, *Positive Bonds*, addresses whether they possess meaningful bonds with individuals in their professional, social, and familial environments. This provides insight into the quality of their relationships with their peers in adulthood, which sequentially can be considered an effect of the duration of the childhood bullying.

In fact, for this area, one of the participants did not give an affirmative response to any of the items in this section. One of the participants had one affirmative response. Nonetheless, seven participants, had two of three affirmative responses for this section, and one responded affirmatively to all three items. This reflects a reduction in the presence of bonds with the social and familial environments for some of the participants in adulthood, in comparison to other sections on the inventory.

clear and consistent boundaries. It is evident that all of the participants in this study were bullied in different measures during their childhood. The impact that these negative childhood peer relationships have had on their resiliency levels in adulthood, in relation to their life choices, is difficult to ascribe to a specific component of the Resiliency Quiz. However, the fifth grouping, *Clear and Consistent Boundaries*, questions whether the participants are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and can utilize this knowledge to achieve their goals. It also investigates their current behaviors in their professional or academic lives. This section therefore categorizes the presence of conditions in the participants' lives that could possibly exacerbate or alleviate the long-term consequences of childhood bullying on these particular aspects.

In this section, all participants scored a minimum of three out of six conditions that generally represent optimal circumstances for the development of resiliency. One of the participants responded affirmatively to four of the items on this section of the resiliency inventory. In turn, four of the ten participants had five affirmative responses, and three of the six participants responded affirmatively to all of the items in this section. This indicates that the majority of participants had high resiliency levels in this category. This could possibly minimize the long-term manifestations of the bullying they experienced at the hands of their peers in childhood on their adult vocational decisions.

emergence of themes from interview transcripts. Upon close scrutiny of the individual responses, the researcher collectively compared the responses for every question, and denoted observations of common reoccurring trends that were of interest. Certain themes were derived as a result. The narratives were scrutinized, and words of interest that arose more than once were noted for every individual response. Next, the researcher utilized the *Find* function in Microsoft Word to locate these common words in the transcripts as a whole. These transcripts were revisited collectively. The following table represents the common words or trends noted, the interview category in which they arose, the frequency of their reoccurrence in the transcripts, as well as whether or not they were included as a theme:

Table 2

Re-occurring Words and Trends in the Interview Transcripts

Common Words Or Trends	*Interview Category*	*Frequency of Re-occurrence*	*Inclusion as a Theme*
More than one previous occupation	Demographic Factors	Ten	Yes
More than one previous educational endeavor	Demographic Factors	Nine	Yes
Help people	Demographic Factors	Ten	Yes
More than one career change	Demographic Factors	Ten	Yes
Career or educational program change to pursue passion	Demographic Factors	Seven	Yes
Financial motives	Demographic Factors	Four	No
Passion for field of choice	Demographic Factors	Eight	Yes
Good relationship with mother	Childhood Family Environment	Ten	Yes
Strained relatins with father	Childhood Family Environment	Fu	No
Parental involvement in professional decisions	Demographic Factors, Childhood Family Environment	Seven	Yes
Parental involvement in personal/life decisions	Childhood Family Environment	Eight	Yes
Bullied for more than one year	Bullying	Ten	No
Too many to count/remember	Bullying	Two	No
Never reported the bullying	Bullying	Eleven	Yes
Told figure of authority of the bullying	Bullying	Nine	Yes
Bullied by more than one person	Bullying	Eight	No
Ignoring/avoiding bullies	Bullying	Six	Yes

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Defending myself	Bullying	Four	Yes
Teachers or authority did not intervene	Bullying	Fifteen	Yes
Parent or authority figure successful in ending the bullying	Bullying	Three	No
Adult behaviors stemming from childhood bullying	Bullying, Personality Dynamics	Two	Yes
Recall names of bullies	Bullying	Two	No
Encounter bullies in later life	Bullying	Two	No
Resilient in adulthood	Personality Dynamics	Eight	Yes
Severely affected by trauma or major upsets	Personality Dynamics	Seven	Yes
I just do it	Personality Dynamics	Five	Yes
Depends what it is	Personality Dynamics	Three	No
Compliant to authority	Personality Dynamics	Eight	Yes
Sometimes question authority	Personality Dynamics	Six	Yes
Optimistic	Personality Dynamics	Nine	Yes

These common words or trends were then studied individually, and were analyzed to determine whether they arose sufficiently to be considered a theme. Four or less occurrences of a trend or word were generally excluded as a theme unless sufficient evidence supported their inclusion in the remainder of the dialogue.

However, in two cases, despite the elevated number of occurrences in the transcripts, trends were excluded as themes. In fact, while all ten participants were bullied for more than one year, insufficient evidence was found to determine the nature and extent of impact on their adult vocational choices. In addition, while eight of the participants noted that they had been bullied by more than one person, the researcher could not link this trend to a future manifestation on adult career and educational selections.

In contrast, only two participants specifically noted that they utilized similar strategies in childhood and adulthood to resolve conflicts. However, other instances

were linked to the future exhibition of behaviors to lead to their inclusion as a theme. Similarly, four participants utilized the words *defending myself* in some form, but this was still included as a theme because further analysis of data suggested that seven participants noted that they were more apt to defend themselves in adulthood than they were in childhood. The following table delineates the themes, and outlines the words or concepts that led to their inclusion

Table 3

Themes Ensuing From Interview Transcripts

Theme	*Re-Occurring Word or Trend*
Depressive Tendencies	Depression, depressed, anti-depressants, severely affected
	Severely affected by trauma or major upsets
Motivations for Post-Secondary Choices	More than one previous occupation
	More than one previous educational endeavor
	Help people
	More than one career change
	Career or educational program change to pursue passion
	Passion for field of choice
Adult Resiliency	Good relationship with mother
	More apt to defend themselves in adulthood than in childhood
	Resilient in adulthood
	Severely affected by trauma or major upsets
Future Exhibition of Behaviors	Defending myself
	Adult behaviors stemming from childhood bullying

More apt to defend themselves in
adulthood than in childhood

I just do it

Optimistic

Table 3: Themes Ensuing From Interview Transcripts (Continued)

Theme	*Re-Occurring Word or Trend*
Perception of Authority	Teachers or authority did not intervene
	Compliant to authority
	Depends what it is
	Sometimes question authority
Familial Influences	Good relationship with mother
	Parental involvement in professional decisions
	Parental involvement in personal/life decisions

As such, one of the means used to analyze the interview data was to verify the frequency of re-occurrence of certain words or trends. The researcher attempted to explicate their frequent appearance in the interview responses. Where sufficient literature support was found that could potentially link childhood bullying to the trend or word, these were then categorized according to similarity, as can be observed in the above table. A title was then given to the category, which constituted the theme for that category.

Description of Themes

depressive tendencies. The inclusion of depressive tendencies as a theme was due to the fact that seven of the ten participants mentioned the word "depression" in reference to their emotional state at some point in their lives. This relates to the findings of Lynch (2004), who states that: "Students who are chronic victims of bullying experience more physical and psychosocial problems than their peers who are not harassed by other children" (Paragraph 6). In fact, she highlights the results of a survey administered to more than one thousand adults, which indicate that over 46 percent of

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these adults contemplated suicide at one point, as opposed to only 7 percent of individuals who were not bullied (Paragraph 20).

