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The (Re)production of Violence and Trauma in High Schools:
How Institutional Policies and Practices Influence Teacher and Staff Decision Making

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

by

Melanie Sonsteng-Person

2022

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The (Re)production of Violence and Trauma in High Schools:
How Institutional Policies and Practices Influence Teacher and Staff Decision Making

by

Melanie Sonsteng-Person

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Todd M. Franke, Chair

Research shows that violence exposure, trauma, and education are inextricably linked, cyclically influencing one another and impacting adolescents' current and future well-being. These experiences are caused and often exacerbated by racism embedded within institutions. This complex relationship between trauma and exposure to violence negatively impacts adolescents' behavioral and academic functioning within schools. Experiences of trauma and post-traumatic stress impact adolescents throughout their lives, trickling down into schools perpetuating the inequities that uphold marginalization. While the impact of violence exposure and trauma on individual youth has been clearly delineated, research has failed to highlight their institutional causes. Understood as an individual problem, the concept of trauma creates and maintains a deficit framework that blames students and their communities for experiencing systemic causes of harm. Through this pathological approach to addressing violence-related trauma, harmful

policies and practices within schools are masked. Research that is unclear on the complex ways institutions reproduce or even create harm renders the systemic causes of violence-related trauma invisible. To challenge the individual deficit approach to trauma-informed care in schools, a constructivist grounded theory multiple case study design was used to explore how teachers and school staff perceive, are impacted by, and respond to the manifestation of trauma derived from community violence exposure in three High Schools in Los Angeles County, California. Findings draw from critical race theory and healing justice to inform a conceptual framework that describes how individual responses to trauma can be situated within institutional power dynamics. The framework from this study details the nexus between teacher education programs, district policies, resources, staff biases, and collective well-being through four main themes: (1) these teachers and school staff determine what constituted trauma for a student, even with minimal information; (2) individual experiences embedded within institutional factors encourage paternalism as the main response to trauma in schools; (3) this response leads to the demoralization of those caring for students; and (4) combined, each of these factors holds a cumulative impact on current and future students. I conclude by discussing the need to identify institutional causes of trauma to understand better and meaningfully address the (re)production of violence-related trauma in schools.

The dissertation of Melanie Sonsteng-Person is approved.

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2022

DEDICATION PAGE

To all the schools I have ever known and loved. It is because of this love that, as James Baldwin states, “I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

To my PaPa, my greatest supporter and the hardest worker I know, who was once a maintenance supervisor for the universities that I am now invited to speak in. Your dedication to education has poured forth in your constant love and support during my academic journey. I hope that my life has become everything you dreamed of.

To my daughter, may this piece be one step closer to a better future for you. A future where you will be safe in the spaces you so loudly take up.

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- 2021 **Sonsteng-Person, M.**, Ritterbusch, A., Mikell, D., Jordan, S., & Brock-Petroshius, K. *Centering Social Justice in the Social Work Research Process: Reflections from Doctoral Students’ Participatory Action Research Initiatives in Southern California*. Society for Social Work Research. Virtual.
- 2020 **Sonsteng-Person, M.**, Richards-Schuster, K. Teixeira, S., Ritterbusch, A., and Mikell, D. *Advancing Justice or Tokenism? Critical Discussion of the Past and Future of Participatory Approaches to Research in Social Work*. Society for

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<https://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2020/webprogram/Session11107.html>
- 2019 “Educational Implications of Community Violence & Trauma: How Los Angeles Teachers are Dealing with Effects in the Classroom.” National Center for School Mental Health. Austin, Texas.
<http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/media/SOM/Microsites/NCSMH/Documents/ASMH-2019/Presentations-2019/CS-1.09.-Educational-Implications-of-Community-Violence-&-Trauma.pdf>

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation was implemented, analyzed, and written during the COVID-19 global pandemic, the continued murders of Black people at the hands of police, and countless mass school shootings across the U.S. It has been a time of immense peril, resulting in an overwhelming call for medical and mental health resources across the country. Amid these urgent calls for support, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association jointly declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health in October of 2021 (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2021). The collective declaration highlighted the simultaneous impact of the pandemic and fight for racial justice, both of which disproportionately impacted the mental health among children and adolescents of color. While the agencies attributed this disproportionality to systemic racism, they failed to urge policy makers to address it within their demands. Instead, the “national emergency” urged policy makers to address child and adolescent mental health by increasing access to services through a variety of means, one of which included supporting effective school-based mental health models (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2021). The demands failed to recognize the need to heal the systems and ideologies that *cause* harm, and rather focused largely on fragmented and insufficient short-term remedies. This joint statement perfectly embodies current conceptualizations and, in turn, responses to trauma; individualized “solutions” to complex social problems.

Across the fields of criminal justice, education, psychology, and social work there is an urgency among researchers and practitioners to determine how to properly address trauma among adolescents. This is due to the fact that trauma has well been established as an outcome of violence exposure (Boxer et al., 2014) and trauma, in turn, has been cited as a main risk factor

for future violence perpetration (Cuevas et al., 2013). Criminal legal system researchers find that adolescents who hear about, witness, and are personally a victim of violence within the community can experience post-traumatic stress symptoms (Fowler et al., 2009), or intense physical and psychological stress reactions (SAMSHA, 2014). Further, psychological research highlights that both trauma and violence exposure result in decreased cognitive functioning (Butler et al., 2018; McCoy et al., 2015; Thomason et al., 2017). This complex relationship between trauma and exposure to violence has been shown to negatively impact adolescents' behavioral and academic functioning within schools (Mathews et al., 2009; McGill et al., 2014) and in some cases lead to future criminalization (Orfield et al., 2004). Experiences of trauma and post-traumatic stress impact adolescents throughout various points in their lives, trickling down into schools perpetuating the inequities that uphold marginalization. While the impact of violence exposure and trauma on individual youth has been clearly delineated, research has a limited understanding of their institutional causes.

Research shows that violence exposure, trauma, and education are inextricably linked, cyclically influencing one another and impacting adolescents' current and future well-being. These experiences are caused, and often exacerbated, by racism embedded within institutions. For example, there are stark disproportionalities in the racial make-up of neighborhoods that are reported to have higher rates of violence (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016). Systemic racism and its resulting poverty have been linked with higher crime rates among Black and Latinx communities (Burrell et al., 2021; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016). This is also reflected in forms of behavioral punishment within schools, such as suspensions and expulsions, that result in decreased academic achievement (McGill et al., 2014; Voison et al., 2016). Of concern, there is a documented racial gap in suspension and expulsion rates and therefore academic outcomes among Black and Latinx students (Losen & Skiba, 2010;

Phillippo & Crutchfield, 2021). Furthermore, researchers argue that children of color are more likely to be identified as traumatized, even when they are not (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020; Love, 2019). As such, even the understanding of trauma becomes a systemic phenomenon rooted in race (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). While trauma-informed care in schools seeks to mitigate these punitive responses to student behavior by providing traumatized students with mental health treatment, it largely ignores the systemic causes of the trauma (Ginwright, 2018).

Recognizing the widespread impact of trauma, scholars have sought to understand how it can best be addressed in the hopes of ceasing future harms. Educational researchers continue to piecemeal individual psychological understandings of trauma together to inform trainings, programs, and policies with the goal of decreasing student criminalization and increasing academic success following trauma exposure (Loomis et al., 2021; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2020). Yet, what has resulted is a misaligned understanding and treatment of trauma within schools. Although the research summarized above relays the extent in which individual children may be harmed by exposures to violence and trauma, it fails to fully address the systemic factors that influence this harm. Although SAHMSA (2014) outlines 6 aspects of trauma informed approaches (safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and culture) a systematic review has found that there are several definitions of what trauma informed approaches are resulting in an inconsistent use or operationalization of trauma-informed approaches (Thomas et al., 2019), making it unclear what schools are doing when they claim they are adopting trauma-informed approaches (Maynard et al., 2019). While some trauma-informed models take a broad ecological approach to addressing harm (Chafouleas et al., 2015; Kataoka et al., 2018; SAHMSA, 2014) schools continue to address societal inequities by adapting trauma treatments. When an individual approach to trauma-informed care is used, it runs the risk of placing blame of institutional harm onto students, families, and teachers (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). With a

focus on the individual identification and treatment of trauma, schools fail to address the systemic causes of harm embedded within the educational system. Recognizing this, Khasnabis and Goldin (2020) argue that we need to shift our focus of trauma to the systems level through what they term “systemically trauma-informed practice.” However, without a conceptual framework for understanding how trauma is embedded within schools, attempts to systemically address said trauma run the risk of failure.

When trauma is understood as an individual problem, the concept of trauma creates and maintains a deficit framework that blames students and their communities for experiencing systemic causes of harm. Through this pathological approach to understanding, and therefore addressing, violence-related trauma harmful policies and practices within schools and the surrounding community are masked. Research that lacks an understanding of the intricate ways in which institutions reproduce or even create harm renders the systemic causes of violence-related trauma invisible. The findings from this study delineate the process through which schools identify and respond to student trauma as well as highlight both the individual and school factors that can (re)produce harm. With these findings, I argue that without addressing harmful policies and practices throughout the educational system, violence will continue to be (re)produced.

Current Study

Violence exposure, in its various forms, can hurt children psychologically and ultimately alter their future trajectories by creating patterns of anger, aggression, self-destructive behaviors, isolation, rejection, and academic and employment failure (U.S. Department of Justice, Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012). If these wounds continue to go unnoticed and unaddressed children, and the communities in which they live can potentially be trapped in the cycle of violence and trauma. Psychological research identifies that exposure to trauma during

childhood can interfere with students' learning and performance in school. Concurrently, education and criminal justice research highlights the racial disparities in educational outcomes and community violence exposure. We need to integrate more multidisciplinary, community-partnered, and race conscious approaches in schools. To challenge the individual deficit approach to trauma-informed care in schools, a constructivist grounded theory multiple case study design was used to explore how teachers and school staff perceive, are impacted by, and respond to the manifestation of trauma derived from community violence exposure in three High Schools in Los Angeles County, California. **This study** addresses the following **aims**:

Aim 1: Explore how and why high school teachers and school staff in Los Angeles County define the ways that trauma has manifested in their schools.

Aim 2: Identify individual and school level patterns or differences in teacher and school staff responses to student trauma.

Aim 3: Understand what institutional factors influence the way that teachers and school staff define and respond to student experiences of violence-related trauma.

Significance

This study advances trauma-informed care by highlighting institutional pathways that cause or worsen student trauma. Analysis of interviews with teachers and school staff describe the nexus between teacher education programs, district policies, resources, staff experiences, and collective well-being in schools. Findings challenge the individual-deficit approach to trauma by illuminating how the ideologies, resources, hierarchies, policies, and practices influence how schools identify and address students' violence-related trauma. In order to meaningfully address harm among children and adolescents, implications call for schools to dismantle the institutional conditions that (re)produce violence and trauma throughout communities and schools.

In this dissertation I first provide an overview of the theoretical concepts and bodies of literature on which I draw. I then describe the constructivist grounded theory multisite case study design that informs this dissertation, and I provide a description of the context of the three high schools and the participants in this study. Next, I outline the following findings: (1) teachers and school staff ultimately hold the power of defining what constitutes trauma; (2) individual identification of trauma, combined with institutional factors, encourages paternalism as the *only* response to trauma in schools; (3) this response leads to the demoralization of those “caring” for students; and (4) combined, each of these factors holds a cumulative impact on current and future students. I conclude by discussing the need to identify institutional causes of trauma in order to better understand and meaningfully address the consistent (re)production of violence-related trauma in schools.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Systemic racism has led to an increase in violence in Black and Latinx communities (Burrell et al., 2021). These systemic issues extend to schools as research highlights disproportionate behavioral and academic outcomes among Black and Latinx youth (Losen et al., 2015; Love, 2019). Of concern, disparities in educational outcomes among youth living within communities that are burdened with high rates of violence are striking. Children exposed to violence are at increased risk for difficulties in school such as misbehavior, low GPA, poor school attendance, and decreased standardized test scores (Busby et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2016; Hurt et al., 2001; Loomis et al., 2020; McGill et al., 2014; Voison et al., 2016). All of which impact educational attainment and future academic success. While research identifies post-traumatic stress as a mediator between community violence exposure and poor school performance (Mathews et al., 2009; McGill et al., 2014), there is a limited theoretical understanding of how schools understand and respond to violence-related trauma in schools.

Post-traumatic stress or “experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions” (SAHMSA, 2014) impacts children’s cognitive functioning and, in turn, behavior in the classroom (Alisic et al., 2012). Educational research has begun to examine the role schools play in exacerbating students’ trauma. The initial symptoms of exposure to trauma in school settings, such as acting out and defiance, often lead to discipline that can potentially retraumatize students in the school setting (Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016). Research indicates that behavioral management techniques currently used in classrooms to reduce unsafe or disruptive behavior can be triggering for traumatized students and result in an increase in dysregulation and reactivity (Hodgon et al., 2013). Furthermore, students that exhibit trauma symptoms are likely to be

misabeled with a learning disorder or behavior problems like conduct or attention problems (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; Goodman et al., 2012).

Schools can be a critical place to provide positive and safe spaces for their students and mitigate the impact of trauma exposure (Hobbs et al., 2019). However, exposure to violence within the community, combined with current school responses to traumatized students, can negatively impact students and families, particularly among communities of color. This violence-related trauma is intensified by experiences of structural violence and trauma, particularly amid COVID-19 and the unrest surrounding police murders of Black men and women. As Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006) identify, individual wellness cannot occur if the systems and communities in which individuals interact with are unwell. Schools are a microcosm of the political and social environments in which they exist, therefore students' behavioral and academic outcomes are influenced by both the educational system and the community in which it is located (Ginwright, 2016). As such, it becomes necessary to identify the ways in which structural harm is embedded and upheld within education. Identifying these systemic issues is a necessary first step to understanding what transformation is needed for schools, and in turn individual staff and students, to heal. This study critically analyzes the role of education institutions - by which I mean the economic, social, and training/preparation factors that underly public schools at the federal, state, and local levels- when identifying and responding to student trauma.

This chapter combines the fields of education, criminal legal, psychology, and social work to present a critical review of current understandings- and responses to- violence exposure, trauma, and educational outcomes. To do this, I will first outline the theoretical framework used to guide the analysis of the literature as well as the design and analysis of this study. Next, the review clearly defines community violence exposure and its impact on educational and mental

health outcomes. An examination of trauma's effects on educational outcomes will follow leading into research that assesses the relationship between community violence exposure, post-traumatic stress, and educational outcomes. Lastly, current school responses to violence-related trauma are discussed. The literature review concludes with a statement of the research problem.