The U.S. Department of Health (n.d.) supports the fact that adults who were victimized by their peers in childhood are more likely than their non-bullied peers to have low self-esteem and to suffer from depression (Paragraph 2). In turn, Lynch (2004) states that being bullied in childhood affects the adults' ability to make social connections, and to succeed in work and educational endeavors (Paragraph 20). Furthermore, Thompson et al. (2002) attribute high drop-out and drug use rates to childhood bullying (p. xvi).

One of the participants who suffered from a severe depression noted that she used to believe that she would be a homemaker like her mother, because she dropped out of high school. She stated that she also did not have faith in her abilities to pursue her studies. Nevertheless, she ultimately returned to post-secondary education, and is currently returning to college for a second degree. In contrast, none of the four participants who divulged no signs of depressive tendencies made any significant career changes in their lives. However, two of them had parents who always supported their educational and employment decisions. These two participants pursued one single career avenue to date in their lives. The other two participants noted that their parents did not always support their life, career, and educational choices. The two figures below illustrate these trends:

Figure 1

*Depressive Tendencies and their Impact on Vocational Choices*
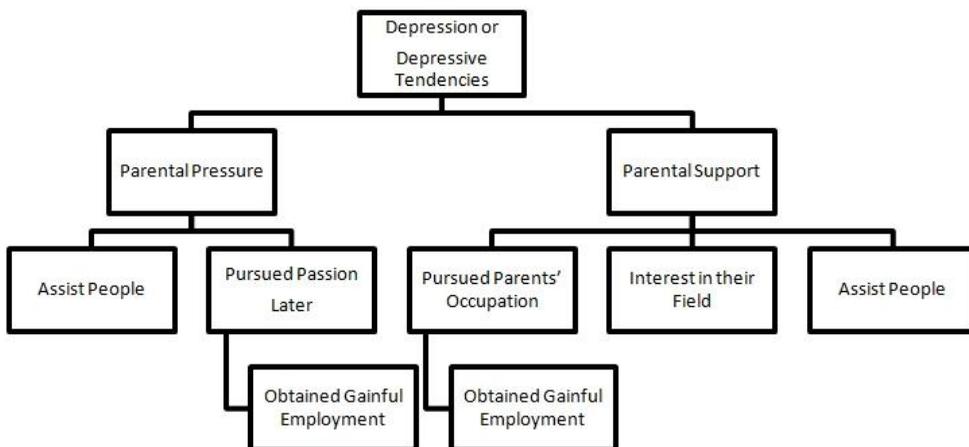
This could suggest that reduced self-esteem brought on by childhood bullying has potentially caused the individuals who participated in this study, who had depressive tendencies, to be more submissive in their post-secondary selections. They were, in some cases, more likely to yield to parental demands when making vocational choices. In contrast, where their non-depressive counterparts had parental support, the participants tended to only pursue on career option, while those whose parents were opposed to their choices made at least one significant career change. This could

potentially imply that when parental support was present, the participants pursued their general area of interest in early adulthood, and those whose parents were opposed pursued different avenues. Further research would be needed to draw conclusive findings in this regard.

Figure 2

Absence of Depressive Tendencies and their Impact on Vocational Choices
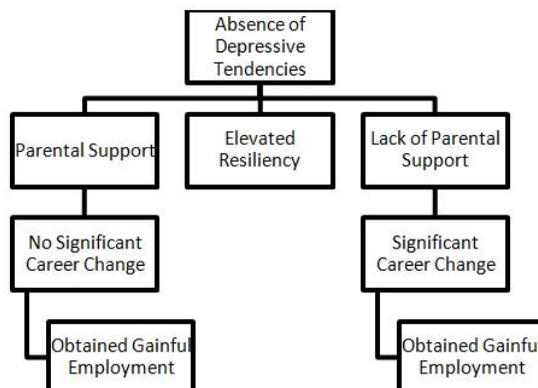
motivations for post-secondary choices. One of the more significant discoveries that ensued from analyzing the data collected was in regards to the motivations of bullying victims for their employment and educational choices. First, their current employment situations were noteworthy. All but one of the participants pursued post-secondary education, and eight even completed more than one degree or diploma in more than one area of study. In addition, all participants were currently employed, but two were on temporary leave from work to return to school. Willet (2004) highlights numerous factors that could influence post-secondary selections. Among these factors, he delineates the availability of post-secondary offerings in the geographical location of choice, the influence of family members, the availability of information in regards to post-secondary offerings, among other factors (Paragraph 1).

Additionally, the geographical location where this study took place comprises two colleges, one which offers French programming, and the other which offers similar English options. There is also a bilingual University and varied private institutions with post-secondary offerings. This suggests that there were numerous opportunities for the participants to continue their studies beyond high school.

However, Taylor, Harris, & Taylor (2004) make the following statement in regards to the roles of the parents in individuals' career selections: "Families, parents, and guardians in particular, play a significant role in the occupational aspirations and the career goal development of their children" (Paragraph 2). They further attribute academic settings, familial inspirations, money, and social circles as contributing factors in the selection of a career.

As was noted in an earlier section, two of the participants simply succumbed to authority in their educational and employment selections. These two participants, and two others, also failed to pursue certain areas in an earlier stage of life but later returned to school or changed their professional situation in some manner to pursue their passion. Using Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Stages as a point of reference, this could be explained by the incomplete transition between certain tasks or phases of life engendered by being victimized in childhood by peers (Bridges, 1980, p. 35). It could also signify that some of the participants limited their opportunities to identify themselves in one of their areas of expertise due to a reduced self-esteem caused by bullying. In turn, this would have caused them to pursue their true passion in later life, when the threat of their peers was reduced.

However, the main motivation behind employment and educational selections seemed to be geared towards pursing an area of interest. In fact, five of these participants pursued an area of interest at a later time in their lives. Furthermore, six participants chose their current occupation at least in part because of a desire to assist people in some way. Four participants indicated that there were some financial considerations for their choices. The following table represents a profile of all of the participants in this study.

Table 4

Participant Motivations for Career and Educational Selections

Participant Number	Continuous Parental Support	Depressive Tendencies	Financial	Same Occupation as Parent(s)	Helping People	Passion /Interest in Field
1		X			X	X
2	X	X			X	X
3	X		X			
4		X	X			X
5	X	X	X		X	X
6	X			X	X	
7	X	X		X		X
8					X	X
9	X	X			X	X
10	X		X			X

This table also includes whether the participants had depressive tendencies, have always had parental support in their endeavors, as well as their motivations for their educational and career selections. These findings could suggest that these participants, who were bullied in childhood, possessed a desire to intervene among the populace, and to be of assistance to people in some way. The majority of the participants' career choices centered on the pursuit of a field of interest, but this sometimes occurred after the pursuit of other avenues. Other factors such a following in a parent's footsteps, or financial considerations, which are common factors of employment choices (Taylor et al., 2004), were not prominent factors for vocational choices among these participants. While the low number of participants in this study is insufficient to ascertain conclusively that people who are bullied in childhood develop a desire to help people once they reach adulthood, further research in this area would be noteworthy.

familial influences. It is important to include the influence of the familial environment on the vocational choices of the participants. Certain factors surfaced during the examination of the interview data and demographic profiles. One of these issues was that two participants indicated that they still utilize certain strategies that were suggested by their parents to deal with their bullies in their present social lives and in their workplace. To support this concept, Patterson (2005) suggests that "Guiding children to manage conflict in their relationships would be helpful in preventing relationship disruption" (Paragraph 3).