Theoretical Framework

The combination of Critical Race Theory in education and healing justice is used to theorize the impact of teacher and staff decision making when identifying and responding to students' violence-related trauma while simultaneously highlighting the possibility of creating schools that act as healing spaces. In particular, I draw from education-specific Critical Race Theory to (1) critically frame current research focused on violence within the community and trauma by taking a race-conscious approach, (2) guide the study design that centers context through a multisite case study, and (3) inform the goal of data analysis to understand how trauma is both recreated and challenged through teacher and school staff decision making. This conceptualization works in conjunction with the healing justice framework as this study highlights how schools, staff, and students can transform harmful educational practices to inform individual and collective healing. I drew on the healing justice framework to (1) understand the current iteration of trauma-informed care in schools, (2) create an interview guide that identified both instances of harm as well as how participants care for themselves and their students, and, (3) frame implications to identify potential policies and practices to be implemented to ensure healing can occur within the confines of the educational system.

Critical Race Theory

The current study is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) as it guides the understanding of the individual and institutional factors that influence responses to student's violence-related trauma. In particular, CRT in education is used to analyze how institutions

influence individual actions and, in turn, how individual actions uphold institutions. CRT was created out of the need for a “theorizing countespace” among legal scholars in the 1980’s (Cabrera, 2018). Its original tenants argued that: (1) racism is embedded within everyday life and not an individual phenomenon; (2) laws that advance the interests of people of color are only passed when they also advance the interests of white people; (3) as race is socially constructed, racialized groups do not have any inherent characteristics; (4) marginalization occurs in unique ways across varying racialized groups; (5) similarly, there are intersecting identities among racialized groups that work together to further reinforce oppression; and (6) racialized individuals have unique experiences that differ from those of white individuals (Cabrera, 2018). While CRT was originally created as a counterlegal scholarship it has been adapted as a way to understand the system of education (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

In its first iteration, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that race is a substantial factor in explaining education inequality. They highlight three key tenants of critical race theory in education: (1) race is a significant determinant of inequality in the U.S., (2) society is based on property rights in the U.S., and (3) race and property create an analytic tool through which to understand social and school inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). First, they state that structural racism causes poverty and, in turn, inequality in schooling. Through this tenant they argue that race, and with it racism, significantly explains the high rates of suspension, expulsion, and academic failure among Black and Latinx males. Next, they argue that the ability to “define, possess, and own property” (pg. 53) is a core tenant of U.S. history and manifests in schools through property taxes and curriculum. In particular, curriculum encompasses not only the difference in courses offered but also the difference in access to materials that ensure students have the tools necessary to learn. Finally Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) argue that the intersection of race and property is the key underpinning of CRT in education. In particular, they

use Harris's (1993) "Whiteness as property" argument that possession has been defined to only include the cultural practices of White people in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In a later article, Ladson-Billings (1998) applies CRT to the education components of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. First, curriculum is critically analyzed as "master script" that upholds White supremacy and through a color-blind perspective, waters down or erases people of color. White supremacy is the belief that white people are a superior race and should dominate other racial or ethnic groups. Furthermore, it highlights the disparities in access to enriching curriculum in white, or suburban schools, compared to Black, or Urban schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Second, instructional strategies are taught to teachers as universal teaching skills that should work for all students. In other words, a color-blind, one size fits all strategy is employed and when it fails the onerous is placed on the student and not the instruction. In fact, teacher education programs teach instructional strategies with the underlying assumption that Black students, or students in urban schools, are "at-risk" and therefore need remediation strategies for instruction. This approach to instruction perpetuates a deficit narrative of learning among Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Next, through CRT in education we can understand assessment as a method to legitimize the deficiency of Black students. The lack of curriculum and effective instruction leads to lower performance on assessment measures. However, these assessments ultimately lack any real measurement of student knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Fourth, school funding is highlighted as one of the most pervasive ways in which racism creates and maintains educational inequality. Finally, Ladson-Billings (1998) highlights how CRT scholars argue that laws enacted during the Civil Rights era actually maintain white supremacy or what Derrick Bell (1980) termed, interest convergence. Through the concept of interest convergence it is argued that Black folks achieve civil rights victories only when they advance the interest of white folks (Bell,

1980). As such, desegregation can be understood through CRT as a way to ensure that white people are happy while maintaining the deficit narrative of Black student failure (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This expansion of the first iteration of Ladson-Billings and Tate's application of CRT to education calls for education research to expose racism within school practices in order to propose radical solutions to address it (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The application of CRT to these five education components outlined by Ladson-Billings (1998) were used to analyze how these five institutional factors influence the identification and response to trauma in schools.

Along with using CRT in education to frame data analysis, it was used to guide the research design. Solorzaño & Yosso (2001) extend this understanding of CRT in education as it highlights how it can be applied to educational research. Their first two tenants mirror Ladson-Billings (1998) claims and as such are reflected in the analysis of the data. However, the remaining three tenants focus on how research should utilize CRT claims in their design and are therefore adapted throughout the research design. First, racism with other forms of subordination - such as sexism, classism, ableism- play a central role in the structure and practices of schools. As such, aspects of schooling such as curriculum, tracking, teacher expectations, assessment, and the like perpetuate the deficit narrative of students of color. Racism has micro and macro components, manifests in institutional and individual forms, can be both conscious and unconscious, and has a cumulative impact on individuals as well as groups. Next, schools must be understood and analyzed within larger societal inequality in order to challenge dominant assumptions of culture, intelligence, and capability. This ensures a clear critique of the concept of objectivity present within education institutions. Solorzaño & Yosso's (2001) third application of CRT to education calls for a transformative research agenda that eliminates racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of subordination within education. Fourth, this transformative research must center the lived experiences of people of color to ensure that marginalized voices are

present in educational research. Finally, to understand the experiences of systemically marginalized people groups, research must be grounded in historical and contemporary contexts (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Through CRT in education, this study sought to examine how educational institutions create harm and how institutional actors maintain that harm.

Critical Race Theory in education underpin this study as it explicates that race and racism underlies the school system, and in turn, influences how trauma-informed care is adapted in schools. This understanding was used to guide the design and analysis for this study through which I critically analyzed how individual actors within the education system (teachers and school staff) and the institutions schools are embedded within all influence how violence-related trauma is identified and responded to throughout three high schools throughout Los Angeles County. First the design of the study was guided by Solorzano and Yosso's (2001) call for a transformative research agenda that centers lived experiences of people of color and is grounded in historical and contemporary contexts. It is important to note that a limitation of this study was that the voices of parents and students from these communities were not represented on the research team or in the data. Grounded theory data collection and analysis were used to study the action and interaction within social and institutional contexts while a multisite case study provided context into how specific district and school practices influence this action. A grounded theory case study design was used as it allows a deeper analysis of the context of each school which was focused, in part, on the racial make-up of participants, students, and surrounding community. Second, the five education components outlined by Ladson-billings (1998) were used as a framework for analyzing how institutional factors influence the identification and response to trauma in schools. Analysis focused on how the required school curriculum, teacher trauma training, assessments, or measures of trauma, school funding, and laws regarding responses to trauma all impact how teachers and school staff respond to trauma and how these

ultimately (re)create racial disparities present in schools. The analysis of the institutional factors that influence the process for responding to students was combined with an analysis on how various individual factors influence the process and therefore the institutions. With the understanding that schools take on the political environment they are situated within, and as such uphold systems of white supremacy and oppression, it becomes necessary to understand the institutional causes of violence, mental health, and, in turn, academic outcomes. This study sought to identify the professional practices found in schools that both uphold and dismantle violence-related trauma to improve the well-being of students and school staff. To that end, CRT for education is combined with the healing justice framework as it claims that it is important to simultaneously identify causes of harm while healing the harm.

Healing Justice Framework

The healing justice framework builds off of the CRT in education and trauma-informed care. While CRT claims that racism is the main cause for education inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and that current iterations of trauma-informed care further pathologize individual students and teachers located in segregated schools, the healing justice framework further explicates harmful practices and how to heal them. The present study adapts the healing justice framework to accurately understand how healing can take place in a school environment. Healing justice has been applied to schools to highlight the need to transform the education institution and relationships that cause harm while simultaneously healing and building hope collectively (Ginwright, 2016).

Healing justice is rooted in indigenous traditions, Buddhist practices, and other communities, such as restorative justice advocates who seek to decolonize state justice (Sawatsky, 2009). Healing justice is a reaction to the current state-issued “justice” and moves from cultivating blame to cultivating relationships, compassion, and healing (Sawatsky, 2009).

The specific healing justice framework adapted for this study is rooted in a movement created by Black and brown femmes and centers organizing and healing practices (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016). Activists of color, queer people, and young people have utilized this framework as a way to identify the impact of oppressive systems and policies and foster emotional, physical, and collective health and healing (Pyles, 2018). The healing justice framework has gained traction as activists have come together to heal “a sense of fracturedness or disconnection that may be a result of trauma, oppressive socio-cultural narratives, and practices...” (Pyles, 2018, pg. xix). These healing practices are a response to the death and sickness of organizers which was caused by experiences of generational trauma derived from long term oppression within racist systems (Page, 2013). Healing justice highlights the need to create collective models of healing that respond to collective trauma and violence through community liberation and transformation (Kindred, n.d.). Healing justice critiques current responses to addressing trauma as individualized behavioral modification that does little to address the social conditions of harm (Kindred, n.d.). Furthermore, it highlights how the privatization of health services has led to a lack of adequate access to care and further pathologizes oppressed communities (Kindred, n.d.).

In the academic context, healing justice is grounded in research which determines social and environmental factors influence an individual's health and well-being (Aneshensel, & Mitchell, 2014), and that individuals can experience hope and well-being when they utilize their power to change the conditions in their lives (Prilleltensky, 2012). Healing justice focuses on addressing the institutional causes of trauma to build practices in schools and communities that promote well-being (Ginwright, 2016). The use of this framework is essential to this study as it seeks to move away from an individualistic response to students' violence-related trauma to create a shared understanding of the process through which surrounding neighborhoods impact

schools. This understanding will, in turn, inform policies and programs that seek to change systems that might have caused or exacerbated the problem behavior in the first place (Ginwright, 2016). As schools take on the political and social environments that they exist in, issues such as discipline, attendance, and academic outcomes are all influenced by the strengths and needs of the community (Ginwright, 2016). With the use of a healing justice framework, schools can respond to and intervene in trauma and violence and bring healing, hope, and well-being to their students and staff (Ginwright, 2016). As such, the healing justice framework is applied to this study as it focuses on the need to radically transform the educational system so that it might effectively identify and address systemic causes of harm. By understanding how practices enacted by teacher and school staff create and uphold institutions, the findings from this study seek to alter the way that schools understand and respond to students, staff, and the community at large.

It is essential to combine the healing justice framework with CRT in education in order to not only identify harmful institutional factors and the ways in which they are upheld by individuals but also how individuals are working to heal themselves, their students, and the educational system. Together, the healing justice framework and critical race theory provide an understanding of the cause and manifestation of violence-related trauma as well as identify problematic and supportive ways that schools can collectively respond to and heal from this harm. With this shared understanding of the problem, it is necessary to understand the historical context of systemic racism with schools, communities, and mental health.

Generally, there is a lack of research investigating how educational institutions (re)produce violence-related trauma, limiting how trauma-informed care is conceptualized and, in turn, practiced in schools. Psychological research identifies that exposure to trauma during childhood can interfere with students' learning and performance in school (Butler et al., 2018;

McCoy et al., 2015; Thomason et al., 2017). Concurrently, education and criminal legal research highlights the racial disparities in educational outcomes and exposure to violence within the community (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016). The following literature review combines these fields to highlight the need for a multidisciplinary, race-conscious approach that identifies institutional factors that influence the quality of care for students and staff within schools.

Violence Exposure, Trauma, and Academic Outcomes

This study advances previous research that has identified the relationship between violence exposure, unaddressed trauma, and school outcomes as it elucidates the individual and institutional factors that influence how and why teachers and school staff identify and respond to students' violence-related trauma. Through the use of Critical Race Theory it is understood that racism permeates the systems in America in which children interact (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It is therefore necessary to establish how previous research identifies the impact of racism on the relationships between education, violence, and mental health. Furthermore, the healing justice framework calls attention to the urgency of moving beyond an individual approach to trauma in order to heal the institutions that have caused harm in the first place. It is through this lens that current responses to trauma in schools are presented and analyzed.

As researchers gain a clearer understanding of the impact of trauma among children, research has sought to identify trauma's role in the relationship between community violence exposure and academic outcomes. Post-traumatic stress has been identified as a mediator between community violence exposure and poor school performance (Mathews et al., 2009; McGill et al., 2014). Persistent fear for one's safety leaves youth constantly on guard, which can result in continual hyperarousal associated with traumatic events (Schell et al., 2004). Repeated exposure to trauma, such as that of ongoing exposure to violence within the community, is

associated with high rates of learning and behavior problems (Burke et al., 2011). Furthermore, exposure to trauma during childhood is correlated with lower attention, immediate verbal recall, and working memory tests (Bucker, et al., 2012). Post-traumatic stress symptoms can interfere with students' ability to learn and perform well in school as key characteristics associated with traumatic stress, such as the neurobiological, cognitive, social, and behavioral, can hinder school performance (Perfect et al., 2016). Student's ability to concentrate and take advantage of school becomes compromised when they are preoccupied with incidents of violence that take place within their communities.

While there is widely documented racial disproportionality in violence exposure, mental health identification and treatment, and school outcomes these fields do not often overlap. This review attempts to mitigate this fact by connecting research from the criminal legal field, psychology, social work, and education as it describes the relationship between violence exposure, posttraumatic stress, and academic outcomes. This is followed by a description and analysis of current whole school and individual staff responses to students' violence-related trauma. Collectively the following highlights the urgency in creating a race-conscious framework that clarifies the ways in which schools can create, maintain, and successfully intervene in harm. This will provide researchers and practitioners alike with a clearer understanding of what transformation is needed to ensure healing within schools.

Violence Exposure within the Community

The definition of community violence adapted for this study is the intentional acts of interpersonal violence between unrelated individuals that take place in public areas outside of the home (Krug et al., 2002). While research generally agrees upon this definition of violence within the community, exposure has been inconsistently conceptualized and measured throughout the literature. Overall definitions consist of three different levels of exposure to community violence;

direct victimization, witnessing, and indirect exposure, such as hearing about an incident (Fowler et al., 2009). The most commonly used measures of exposure account for direct victimization and witnessing, resulting in a lack of awareness of the impact of indirect exposure to violence. As such, this study conceptualizes exposure to violence on all three levels.

Each year violence has a significant physical, mental, and economic impact on young children in schools and communities (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2013). A large number of children hear about, witness, or are victimized by violence within their schools and communities (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019; Finkelhor et al., 2015). Data from the National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence (NatSCEV) established that in 2015 about 60% of youth had been exposed to violence within the last year, and 59% of the youth reported witnessing community violence within their lifetime (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Of concern, Los Angeles is burdened with high rates of violent crime. In 2016, there were 22,213 reported violent crimes (LAPD, 2018), 1.4 times higher than the national average (FBI, 2017). Of these violent crimes, 218 were murders, and 12,054 were aggravated assaults (LAPD, 2018), 1.2 times higher than the national average (FBI, 2017). With such high rates of exposure to violence it becomes necessary to understand how this exposure impacts the academic and emotional well-being of children and adolescents.