In addition, Thompson et al. (2002) further state that relationships and social skills are learned in the home. In this study, all ten of the participants had good relations with at least one parent. This is possibly one of the reasons that they are now all employed, and that most pursued post-secondary studies despite research findings that suggest that victims of childhood bullying are likely to encounter difficulties in their future employment and educational avenues (Lynch 2004; Knoester, 2003; Pattersen, 2005; U.S. Department of Health, n.d.).

As a final point, Voors (2000) considers assertiveness on the part of a bullying victim to be an effective strategy to reduce future incidents. The fact that seven of the participants noted that their parents are supportive of their life and of their career choices suggests that this could have built up their self-esteem, and could potentially account for their successes despite their negative childhood experiences. As such, it can be assumed that having life conditions that foster resiliency may have an impact on the extent of the effect that childhood bullying has on professional and educational selections made in adulthood.

adult resiliency. There were significant extrapolations of data that occurred in regards to the adult resiliency environments of the participants in this research. First, the resiliency inventory suggested that all ten participants had elevated resiliency levels. In fact, they seemed to grow more resilient in adulthood than they were in their childhood. However, six of the participants stated that they were accommodating, but nonetheless indicated that they have difficulty dealing with traumatic situations.

Conversely, Nan Henderson (2002) indicates in reference to her Resiliency Quiz that: "People bounce back from tragedy, trauma, risks, and stress by having the following conditions in their lives" (Paragraph 2). These conditions consist of having a caring and supportive familial and social circle, having elevated expectations for

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success, belonging to community groups with opportunities for meaningful contribution, having positive, constructive relationships, and finally, establishing clear and consistent limitations and realistic expectations. She continues by outlining the fact that higher numbers of affirmative responses suggests that there are greater chances of bouncing back from life problems.

This could explicate the fact that, in this research, the participants all obtained gainful employment, which contradicts some research findings that suggest that adults who are bullied in childhood are more likely to have difficulty in school and in the workplace (Knoester, 2003; Lynch 2004; Pattersen, 2005; U.S. Department of Health, n.d.).

The following figure represents how having elevated resiliency levels, optimism versus pessimism, and developing the ability to deal with trauma in adulthood impacts the extent of the manifestation of childhood bullying in later life, in accordance to the observed trends in this study:

Figure 3

The Impact of Elevated Resiliency and the Ability to Deal with Traumatic Situations in Adulthood and the Extent of Manifestation of Childhood Bullying
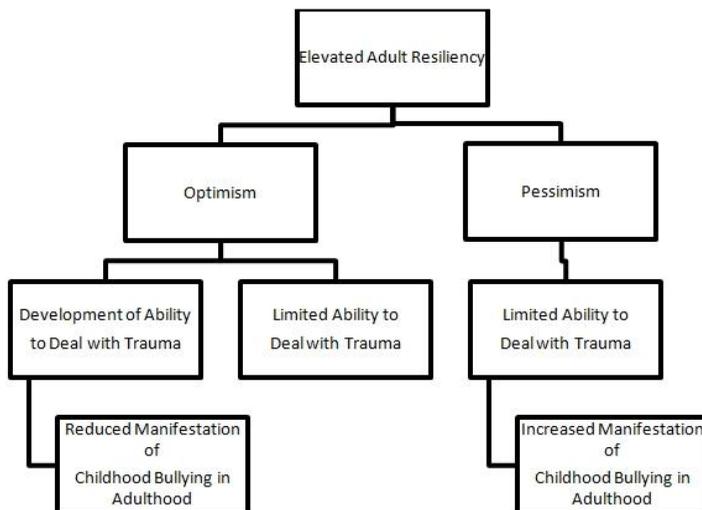
Copper, Estes, & Allen (2004) designate hopefulness as a characteristic that is thought to be more often present in resilient individuals (Paragraph 2). The fact that all of the participants had elevated resiliency levels could suggest that their environmental conditions have lessened the impact of being bullied in childhood in their later lives. In short, these indications suggest that positive environmental factors as well as certain internal characteristics found in resilient individuals can potentially affect the extent of the effect of childhood bullying on adult vocational choices.

future exhibition of behaviors. General trends in regards to adult exhibition of certain behaviors were also noted. At the outset, Knoester (2003) notes that being a victim of bullying in childhood can cause the adaptation of anti-social behaviors that can sometimes continue across the life-span (Paragraph 8). For this study, nine of the ten participants indicated that they could not stand up for themselves in the past, but that now they are much more apt to speak up when they feel someone is disrespecting them. In addition, seven of the participants even stated that they are sometimes firm and blunt in their defense. Finally, two participants noted that they still utilized the conflict resolution strategies provided by their parents in their youth to resolve present situations.

In regards to employment, five of the participants often questioned their employers when they were asked to complete a task. One even noted that he sometimes got into trouble at work for voicing his opinions too firmly. Another participant noted that her new, strong attitude at work definitely stemmed from being bullied in childhood.

Conversely, Bandura's theory of Social Cognition suggests that children learn certain behaviors in the home, in the media, or from their social connections (Isom, 1998, Paragraph 1). As such, in reference to this theory, being victimized by their peers in childhood could have reinforced the need for the participants to defend their rights assertively. Their victimization could have caused them to want to eliminate the possibility of this reoccurring in adulthood. Finally, this could suggest that maturity, in combination with optimal life-conditions, have provided the victims of childhood bullying with necessary tools once they reach adulthood to ensure that they are not victimized again. It is possible that assertiveness was developed as a defense mechanism to avoid the trauma they experienced in childhood.

perception of authority. Certain observations also led to the development of the participants' perception of figures of authority in adulthood as a theme. At the outset, Watkins (2000) indicates that certain children who are continuously victimized by their peers sometimes develop a pattern of compliance with authority (Paragraph 5). For this study, the areas of interest were specifically geared towards the participants' use of coping mechanisms in their perception of authority, and its' impact on their subsequent vocational and educational choices.