Racism and Violence in Communities

As this study describes the influence of violence exposure and trauma on educational outcomes, it is necessary to understand how race and racism influence the reported disproportionate levels of exposure to violence. There is a prominent racial imbalance in areas with high violent crime rates. While nationally crime has decreased (Gramlich, 2017), disadvantaged and segregated communities continue to be disproportionately affected by high levels of violent crime (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016). Communities that

consist of majority Black residents had five times as many reported violent crimes. Those with a majority of Latinx residents had two and a half times as many violent crime reports compared to majority white communities. These extreme variances are linked to structural disparities, including the absence of access to community resources and institutions, as well as social control tactics implemented by police (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016).

While research identifies the racial disparities in violence exposure and the potential causes, there is a persistent gap in the literature that identifies how racism influences community dynamics which shape experiences with community violence (Burrell et al., 2021). Recent research has identified how various aspects of structural racism create and perpetuate violence within Black communities (Burrell et al., 2021). Structural racism includes exclusion of Black communities through racialized policies and practices, geographic exclusion from spatial isolation, the fear of Black men through stereotyping, oppressive civil authority, and a diminished sense of identification with one's culture. These forms of racial oppression were found to interact with economic disenfranchisement and intrapsychic factors to lead to a loop of violence (Burrell et al., 2021). These findings are significant as they move the current understandings of the perpetration of violence as an individual behavior to one that is caused by systems. Furthermore, a systematic review focused specifically on the experiences of violence exposure among Latinx communities (Santacrose et al., 2021). Authors identified a lack of research that delineates risk or protective factors found in macrosystems as the research focused primarily on individual and familial factors (Santacrose et al., 2021). Combined, this literature highlights the need for research to move beyond classifying violence within the community as an individual problem and instead understand its system level causes to advance systems level change.

Academic Impact of Violence Exposure

The individual effects of community violence are far-reaching and well documented. Community violence permeates the boundaries of many schools as children exposed to community violence are at risk for higher rates of aggression (Boxer, Sloan-Power, Piza, & Schappell, 2014; Chen et al., 2016; Isaacs, 1992; McGee, 2014), traumatic stress reactions (Boxer et al., 2014), depression, anxiety (McGee, 2014; Boxer et al., 2014), and substance use (Boxer et al., 2014). Children that live in violent communities are exposed to assaults and murders of family members, peers, adults, and community members (U.S. Department of Justice, Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012), which can prevent children from feeling safe within their own communities and schools. This can create a widespread atmosphere of fear and perceived threat of violence resulting in an increase in stress on an already vulnerable population (Isaacs, 1992). Children's reactions to community violence exposure may manifest as fear, hostility, anger, confusion, anxiety, and hypervigilance (Isaacs, 1992). These adverse outcomes extend to school performance; children exposed to violence have an increased risk for difficulty in school such as misbehavior, low GPA, poor school attendance, and decreased standardized test scores (McGill et al., 2014; Voison et al., 2016), all of which impact educational attainment and future educational success.

Community violence is common and repetitive (Chen et al., 2016). It has the potential to impact the lives of everyone in the community resulting in young people constantly hearing about and witnessing victimization of friends, family, and neighbors (Fowler et al., 2009). Children's ability to concentrate and succeed in school becomes compromised when they are preoccupied with incidents of violence that take place within their communities (McCoy et al., 2015). Exposure to crime and violence is associated with underperformance on standardized test scores in reading, writing, and math as well as lower GPA (Busby et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2001; McGill et al., 2014; Voison et al., 2016). In their study on children's

cognitive performance following a recent incident of community violence, McCoy, Raver, and Sharkey (2015) found that a week after a violent incident occurred a half-mile from a child's home, the child was less likely to complete a cognitive performance test accurately. In addition, community violence exposure is related to lower I.Q. and reading scores (Delaney-Black et al., 2002), with the continuation of low reading scores over time (Duplechain et al., 2008). Along with these performance outcomes, research correlates exposure to community violence with behavioral outcomes in schools. These include a decreased rate of school attendance and high school graduation (Gonzalez et al., 2016), as well as a higher likelihood of suspensions and expulsions from school (Crosby, 2015). Furthermore, research has consistently documented that exposure to community violence can result in post-traumatic stress among children.

Exposure to violence and the impact of trauma

Research agrees that post-traumatic stress is a significant outcome of community violence exposure (McGill et al., 2014). In their meta-analysis regarding mental health outcomes, Fowler et al. (2009) determined that post-traumatic stress was a consistent outcome of community violence exposure. Furthermore, they found no difference in post-traumatic stress responses among children who were victims, witnesses, or indirectly exposed to violence (Fowler et al., 2009). With such a high correlation between community violence exposure and post-traumatic stress, it is necessary to define trauma and understand how it impacts children's cognitive functioning.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) define trauma as "experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions." This experience can be a single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances that has lasting effects on the individual (SAMHSA, 2014). While varying events can cause traumatic stress in youth, community violence will be focused on here. Potential markers of trauma exposure in children

are decreased capacity for self-regulation, problems with memory and attention, loss of impulse control, problems with aggression, interpersonal relationships, and self-perception (van der Kolk et al., 2005). Support for this evidence comes from the biomedical field, which shows that repeat traumatic exposure may alter the way the brain interacts with external stimuli (Thomason & Marusak, 2017). Exposure to stressors, such as community violence, immediately activates the brain systems involved in heightening vigilance, directing focus towards a perceived threat, and taking immediate action for protection (McCoy et al., 2015). With continuous exposure to trauma, the prefrontal cortex, responsible for rational thought, is under-activated while the limbic system, responsible for the fight or flight response, is overactive, which results in decreased cognitive functioning (McCoy et al., 2015; Thomason et al., 2017). Research has utilized neuroimaging to determine the impact of community violence exposure on the brain's gray matter and found that, similar to veterans with PTSD, adolescents exposed to community violence had smaller gray matter in the left anterior cingulate cortex (Butler et al., 2018), the part of the brain that connects the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system (Stevens et al., 2011) and the left inferior frontal gyrus, the part of the brain responsible for cognitive control, language production (Butler et al., 2018), and response inhibition (Swick et al., 2008).

Violence exposure, and the subsequent trauma children experience, can result in children feeling hyper-vigilant and focused on detecting threats, making them unable to let their guard down (U.S. Department of Justice, Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012). Persistent fear for one's safety leaves youth constantly on guard, which results in the continual hyperarousal associated with traumatic events (Schell et al., 2004). Without properly addressing trauma, children's prefrontal cortex continues to be underutilized (van der Kolk et al., 2005). In fact, research determines that individuals whose trauma is unaddressed become stuck in the fight or flight response and cannot think logically and rationally, have difficulty regulating

their emotions, and have an increase in vigilance (McCoy et al., 2015; Thomason et al., 2017).

As such, children exposed to community violence and its subsequent trauma may have difficulty achieving academic success.

Racism and Trauma

Just as criminal legal scholarship highlights the need to move beyond an understanding of violence as an individual phenomenon so too does recent trauma literature (Powell, 2021). Of particular concern is the need to understand how the collective experience of systemic racism is in fact an experience of toxic stress (Powell, 2021). Currently, presenting symptoms of systemic racism rarely result in a clinical diagnosis of trauma (Powell, 2021; Saleem et al., 2021), calling into question: for whom and what constitutes a traumatic experience? In fact, Saleem et al. (2021) argue that as racial stress and trauma may not lead to a posttraumatic stress diagnosis, symptoms might be misinterpreted in schools as disengagement or inability to perform academically. As previous research highlights the impact of exposure to violence on adolescent trauma, it is imperative to understand the consequences of race and racism on mental health.

While previous research describes race/ethnicity as a risk factor for trauma, recent research delineates how the broader experiences of systemic racism and oppression *cause* this increased risk (Douglas et al., 2021). For example, in a mediation model testing the relationship between race, polyvictimization, and posttraumatic stress symptoms, it was found that identifying as Black was indirectly related to more severe ratings of posttraumatic stress (Douglas et al., 2021). However, after adding in polyvictimization, identifying as Black no longer influenced the severity of posttraumatic stress reported. This indicates that increased victimization and not individual race acts as a risk factor for trauma severity (Douglas et al., 2021). As systemic racism uniquely impacts youth of color Saleem et al. (2021) highlight the

necessity to understand racialized traumatic stress within a trauma-informed framework in schools.

Academic Impact of Trauma Exposure

Within the last decade, research has paid particular attention to trauma's impact on educational outcomes (Goodman, Miller, & West-Olatunji, 2012). In a systematic review of research that examines the impact of trauma on students it was determined that traumatized students have more discipline issues and referrals, are more likely to miss school, and more likely to be suspended than their non-traumatized peers (Perfect et al., 2016). In the classroom, where traumatic stress symptoms are evident in student behavior, students are likely to be mislabeled with a learning disorder or behavior problems like conduct or attention problems (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; Goodman et al., 2012). Research has found that students experiencing traumatic stress were twice as likely to have an individualized learning plan (IEP) compared to those not experiencing traumatic stress and three times as likely to be given an IEP if they exhibited trauma symptoms (Goodman et al., 2012). In a qualitative study on youth experiences after trauma, youth self-reported that their experiences outside of the classroom manifested in school through externalizing behaviors in the classroom (West et al., 2014). These externalizing behaviors were anger emotions, such as frustration, irritability, stress, and pressure along with aggressive behaviors, which included verbal and physical fights. Each of these manifestations impact student learning (West et al., 2014). As low educational attainment is an outcome of both community violence exposure and post-traumatic stress, researchers have started to examine this relationship.

One study examined the role of children's trauma-related distress on a child's reading ability and I.Q. following community violence exposure. They found that trauma-related distress impacted children's reading abilities but not their overall I.Q. following exposure to community

violence (Delaney-Black et al., 2002). The analysis of this relationship was further specified by Mathews et al. (2009), who tested post-traumatic stress as a mediator between community violence exposure, GPA, absences, and standardized scores for reading, language, and math. Their results showed that post-traumatic stress was a primary mechanism through which community violence exposure impacted GPA and standardized test scores (Mathews et al., 2009). However, post-traumatic stress was not a mediator for school attendance (Mathews et al., 2009). McGill et al. (2014) built upon these findings and found post-traumatic stress to be a significant mediator between community violence exposure and attitude towards teachers and sensation-seeking behaviors (McGill et al., 2014).

Although these studies identify that trauma explains the relationship between violence exposure and school outcomes, they are limited in their ability to identify how and why this relationship exists. As such further research is warranted to account for the individual and institutional factors that influence this relationship. As students exposed to community violence are at an increased risk for emotional and behavioral symptoms that can diminish learning and decrease educational outcomes (Busby et al., 2013), researchers have aimed to identify protective factors that can alleviate the impact of violence exposure. Previous research highlights the desire for schools to use their role in children's lives to properly respond to trauma. In fact, trauma-informed schools have become widely accepted responses to student trauma. However, research often fails to examine the impact of these programs through a critical lens that centers the systemic issues that caused the trauma in the first place (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). In response, this review will examine current school responses to trauma paying particular attention to how these interventions address race and racism in K-12 schools.

Current School Responses to Violence-Related Trauma

Schools are a critical place to provide positive and safe spaces for their students, which has the potential to mitigate the impact of violence-related trauma exposure among students (Hobbs et al., 2019). While there is limited research that focuses on the roles schools can play after students have been exposed to violence within the community (Ozer et al., 2017), research has identified several school factors that can either buffer or exacerbate other environmental-related trauma and its impact on student outcomes.

One of the most widely accepted responses to student trauma is the adaptation of trauma-informed practices in schools. As there is not a universally agreed upon definition of trauma-informed schools, the framework that will be used to understand current school responses to trauma is the Trauma-Informed School Systems (Kataoka et al., 2018). This framework combines SAMHSA's (2014) six aspects of trauma-informed care with the trauma-informed service delivery model (Chafouleas et al., 2015). In their work Kataoka et al. (2018) argue that while detection and subsequent treatment of trauma in students is necessary, it is just as important to intervene within the whole school and district to ensure that all school staff are aware of how violence and trauma can impact student functioning. Therefore, the Trauma Informed School Systems framework outlines three levels in which trauma-informed care should be adapted in schools (Kataoka et al., 2018), the macro, the mezzo, and the micro. First, the macro or outermost level consists of school leadership, policies, procedures, and finances (Kataoka et al., 2018). They argue that these macro level factors must all be addressed in order to sustain trauma-informed practices in schools (Kataoka et al., 2018). The next level focuses on creating a positive school climate, specifying that teacher trainings are needed to support teachers in better responding to traumatized students as well as supporting their own mental health and well-being (Kataoka et al., 2018). The micro, or innermost level, consists of

integrating socio-emotional support for students through a three tier model of support with universal prevention, targeted prevention, and treatment (Kataoka et al., 2018).

In their micro level three tier model, Tier 1 includes universal trauma support for all students (Kataoka et al., 2018). Tier 2 provides focused secondary support for groups of students who are identified as at risk or display early signs of behavioral or emotional issues (Kataoka et al., 2018). Finally, Tier 3 consists of intensive individual interventions for students that are identified to be exhibiting trauma symptomology (Berger, 2019; Kataoka et al., 2018). While Kataoka et al. (2018) highlight that schools have varying levels of needs and capacity to adopt trauma-informed care in schools, it is clear that most research, and in turn schools do not implement programs within each of the three tiers of the Trauma-Informed School Systems approach (Berger, 2019; Maynard et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2019). As such, the following sections will first outline current conceptualizations and outcomes of trauma-informed care in schools. Next it will combine the research on the varying aspects that make up the macro, mezzo, and micro levels of trauma-informed care in schools.

Trauma-Informed Care in Schools

As community violence exposure and post-traumatic stress predict later academic success (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Crosby, 2015), it is necessary to identify and understand the potential school factors that moderate this relationship. Within the last two years three systematic reviews were published on trauma-informed approaches in schools. The first of the three systematic reviews sought to determine the dominant framework used for trauma-informed care in schools and the effectiveness of current school-based supports (Thomas et al., 2019). Across the included 33 articles, there was not a consistent use or operationalization of trauma-informed approaches and, therefore, no standard framework (Thomas et al., 2019). While some of the included studies identify reductions in trauma symptoms or depression, only 13 of the studies used school-level

measures of effectiveness (Thomas et al., 2019). This highlights a gap in understanding of how trauma-informed approaches impact school wide measures such as school climate, behavioral incidents, student-level measures of attendance, academic outcomes, or belonging (Thomas et al., 2019). The review concludes with a call for research that provides contextual details of the school and community to better understand the effectiveness of trauma-informed approaches in schools (Thomas et al., 2019). A second systematic review focuses on multi-tiered approaches to trauma-informed care in schools (Berger, 2019). This review finds thirteen studies that evaluate multi-tiered approaches. The thirteen approaches result in improvements in behavioral and academic outcomes and a decrease in depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms among students (Berger, 2019). They also identified an increase in self-perceived knowledge and confidence of staff, although these were not measured with previously validated instruments (Berger, 2019). This review emphasizes the need for research that focuses on teacher training and support as well as the role of other school personnel, such as leadership teams and school counselors (Berger, 2019). Finally, a Campbell systematic review was conducted to determine the effects of trauma-informed schools on trauma symptoms (Maynard et al., 2019). Results determined that current trauma-informed approaches in school lack the necessary evidence to be fully effective (Maynard et al., 2019). The authors conclude that not only is it unclear precisely what schools are doing when they state that they are implementing trauma-informed approaches, but there is a lack of evaluations using experimental or quasi-experimental methods on these programs (Maynard et al., 2019). Taken together, these reviews support the argument for research to focus on gaining a clearer understanding of what school factors influence well-being.