In fact, the research findings suggest that the participants were not always immediately acquiescent to authority. In truth, six of the participants actually questioned their employers when they were asked to complete a task. Three even indicated that they do not act in accordance with the request unless it is something that they felt was reasonable. Four participants, however, immediately conformed to the requirements of their employers or teachers. The following table represents a profile of the participants in regards to their level of resiliency, their depressive tendencies, whether they were pressured by their parents in their vocational selections, and whether they complied with their employer's or another figure of authority's requests:

Table 5

Relation between Resiliency Levels, Parental Support and Participant Perception of Authority

Participant Number	Overall Resiliency Level	Depressive Tendencies	Continuous Parental Support	Immediate Compliance With Authority
1	14/18	X		
2	15/18	X	X	
3	16/18		X	X
4	11/18	X		X
5	15/18	X	X	X
6	13/18		X	
7	17/18	X	X	X
8	12/18			
9	15/18	X	X	
10	11/18		X	

As such, the evidence is conflicting in this regard. There does not seem to be a relation between the adult overall resiliency level and the surfacing of depressive tendencies, and the resiliency level does not seem to be related to immediate compliance with authority. At the moment, based on the information gathered from the demographic profiles and from the interview responses, there is no reason to conclude that the level of compliance to authority had any consequence, positive or negative, on the participants when they made their choices. The only factor that was evident was that two participants yielded to the will of their parents in their choice of an educational program or employment field. Eight participants ultimately ended up pursuing what they considered to be their passion at a later point in their lives. One of these two participants had depressive tendencies and the other did not, therefore the evidence in inconclusive in this regard as well.

This could suggest that authoritarian influence did not continue to be a factor in the selection of post-secondary options, for these participants, despite being bullied in childhood. However, this could also suggest that maturity and life circumstances that foster resiliency can potentially assist individuals in making employment and educational decisions that are better suited to their area of interest rather than being based on environmental conformity.

Conclusions

The research findings of this study suggest that there might be manifestations of adult bullying that surface into adulthood when adults make choices for their vocations. In fact, many of the participants could recall clear facts about their childhood bullies, and could remember the feelings of anger and distress they experienced. Many of these participants chose their vocation due to a desire to help others. Coloroso (2001) makes the following statement in regards to bullying intervention: "Breaking the cycle of

violence involves more than merely identifying and stopping the bully. It requires that we examine why and how a child becomes a bully or a target of a bully as well as the role bystanders play in perpetuating the cycle" (p. xvi). This suggests that the areas of consideration when undertaking studies about bullying and career selections are multifaceted. In fact, Voors (2000) indicates in the following statement that society often portrays attitudes that lead to discriminatory tendencies: "Every child and adult deserves to be treated with respect. Yet every day our children absorb societal attitudes that not only minimize and deny but also sometimes embrace intolerance" (p. 13). It is important to recognize that the media, the home environment, pressure from peers, and other factors affect the perception of violence as an acceptable behavior.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected, it is evident that optimal environmental conditions that foster resiliency in individuals was possibly, for these participants, an important factor in reducing the long-term impact of childhood bullying. Consequently, bullying intervention and reconciliatory justice measures should comprise proficient conditions such as the ones found on the Resiliency Quiz in regards to providing students with opportunities to bond. They should also encompass teaching them positive life skills and conflict resolutions strategies, the provision of caring and support by teachers when they intervene in situations of bullying, the setting and communicating of high expectations from teachers and parents, as well as the creation of opportunities for meaningful participation. This could take the form of having the students participate in community charity events, fundraising, or helping the less fortunate through community service (Henderson, 2002). On the other hand, it is evident that, at times, it is difficult to remedy familial circumstances that hinder some individuals' ability to heal from being victimized by peers.

However, schools can alleviate this occurrence by acclimatizing after-school programs or opportunities for their students to contribute positively in their environment. This could include the creation of peer support groups for victims of bullying, individual career counseling sessions with experts in the community integrated into schools, or even the creation of student and parent councils to provide input into effective bullying intervention strategies (Lynch, 2002, Paragraph 1). In addition, in light of the fact that victims of bullying are often reluctant to come forward (O'Moore & Minton, 2005) it could be beneficial to implement bullying reporting protocols where the students could feel more secure, for example, by having positive student leaders in charge of observing the schoolyards for incidents of bullying, and of reporting their observations to a designated figure of authority.

To continue, many of the participants in this study chose their occupations based on a desire to aid others. This suggests that schools can assist the perpetrators and victims of bullying by providing prospects for their student bodies to assist in the reduction of school violence. One example of this is the Safe Schools Ambassadors Program (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.), in which the students are trained by an outlying community organization to promote and utilize positive conflict resolution skills in their schools.

As a final point, the analysis of the data has shown that two of the participants utilized strategies provided by their parents or teachers to resolve conflicts in their future occupations. Some researchers have also indicated that children who are

provided with positive conflict resolution strategies are more likely to have positive peer relationships (Coloroso, 2001; Patterson, 2005). This outlines the importance of implementing educational programming that promotes character education and positive character traits in their students. Many of the adaptations of later behaviors seem to be rooted in childhood. In addition, in light of the fact that many of the participants chose their current field due to a desire to help others, it would be of primary importance to provide students with information in regards to their post-secondary educational and career options. As such, scholars, parents, educators, and administrators should be provided with the necessary knowledge and tools to ensure that the children are benefiting from the most proficient educational environment possible. This maximizes their chances for future academic and employment stability.

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Women Survivors' Experiences of the Intersection of Abuse and Work[31]

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Career counsellors working with women who have had a history of abuse realize that many individual and social realities affect women's ability to enter the paid work force. Several authors contend that relational issues are a dominant theme for women in the ways in which they approach work situations (Flum, 2001; Josselson, 1992; Schultheiss, 2003). If primary relationships have been disrupted by abuse experiences, it is likely that issues and problems within a work context will also emerge (Flum, 2001). Components of physical, emotional, intellectual, and psychological well-being influence a woman's ability to work (Elliot & Reitsma-Street, 2003) and work becomes very important for women who are trying to rebuild their lives after experiencing various forms of abuse (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003).

Immediate support for women as they leave abusive situations is very important. Yet the effects of abuse create barriers that persist long after initial supports have been exhausted. Women who have experienced abuse encounter a number of specific life situations that often interact, overlap, and connect to create barriers to work. Experiences of assault by an intimate male partner and historical abuse combined with poverty, and current health conditions contribute to potential barriers when women seek to find and hold employment (Wells, 1994).

How are women giving meaning to the intersection of their abuse experiences and their work histories in light of the fact that problems may persist for them when it comes to finding and maintaining employment? How would they go about telling these stories? The present paper explores these questions.

Survivors and Work

Career choice and career development unfolds in particular ways for women; options and opportunities are influenced by a social context that includes balancing work and family, dealing with career interruptions, and diverse career patterns (Schreiber, 1998). Lent, Brown and Hackett (2000) describe Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as providing an important theoretical perspective from which to view women's situations in terms of work. An emphasis on variables such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals, as well as environmental variables that include family, friends, financial conditions, and the larger societal context allows this theory to be especially useful when examining how career unfolds for women.

Chronister and McWhirter (2003) have applied the SCCT model specifically to women who have been the target of domestic violence. Learning experiences were limited; opportunities to succeed in education and career related activities were low; and fear, anxiety, and depression influenced self-efficacy and future expectations. In the face of harassment in the workplace by abusers, absenteeism, impaired work

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performance, and lack of advancement, it was not hard to understand that women held negative outcome expectations.

Little attention has been paid to the long-term effects of domestic violence on employability (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Women who reported domestic violence were more likely to have had more jobs but a lower personal income with their socio-economic status dropping over time (Lloyd, 1997). Studies confirm that these women do seek employment but are unable to maintain it (Raphael & Tolman, 1997).Women who have experienced histories of abuse experience a complex set of circumstances and behaviours that may present multiple barriers to employment (Elliot & Reitsma-Street, 2003).