Furthermore, some of these findings are uncritically examined through what Love (2019) calls the “educational survival complex,” where students are taught how to survive as they navigate a system that mirrors the world they live in. To uphold white supremacy schools

attempt to “mitigate” the suffering of students of color (Love, 2019) such as the implementation of trauma-informed schools which has been promoted as a solution to equity within schools (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). However, these individualized solutions to complex social problems often fail in part because, as Robin Kelley (2018) argues, schools are likely to work to address individual trauma as managing individual trauma does little to actually dismantle the structural racism embedded within the institution (Kelley, 2018). This ultimately places the blame of institutional harm back onto the teachers and/or the students and their families (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). Furthermore, some practices of trauma-informed care encourage teachers and school staff to identify potential causes of harm among marginalized communities while simultaneously ignoring the assets that students, their families, and their communities bring to the school (Goldin et al., 2022) particularly with the mantra of “instead of asking ‘what’s wrong with you?’ instead ask ‘what happened to you?’” With the focus on individual experiences of harm and its resulting symptomology, the adaptation of trauma-informed care in schools runs the risk of perpetuating the belief that the school staff can save individual students which ultimately releases them from addressing the institutional factors that created and maintains harm (Goldin et al., 2022). But trauma informed-care is useless without the radical transformation of systems of oppression. In fact when trauma informed-care focuses on the individual it reframes systemic and institutional causes of harm as personal and individual.

With the understanding that violence-related trauma is a systemic problem that has to be addressed at both the systemic and individual level, it is necessary to situate research on trauma responses in schools within the context of the school system. While not explicitly focused on student exposure to community violence, research has identified the essential influence schools have on student outcomes in other contexts (Orfield et al., 2004). Using Kataoka et al.’s (2018) Trauma-Informed School System framework, three levels of trauma intervention and prevention

will be presented here: (1) Macro level which include behavioral policies, and school leadership; (2) mezzo level which will include school climate, teachers, and teacher trauma trainings, and; (3) the micro level which will include information on current mental health supports in schools.

Macro

First, this review will discuss the macro level of trauma-informed care in schools (Kataoka et al., 2018). Current research has identified how community partnerships, behavioral policies, and school leadership impact violence-related trauma and academic outcomes in schools (Astor et al., 2009; DeMatthews et a., 2017).

Community Partnerships

As this study samples from schools involved in the Community Schools Initiative (CSI) across Los Angeles County it is important to describe current research around CSI. Community schools work to partner with community organizations to provide services to students and families within high-poverty schools ((Maier et al., 2017). There are four pillars that make up CSI, Integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practice (Maier et al., 2017). Research indicates that well-implemented community schools result in higher student attendance, behavior, social functioning, and academic achievement (Maier et al., 2017). Furthermore, whole schools have been found to benefit from community schools with higher reports of positive school climate, high school graduation rates, and a reduction in racial and economic achievement gaps (Maier et al., 2017).

While research indicates that CSI can result in positive outcomes for students and schools, recent research examined parent perspectives of CSI. CSI coordinators in Baltimore public schools highlight that they are working to address the immediate needs of families such as housing, food, and employment (Shiller & TDP, 2020). This impacts the pillar of family and

community engagement as it maintains families in a position of those in need of the school and not as assets or partners with the school (Shiller & TDP, 2020). Findings highlight the need for schools to work to move parents from the role of beneficiaries of their programming to those that take a collaborative leadership role in the schools. Authors argue that this can only be done by upending deficit perspectives towards students and their families, an aspect of schools that maintains powerlessness (Shiller & TDP, 2020). While community partnerships have the potential to address factors that impact student learning, it is unclear how schools that have implemented CSI are identifying and responding to student trauma.

Behavioral Policies

The school to prison pipeline literature focuses on the impact of behavioral policies on student outcomes. This body of work argues that behavioral management techniques used to address students' manifestation of exposure to violence and trauma can be problematic. While schools are increasingly moving to positive behavioral interventions, the continued use of punitive approaches in schools can lead to an increase in student criminalization (Freeman et al., 2013). The initial symptoms of exposure to trauma in school settings, such as acting out and defiance, often lead to discipline that can potentially retraumatize students in the school setting (Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016). Research indicates that the behavioral management techniques that are currently used in classrooms to reduce unsafe or disruptive behavior can be triggering for traumatized students and actually result in an increase in dysregulation and reactivity (Hodgon et al., 2013). To illustrate, this study comes after a class action lawsuit (*Peter P. et al. v. Compton Unified School District*, 2015) was brought against Compton Unified School District who, it was claimed, failed to provide accommodations for students that have been traumatized by witnessing, hearing about, and falling victim to various types of violence at home and within

their neighborhoods (Turner, 2015). This lawsuit highlights the need for schools to move away from punitive responses to behavior and instead adapt positive behavioral policies.

Furthermore, there is a documented racial discipline gap within schools (Losen & Skiba, 2010). In particular, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) places police officers within each of its schools, more officers are sent to schools with higher percentages of Black and Latinx students (Freeman et al., 2013). Of concern, compared to the 15 largest districts within the United States, LAUSD had the highest number of ticketing and arrests among its students, five times higher than that of New York City schools (Freeman et al., 2013). During the 2011-2012 school year, 8,993 students in LAUSD were either arrested or received a ticket, 93% of which were Black and Latinx students (Freeman et al., 2013). These disproportionate rates are seen nationwide as research has found extreme suspension disparities among Black and Latinx students in urban middle schools compared to the national average (Losen & Skiba, 2010). With Black students receiving suspensions at three times the rate of their white counterparts (Losen et al., 2015). These numbers indicate a larger systemic problem of the criminalization of Black and Latinx students in schools. Racially disproportionate punishment in schools is understood as an outcome of both explicit and implicit biases within schools (Girvan et al., 2021). This can include biases among teachers and school leadership (Girvan et al., 2021) as well as policies and available resources in schools with predominantly Black and Latinx students.

With the understanding that punitive approaches result in negative outcomes among students and staff, schools have moved towards positive approaches to behavior. For example, School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPIBS) is grounded in positive behavior intervention and research that states that the use of proactive strategies that prevent discipline problems are most effective (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2017). SWPIBS moves away from punitive approaches for managing disruptive behavior and instead seeks to

teach behavioral expectations of students and reward them when they meet these expectations (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2017). Research finds that school that implemented SWPIBS have lower overall out of school suspensions overall (McIntosh et al., 2018). While SWPIBS resulted lower disproportionality in suspension among Black, Multiracial, and Pacific Islander students it did not mitigate the disproportionality entirely (McIntosh et al., 2018). Similarly, Los Angeles schools are adopting Restorative Justice Practices which focus on community building and restoring relationships when harm occurs (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2017). Schools use this practice as a way to create a positive school culture and climate through the practice of inclusivity and collaboration (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2017). Research evaluating restorative justice practices in Pittsburg Public Schools finds that these practices improved teachers' ratings of school climate, and decreased suspension rates but had no impact on academic outcomes or arrest rates (Augustine et al., 2018). When all school staff approach students through a trauma lens and are fully equipped to provide whole school supports, students and staff will be able to reach their full potential (Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016). One key component of adopting a trauma lens in schools is school leadership.