Psychological trauma contributes to hyper-arousal tendencies (Herman, 1997). Job interviews can create panic; women survivors may experience extreme levels of fear over appearing uneducated, being asked personal questions that are uncomfortable to answer, or having to explain problematic job histories (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Elevated levels of fear and anxiety can accompany job evaluation or testing situations (Gianakos, 1999). Stress related illnesses can result in time lost from work, education, or training and women often quit jobs or are fired due to their absences (Wells, 1994). Raphael and Tolman (1997) found rates as high as 56% of women reporting that they had missed school or training due to abuse. Abuse has robbed women of control over their lives and their bodies at a very deep level and this leads to feeling powerless (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Powerlessness can result in an inability to make choices about employment options, a lack of awareness that one can be assertive, the tendency to relinquish power, and difficulties with authority figures (Wells, 1994).

Gianakas (1999) writes that women who have unresolved issues resulting from abuse may behave inappropriately with male supervisors in work situations. Interpersonal conflicts with co-workers and supervisors can emerge in training and work settings (Prigoff, 2000) because of this inability to maintain healthy boundaries. Many studies indicate links between domestic violence, childhood abuse and substance misuse (Bala et al., 1998; Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Reitsma-Street, Schofield, Lund, & Kasting, 2001; Ullman & Brecklen, 2003; Wells, 1994). Women experience difficulty accessing treatment due to pressures related to obtaining childcare, lack of funds, and transportation problems (Schober & Annis, 1996).

Hall (2000) interviewed 20 urban, low-income women who had suffered multiple forms of childhood abuse and were in recovery treatment due to substance abuse. She analyzed the women's stories as they related to learning and work difficulties and found four domains of interest: a) problems with school because abuse in the home environment had compromised school as a source of learning and as an arena of peer socialization, b) a lack of adult skills related to relationship competency, money management, life planning, and parenting, c) problems around academic and health literacy, and d) problems related to alcohol and drug addiction. These four issues represented barriers to success in the job market for these women.

The above authors have raised questions about the ways in which women with abuse histories move past the initial supports offered to them to negotiate the world of work. The focus of the present study was to explore survivors' stories of the intersection of abuse and work experiences in a relational context.

Methodology

The research question, situated within an overarching framework of social constructionism, assumes an approach to career and work that is relational. Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum (2004) argue that this point of view leads to a particular leverage in understanding how people comprehend, construct, and act in relation to the challenges and opportunities of their working experience. Relationship and relational frameworks, woven through the stories these women constructed about career and the work process, provide many important points of interest for career counsellors working with women who have a history of abuse, as well as with women who have experienced other relational difficulties.

Narrative methodology honours and allows the unique voice and story of each participant to emerge. Bluestein, Kenna, Murphy, Devoy, and DeWine (2005) write that, "Narrative analyses are particularly informative to the psychology of work for individuals who have been outside of the mainstream of career development discourse" (p. 359). Career narratives in particular have the ability to identify aspects of the social realm that have enabled or constrained individuals (Cohen, Duberly, & Mallon, 2004).

Five women, recruited from a local employment program created for women with abuse histories participated in a 90 minute audio-taped one-on-one interview with the author. The women were asked to speak of how their past experiences of abuse had intersected with their abilities to find and maintain employment. As each woman sat down for the interview, she was asked, "When you heard me say that this research was about work and your experiences of abuse and I asked if you thought you might have a story to tell about that – what did you start to think about? What stories came to mind for you?" Work was defined in a broad sense as the carrier of meaning in their lives, not just paid work outside the home. During the interview, each woman was offered the opportunity to create a time line drawing in which she could illustrate the times in her life when abuse experiences intersected with her choice of work, her ability to obtain or retain work.

Frank (2000) writes of the ethical and intellectual responsibility to enter into relationship with the stories we elicit as researchers. The analysis of the women's narratives became an entering into the relational space created between the participant and the interviewer. This entailed working amidst several layers of interpretation – field notes taken throughout the process, tape recorded interviews, verbatim transcripts, time line drawings, and concept maps created to illustrate major themes.

Results

Becky[32]

Becky described verbal abuse from her father as a starting point that made her vulnerable to sexual abuse as a teen that then precipitated her slide into prostitution and criminality. Living within this belief system led to missed opportunities. Becky spoke of the people she had known and the type of work she had done as blinding her to any reality outside of criminality for a large portion of her life. "Most of my life has been spent in a different world and if it had been spent working at MacDonald's and going to

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[32] Pseudonyms were chosen by participants

Burger King and having a paper route it would be a whole different reality . . . If I hadn't had to put so much time into surviving the mental abuse and I hadn't put so much time into abusing myself, I wonder how much differently my life would be and I would be . . . I bet I'd be walking out proud of my resume and being comfortable with getting a job."

The four themes identified in Becky's story include: a fragmented sense of self, loss of opportunities, a lack of "job getting skills", and a desire to work for change with other women. Becky described issues related to a lack of support to become the self she might have been and a distorted sense of self worth due to her experiences. She describes her experience of assault at the hands of an intimate male partner as being her lowest point, "When I first got out of the situation, my sense of self, there was no sense of self, and I remember just describing it as 'I fragmented'." Loss of opportunity connected to her belief that she was living a life script that she did not have a hand in writing. Becky spoke of how her life was on a certain path she had no control over.

Becky struggled with not being able to visualize herself in the world of work and her lack of experience with any of the "getting a job skills" that most people begin to experience at a much younger age. She shared that she had never had to go on an interview, or sit across from someone who was judging her as capable to do a certain job; ". . . you don't have to apply to be a prostitute and they don't ask you to fill out a job application to be a drug dealer." When speaking about the world of work, Becky's story was filled with expressions of unfamiliarity, lack of vision, and fear. What Becky lacked was the recognition that many of the job skills she had acquired in her life were in fact transferable and she could draw on them now as she moved into a different type of work world.

A prominent theme in Becky's story was her desire to work to educate and help other women. She believed that her experiences of domestic violence have made her sensitive to this issue. She shared her desire to work in the field of social work and how experiences with other women had shown her that she was able to do that type of work. "I do have the ability, I know that. I am able to give people hope and I think that is a gift."

Jeannie

When Jeannie first began to recover from the shock of a break-up with a long-term, abusive partner, she spoke of waking up in the morning and thinking, "What am I going to do for myself today. Not for my son, or for anybody else, but for me." She spoke of not really knowing how to think about herself. She had been looking after her partner and her son for so long, that had constituted her work. Jeannie was amazed by the notion of being by herself and learning how to do things for herself. "I had to keep reminding myself, you know, that there was no one to tell me what to do." The realization that she was on her own was scary. "I was scared thinking how I would have to go out and look after myself and make money."

Four significant themes identified in Jeannie's story included: doing things just for herself, being taken by surprise and not being heard, feeling silenced in the face of abuse, and questions related to being ready to move forward with her life. As Jeannie told her story, she repeated a theme related to the number of times she was caught off guard by what was happening to her. She entered into a relationship after leaving her abusive partner only to find herself in another abusive relationship and it was a shock.

"He started hitting me and doing things and saying things I never expected." Jeannie also described speaking and not being heard. She told her abusive partner to leave and yet he remained, she broke off a subsequent abusive relationship only to find the man back in her apartment as if she had never spoken of ending their relationship. In not knowing and not being heard, Jeannie did not seem to be an active agent in her own life.

Jeannie spoke of being uncomfortable with talking about being a victim of the abuse. "I was so ashamed of what was happening to me and I didn't want anybody else to know about it . . . I didn't think it was a good feeling to have other people know these things." She worried about being part of an employment program for women with abuse histories because she knew she would have to talk about things that had happened to her.

Parts of Jeannie's story relate to her lack of readiness to move forward with her life. While doing the time-line drawing, Jeannie spoke about not remembering her childhood at all. These gaps in her memory and experience limit her ability to understand and move forward. When speaking of her long-term relationship with an abusive partner, Jeannie says, "I had a good life" and minimized how he had abused her. Jeannie did not seem ready to completely face these experiences and she shared a sense of limitation in her ability to be an active agent in her life and move forward.

Betty

Before the age of fourteen, when she ran away from home to live on the street, Betty had already undergone intense trauma. She became vulnerable to alcohol abuse. "I started drinking heavily when I was around that age. Cause I discovered that even through it tasted awful, it made everything okay." She was vulnerable to men in the workplace and ultimately she was vulnerable to a relationship with an abusive husband. When Betty finally got away from this violent and abusive marriage, barely with her life, her emotional and physical health was severely compromised. She fell into a pattern of addiction and depression that made work impossible. Betty spoke of surviving two major breakdowns and a serious suicide attempt. It took her a long time to begin to find her way out of the darkness.

The three themes identified in Betty's story: low self-esteem, ability to work, and lost opportunities, were not discrete units. These themes merged and overlapped. Long-range affects of abuse set Betty up to be vulnerable to other incidents of abuse, to addiction issues, and to the extreme distress she has lived with most of her life. The long-range affects of abuse overlap with the other themes and create intersections with her work experiences:

Betty' physical weakness and her drinking compromised jobs she was able to obtain after getting away from her abusive husband. She was unable to cope with a job she had in a truck factory where men harassed her. "I was still quite afraid of men at that point . . . I was trying to be tough, to prove to myself I could be around men . . . I just started getting more and more stressed . . . I still had the physical problems from the abuse in my back and legs . . . I would be on Demerol for the pain and still trying to work. I was drinking pretty heavily then." In subsequent attempts to obtain employment, Betty shared that her abuse affected her. "I don't have the confidence to apply for a job and when I did work at a job I couldn't handle the stress, physically or mentally, and I would need to go on sick leave."

When Betty was homeless and living on the street after losing her job at the truck factory, she ran into a friend who was able to connect her with a woman who let Betty stay at her house until she could qualify for social assistance. Betty shared that she was amazed this woman would open her home to her. She saw herself as the "scum of the streets" and wondered why anyone would let her live in their home. The state of Betty's self-esteem seriously impeded her ability to see herself as capable or able to work.

Melanie

For much of her life, Melanie had defined herself in terms of her past abuse experiences. She alluded to the many implications: her lifelong eating disorder, relationship issues, questionable choices with work, and a sense of fear. Speaking of her work experiences, "I think that one of the major ways my abuse has affected work is in how I feel about myself and then how that translates to the type of work I have chosen and how that reinforces those feelings." She chose cleaning work, being around other people's dirty things, seeing herself as an observer, standing on the outside of life looking in. "That explains a lot of my life and it comes from the sexual abuse and never feeling like I could really participate in my own life."

The four themes that connected Melanie's experiences of abuse and her work history included: being defined by her abuse experiences, her perceptions of being unsafe in the world of work, paths not taken and opportunities lost, and how healing became her work.

Melanie defined her work life as having been guided by her strong attraction to unsafe work experiences that served to reinforce what she already felt about herself: that her purpose in life was to be used by others. Many of her work experiences are seen through this lens: out delivering papers all by herself or working at a summer resort out in the middle of nowhere. "Now I see that I was choosing things that weren't necessarily safe."

Melanie named many opportunities she missed because of her abuse. She felt regrets about missed opportunities in her relationship with her husband because of the sexual abuse issues she was dealing with. "I wish I could have allowed him to be my ally." Opportunities missed in the world of work figure largely in Melanie's story. "If I hadn't had this idea that work was where I would get used and feeling like that was all I was good for . . . maybe I could have chosen a different path with work." She also reflected that dealing with sexual abuse meant she could not work full time and have access to the money necessary to pursue certain paths. ". . . maybe I could have just kept working somewhere and had the money to do some training – maybe then some of those other paths would have been possible."

Very early in her interview Melanie made a telling statement, "When I think about the question of abuse and work, in some ways I have started to perceive that my healing from the abuse is a big part of my work." For a number of years she had been in counselling and had been part of many healing programs and experiences. Melanie's healing work became full-time work. "I couldn't have got to where I am now without having gone through the blackness and the searching and the healing. It was worthwhile, all of it."

Cinnamon

A dominant theme that emerged from Cinnamon's story was her struggle to understand and deal with an unhealthy relationship with her mother. Cinnamon spoke of always trying to please her mother and this had an impact on work and intimate relationships over her life span. She described the traditional mindset her mother held, "It's the whole religious thing, you know . . . my background and my mom's was very traditional . . . my mom wouldn't have even had a way to get what was happening to me." These early experiences and family values created vulnerability for Cinnamon that she connected with unhealthy choices in the work environment and an abusive marriage.

Cinnamon's story generated four themes that connected her experiences of abuse with her experiences of work: family of origin issues, how these issues influenced both work and relationships, loss of confidence and belief in herself, and current feelings about work. Living out a script of trying to please her mother was transferred to her work life. "I was always trying to please the owner . . .it all got overwhelming, I had a breakdown, everything fell apart." Cinnamon shared that when she met her husband she transferred all the control and people pleasing to him and, " . . . just went on doing the same thing . . . " She talked about the links between what she went through in her marriage and what she went through in her childhood with her mother, "I guess you could say I married my mom."

Cinnamon's experiences of abuse in her marriage reached out to influence what she could envision for herself in the future. She described a marriage in which she was isolated; her husband did not like her to have friends or speak to her family on the phone or to work outside of the home. "I'm still in isolation in some ways . . . years of living like that takes a toll on you . . ."

What Cinnamon had gone through was characterized by what she had lost. When she previously worked in management, she speaks of having confidence. She could attack problems and find solutions, now decision making is difficult. "I don't have confidence in my abilities anymore . . . confidence is a big challenge right now."

Cinnamon's relationship with the world of work is fraught with fear, reluctance, and distrust. She is afraid to go back to work, ". . . going back to work, I'm just not ready. That is why I'm choosing school right now. . . " The pressure to get out and find work made her feel as though she had moved from one controlling environment, her marriage, to another. "I still feel like I don't have a say. I have a bit more control but I'm still not calling the shots on my life and it's frustrating."

Discussion

The five women in this study experienced barriers in terms of being able to find and maintain employment, a prerequisite for forging a work identity that is capable of providing an ongoing sense of agency. Isaacson and Brown (2000) state that work is the means of relating to society and it can provide status, recognition, and affiliation. Though work may come to serve these functions for some of these women, they did not speak of work in this way when they told their stories. Work was going to be something to figure out (Becky), something never done before, but now necessary (Jeannie), something not likely to be done again (Betty), something to be envisioned as many different paths even though the way is blocked (Melanie), or something that is feared

(Cinnamon). Their experiences of abuse continue to effect their views of and participation in the world of work.

Women who have experienced violence and abuse are at risk for mental or physical health problems (Elliot & Reitsma-Street, 2003). This was clear in Betty's story: she had not had a paying job in twelve years; and it seemed unlikely, in view of her fragile state, that employment would be part of her future. Betty's struggle to deal with her pain, both physical and emotional, by self-medicating with alcohol relates to studies that have linked childhood abuse, domestic violence, and addiction issues (Bala et. al., 1998; Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Reitsma-Street et. al., 2001; Ullman &Brecklen, 2003; Wells, 1994) fit with

Melanie spoke of spending the past eight years working full-time on her own healing. Though she had many dreams of what she might do in terms of work in the future she also reported feeling very stuck and unable to move on. The emotional affects of her abuse experiences still had a powerful hold on her. Melanie continued to experience a number of stress reactions which create further barriers to employment (Gianakos, 1999).

Loss of valuable educational and work experiences played a large role in blocking potential work opportunities and options. Women who have abuse histories have often experienced limitations in learning experiences. Opportunities to succeed in education and career can be few; fear, anxiety, and depression influence future expectations (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Becky spoke of school as difficult for her due to abuse at home and the way in which her future expectations were skewed based on negative messages of verbal abuse she was taking in from her father. Betty ran away from home at a very early age, ending up homeless and on the street; her educational options seriously compromised. Melanie spoke of not being able to pursue educational opportunities because of her abuse. Cinnamon left home before graduating and had to finish Grade twelve through night school classes.

Three of the women spoke of lost opportunities related to work. Becky had many work experiences but she did not have work experiences she felt she could put on a resume. Chronister and McWhirter (2003) report that job interview situations can create panic for women who have experienced abuse, this may relate to having to answer personal questions that are uncomfortable or having to explain problematic job histories.

Jeannie had simply never needed to work outside the home. Her partner had always gone out and made the money; she just assumed her life would continue on that path. Women with abuse histories often come from backgrounds that are characterized by rigid gender stereotypes about work-role attitudes (Brown, Reedy, Fountain, Johnson, & Dischiser, 2000). Jeannie simply never envisioned a time when she would have to look after herself financially and this was a scary thought for her now.

Melanie lost significant opportunities to pursue work that might have better suited her because, in her opinion, she did not receive the support to look at other options. She also relates the ways in which abuse experiences blocked educational opportunities. Her sense of herself as "garbage" and her pattern of choosing only work that would reaffirm this belief blocked many other work experiences. She also speaks about the time involved in healing and how this has meant lost chances to sustain employment over time and save money that could have gone toward education.

Loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy was another common theme in the women's stories. Abuse and trauma experiences have an affect on self-esteem and one's

basic sense of self-worth (Rosenbloom & Williams, 1999). Brown et al. (2000) contend that low self-esteem is the most significant barrier to employability and the barrier that contributes the most to lower levels of self-efficacy. Employment success is related to high levels of self-efficacy (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003; Gianakos, 1999) and the literature indicates that abuse lowers these levels (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003; Brown, et al., 2000). Sustaining a healthy self-concept under the circumstances of abuse is almost impossible (Ibrahim & Herr, 1997). Becky shared her distorted sense of self-worth due to her experiences in the sex-trade. Betty spoke, quite poignantly, of how she had no self-worth; she thought she was the "scum of the streets." Cinnamon compares her confidence levels now with how she saw herself in the past and feels she has lost so much. Melanie described the ways in which abuse destroyed her sense of herself as capable of following certain employment paths in her life. Jeannie's reference to "doing things just for herself, for the first time" and the struggle that has been indicates a lack of a clear sense of self-efficacy in the world.

Abuse compromises interpersonal choices. Schultheiss (2003) writes about the need to take an in-depth look at the role of relationship in one's life in order to determine how these influence one's work experiences. Townsend and McWhirter (2005) suggest that connectedness is often seen as a central organizing principle and a critical theme for women. When connections have been disrupted because of relational violence, work relationships are also affected. Betty reflects that she would not have chosen her "crazy" husband if she had not experienced early childhood abuse. Cinnamon spoke of having ended up with her abusive husband because of a life long habit of people pleasing rooted in her childhood experiences. Becky believed she was targeted for sexual abuse in high school due to her earlier abuse experiences. The cumulative affects of these abuse experiences have direct impacts on work ability and choices.

Loss of voice and isolation was a further theme expressed across participants. Phillips and Daniluk (2004) write that women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse report feeling different, alone, and invisible. Jeannie spoke of feeling voiceless; Betty's severely abusive husband separated her from all relationships, both work and social; and Cinnamon's husband separated her from her friends, creating a long-term problem in terms of trusting people and making new contacts. Melanie's struggle within the actual interview to find words to describe her experiences seemed an aspect of silencing; her sense of being different and isolated is clear in her depiction of various work experiences.

Abuse experiences resulted in a serious loss of a sense of safety. In Judith Herman's (1992) recovery from trauma model, re-establishing a sense of being safe in the world is the first stage of recovery. A dominant theme in both Melanie and Cinnamon's stories is their fear and the way in which they no longer feel safe in the world, including the world of work. Chronister and McWhirter (2003) describe what happens to a woman when abuse has robbed her of control of her life and her body; she becomes quite powerless to move about in the world with confidence. Powerlessness can lead to an inability to make employment choices, a lack of ability to be assertive, and a tendency to relinquish power (Wells, 1994).

A social constructivist approach to career that emphasizes the whole person in the ever changing context of their life (Peavy, 1995; Savickas, 1995) provides an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the five women interviewed for this research. It is not hard to visualize the ways in which their life context had

influenced how they understood work. Their stories illustrate the interaction of the many factors involved in approaching, making, and maintaining work choices. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, et al., 2000) fits particularly well with the stories of the participants in this research. In each of their stories it was obvious that they brought many issues related to cognitive and personal variables (i.e. past performances, emotionality, vicarious learning, and verbal persuasions) from the past, most of which had affected their sense of self-efficacy, into their present reality of having to negotiate the world of work. SCCT also emphasizes contextual and environmental factors. An upbringing that emphasized traditional sex-role stereotypes (Cinnamon), an identity formed through adolescence by a verbally abusive father (Becky), and a sense that work was an arena in which you were used like a piece of garbage (Melanie), create very real and specific contexts for the women who are living with these past experiences. An emphasis on context also allows counsellors to focus on issues surrounding relationship.

Three of the women interviewed had gone through long waiting periods in order to obtain safe housing. Low income women experience major difficulties meeting basic housing needs and there is a serious lack of supportive housing for women who have been victims of various forms of abuse (Reitsma-Street et. al., 2001). Abused women consistently rate issues regarding housing, affordable childcare, and transportation as their priorities (Elliot & Reitsma-Street, 2003).

In all of the participant's stories, the issue of being ready for various experiences emerged. Becky spoke of many fears but ended on a note of hope and readiness to move forward. Jeannie was at a stage of envisioning possibilities for herself but her story seemed to indicate a need for more time and support before she would be able to move forward with a sense of self-efficacy. Betty's story indicated a readiness to enter the employment program; she was able to take advantage of counselling opportunities in relation to her abuse experiences. Melanie had accessed many support and healing programs but her story indicates that she was still not ready to move forward. Cinnamon admits that the employment program came too soon for her, she was not ready to re-enter the world of work.

Herman (1992) writes that the final stage of recovery from abuse and trauma is the desire to reconnect. This desire is in fact the core of recovery. Some women may adopt what Herman describes as a survivor mission. They feel called upon to engage in changing the wider world in some way. They focus their energy on helping others who have experienced similar abuse as a possible means of transcending their own experience and gaining personal power. All five of the participants spoke directly of their desire to work for change in the world, specifically with other women and children. For Becky this has to do with social work and helping other women get out of abusive situations. Jeannie had managed, through everything that happened to her, to maintain a volunteer position working with single moms and she experienced this to be a safe and beneficial place for her. Betty shared a very well-thought out plan to create a soup kitchen once a month for women and children. Experiences of feeling unsafe in such situations have created a desire to provide other women and children with a safe place to be together. Melanie spoke of her desire to carry on with her education and pursue a career in counselling. Cinnamon spoke quite passionately of the need for schools to begin teaching children conflict resolution skills and how to stand up for themselves in an effective manner. This was in direct response to her reflections on her own lifelong struggle to find her voice and stand up for herself.

Implications for Career Counselling Practice and Policy

Counselling women about career and work choices is counselling in the context of their whole lives, for work is rooted in life. Bluestein et. al.'s (2005) contention that work is embedded in complex layers of social, cultural, and political factors points to a need for career counsellors to consider how these layers and contexts have affected all areas of a woman's life. The social constructivist career model makes it clear that life-context matters (Peavy, 1995). Women who have experienced abuse bring that specific context to the career counselling setting.

Aspects of trauma counselling highlight the importance of hearing women's stories, but also the ways in which these stories interact with everything else that is happening in women's lives. A constructivist framework for career counselling is well suited to helping counsellors recognize how experiences of abuse have influenced other important areas of a woman's life. Mahoney (2003) writes that a constructivist therapist experiences clients as intentional agents in their own lives; as active in their own meaning-making process. The constructivist counsellor works to collaborate and facilitate the client as an agent in her own life, holds affirmation and hope for the client at times when she may not be able to, and comes to understand and know the client from within her own belief system.

Constructivist counselling also conceptualizes human experience as complex, a lifelong experiment in which the client is neither a prisoner of the past nor totally free to choose any future path (Mahoney, 2003). Themes in the participant's stories link to some of the newest research on complex trauma (Briere & Scott, 2006). All five of the women interviewed described life situations that involved ongoing experiences of abuse. Briere and Scott (2006) describe complex trauma as severe, prolonged, and repeated trauma that takes on a chronic, developmental etiology: the result of a wide range of outcomes that vary from person to person as a function of their unique trauma exposure; for example, age of first trauma experience, issues related to disrupted attachment, and subsequent revictimization. Childhood abuse issues can lead to maladaptive adolescent behaviour (substance abuse, inappropriate sexual behaviour, ongoing emotional or mental health issues) which in turn result in vulnerability to additional victimization, which leads to further responses and behaviours leading in turn further risk.

When working with this population it is important that career counsellors have an understanding of the complex nature of trauma, especially as it may relate to early childhood exposure to traumatic experiences. Although Betty's story was severe in terms of the cumulative nature of her trauma experiences and the ways in which they made her vulnerable to further victimization, her story is in no way unusual. The types of cumulative abuse that many of the participants shared form a life context that influenced all areas of their lives, including their ability to work. By recognizing that career counselling is counselling for life, counsellors realize that to facilitate readiness for work many issues need to be addressed.

Women who have experienced abuse need opportunities to learn about themselves, the world of work, and the options they might have for their future (Gianakos, 1999). Simply learning skills is not enough for this population of women (Wells, 1994). Understanding the context of their abuse and how it has influenced their decision-making is also important (Belknap, 1999). Elliot and Reitsma-Street (2003) argue against programs that pressure vulnerable women to take any job that comes

along without addressing the significant stresses and barriers they face. Being ready to access specific support experiences is crucial for the success of these endeavours. As is seen in these women's stories, when recovering from abuse experiences, readiness is a complex process

The literature and the individual women's stories support the need for long-term targeted support for women who have experienced abuse and are now moving toward re-entering the world of work. Although the targeted employment program all five women took part in was a positive experience, fourteen weeks was not long enough. Programs also need to address the multiple issues these women face: the need for vocational training, education, employment coaching and support, housing, childcare, legal advice, assistance with welfare, and skills training for independent living (Moe & Bell, 2004).

Programs need to be holistic in the ways they view women. Models of empowerment, such as the one suggested by Chronister and McWhirter (2003) emphasize: (a) collaboration between facilitators and clients, (b) paying attention to context which includes educational levels, attitudes to work, affects of abuse, family demands, culture, economics, and access to community supports, (c) an active process of recognizing the skills and resources the woman already has, (d) helping women become critical thinkers about their own life situations and move toward exercising more personal agency, and (e) connecting women with the wider community.

There is a particular need to pay close attention to factors of *readiness* for change in a woman's life. If employment programs are offered before women are ready, they may not be able to take advantage of the opportunities for education and skill development being offered. This readiness is related to a process of recovery from abuse experiences that is hard to place on a specific timeline. Lock-step programs that focus on one particular model of career preparation or readiness may not work for this population of women. Appropriate assessment and programs designed to meet individual women's needs would seem to make the most sense. The stories of the five participants in this study indicate different profiles of readiness that is unrelated to the time away from abusive experiences. Some women would benefit from supportive employment internship programs, others are still in need of counselling to deal with the long-term affects of abuse, and yet others may need to enter into the world of employment and concentrate on the healing personal work involved in abuse recovery later.

Policy makers must also pay attention to the critical issue of access to safe and affordable housing for women who are attempting to rebuild their lives. Ensuring that women can find housing is an essential component of their safety and the safety of their dependent children (Moe & Bell, 2004). In extensive research directed at housing issues and policy options for women living in urban poverty in three Canadian cities, Reitsma-Street, et. al. (2001) found that there is a serious lack of supportive housing for women who have been the victims of domestic violence. This was echoed by participants in this study.

The five women who narrated the ways in which abuse intersected with their experiences of work spoke of many barriers in their lives. At the same time, their stories shone with light and hope. They were determined to move beyond abuse experiences and though they were at various points in the process of doing that, their individual courage and determination to not be defined solely by these experiences was clear. Many of them reflected on how far they had come on their individual journeys of

recovery and all had hopes and dreams for the future. Betty's words speak of this hope when she talks of why she is telling her story, ". . . maybe it will give some woman hope that you can still have quality of life even after being devastated, you know . . . you can still follow your dreams."

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