School Leadership

Along with behavioral policies, research establishes school leadership as a supportive influence on schools. In particular, school leadership has a significant impact on school outcomes. In their study, Astor, Benbenishty, and Estrada (2009) found that successful principals increase school safety by implementing clear procedures to respond to violence that allow teachers to create safe settings. On the other hand, findings from a qualitative study described how the bureaucratic structures in schools leave teachers feeling disempowered (Narayanan, 2021). A significant source of this disempowerment was attributed to decisions made by school leadership, who then forced teachers to follow school rules teachers had no decision in or face

consequences from leadership (Narayanan, 2021). However, subsequent research has found conflicting impact of leadership on school staff. For example, one study found that school staff did not describe the influence of school leadership on their own well-being at the school (Capps et al., 2022).

School leadership also impacts the whole school as Astor et al. (2009) argue that effective school principals are able to create whole-school approaches that inspire teachers, parents, and students (Astor et al., 2009). Schools have higher student outcomes when principals emphasize the significance of education by hanging student work in the hallways and classrooms (Astor et al., 2009). Furthermore, in a study on school climate it was found that school leadership had a significant influence on a school's culture (Capps et al., 2022). It further highlights how turnover in school leadership leads to uncertainty and turmoil among the school staff, particularly in terms of leadership's impact on school policy and climate (Capps et al., 2022). This is of utmost concern as Love (2019) argues that in order for teachers to be successful at creating positive schools for their students, they are in need of leadership that creates positive climates for the school staff.

Mezzo

Along with behavioral policies and school leadership, a positive school climate is an essential factor for providing safe and welcoming schools to students (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). As Kataoka et al. (2018) identify, teachers play a significant role in creating a positive school climate. As such, school climate, the role of teachers in addressing trauma exposure, and the impact of teacher trainings will be discussed.

School Climate

Research has sought to identify the role of school climate on academic outcomes following violence exposure and has produced mixed results. Initial research determined that

school climate did not act as a moderator for internalizing or externalizing behaviors among youth exposed to community violence (Hardaway et al., 2012). However, a recent study in Colombia found that a positive school climate did actually moderate the relationship between community violence exposure and externalizing behaviors (Gaias et al., 2019). Of note, this study measured positive school climate through the concepts of safety, connectedness, and available services (Gaias et al., 2019). This was further explicated in a study on New York City schools which identified that following student exposure to violence, poor school climate acted as a negative predictor for student test scores (Laurito et al., 2019). School climate, in this study, was defined as safety, disorder, and sense of community (Laurito et al., 2019). These recent studies indicate that school climate plays an important role for students exposed to violence as it has the potential to protect against externalizing behavior (Gaias et al., 2019) and poor academic outcomes (Laurito et al., 2019). However it is important to highlight that research utilizes a variety of definitions and measures of school climate, making it challenging to fully understand the role of school climate on academic outcomes (Berkowitz et al., 2017) and violence-related trauma.

Furthermore, systemic racism has resulted in disproportionate impacts of school climate. Research has identified that schools with majority Black students are more likely to have weaker school climates, a factor that exacerbates the impact of violence (Laurito et al., 2019). Latinx males attending schools with a weak school climate are particularly susceptible to significant declines in academic achievement after being exposed to violence within the community (Laurito et al., 2019). This disproportionality becomes particularly pertinent as it is essential for schools responding to trauma to create a safe school environment (Kataoka et al., 2018).

One aspect of building a safe environment within schools is through institutional trust (Germain, 2022). Institutional trust is said to be present when students and families believe that

the education system values them, will care for them, and serve them well (Germain, 2022). Creating trust means that students and families believe that teachers and school staff will not oppress them but will rather be accountable and transparent with the decisions that they make (Germain, 2022). It is argued that the first step in building this trust is for schools to openly acknowledge the harmful history of schools within marginalized communities and work towards building cooperative relationships with students and families to meet the identified needs of the community (Germain, 2022). An important aspect in creating a positive school climate and building trust is the role of teachers. Research identifies that trust in teachers and feelings of safety increase student identification with school even when accounting for SES and ethnicity (Mitchell et al., 2018). As such, it is important to understand how and why teachers identify and respond to violence-related trauma.

Teachers

As teachers interact with students daily and are often trusted by their students, they can aid in student's recovery following traumatic stress exposure (Bell et al., 2013). Studies examining the protective role of teachers identify teacher-student relationships (Astor et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001), teacher knowledge and trainings on the impact of trauma (Alisic et al., 2012), and teacher's personal and psychological characteristics (Mashburn et al., 2006), all impact student outcomes.

Attachment to teachers has been found to increase students' academic achievement (Bryan et al., 2012). Student relationships with teachers has long-lasting effects; research has identified that the student-teacher relationship in kindergarten impacts future academic and behavioral outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). A kindergarten teacher's report on a negative student-teacher relationship predicted student grades, test scores, work patterns, disciplinary performance, and suspension throughout elementary school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). As student-

teacher relationships tend to be relatively stable, with conflict early on in a child's schooling predicting later student-teacher conflict (Jerome et al., 2009), it is imperative to understand what individual factors influence teacher-student relationships. Teacher's ratings of student competence and behavior were associated with their individual personal and psychological characteristics such as years of experience, race/ethnicity, and higher reports of self-efficacy all impacted how teachers rated their students (Mashburn et al., 2006). Along with the individual identity of teachers, institutional factors such as child-teacher ratios and programs available within the school setting were all found to impact teacher's perceptions of students (Mashburn et al., 2006). Furthermore, the classroom management style employed by teachers is also predictive of student's level of school attachment (McNeely et al., 2002). This is particularly concerning considering trauma's impact on children's cognitive functioning and behavior in the classroom. It is therefore necessary for research to further elucidate how both individual and institutional factors impact teacher's ability to identify and address students' violence-related trauma.

A teacher's ability to identify initial behavioral symptoms associated with traumatic responses to neighborhood violence may facilitate a rapid response to youth who have experienced violence (Fowler et al., 2009). Students spend a significant amount of time with teachers each week, enabling them to identify changes in behavior related to trauma exposure (Alisic et al., 2012). Teacher support has been identified as significant factor that can mediate the relationship between violence exposure and academic outcomes (Loomis et al., 2020). In fact, research shows that after exposure to community violence, identification with school and teacher support increase hope and decrease psychological symptoms (internalizing and externalizing) (Ludwig & Warren, 2009). However, these factors did not lessen the rates of reported post-traumatic stress or depression (Ozer et al., 2017). Although research has identified the protective role of teachers following exposure to violence and/or trauma, research has also identified that

compared to their white peers, students of color that experience polyvictimization are more likely to receive a phone call home for problems (Joseph-McCatty et al., 2022). Indicating that race plays a role in the identification and response to trauma in schools.

Teachers can be successful in monitoring and supporting students following traumatic events (Rolfesnes & Idsoe, 2011). However, school staff typically receive little training on the impact trauma has on students and the ways they can aid traumatized children (Crosby, 2015). Teachers have reported that due to a lack of guidance and knowledge they were unclear on their role and how to assist children effectively following trauma exposure (Alisic et al., 2012). Since teachers have been identified as a significant buffer for environmental stress it is necessary for research to obtain a better understanding of what actions teachers take when identifying and responding to student trauma.

Teacher training

As trauma effects children's cognitive functioning and, in turn, behavior in the classroom, children impacted by community violence exposure can present a significant challenge for teachers. Students that have experienced trauma might exhibit behaviors potentially misunderstood as acts of defiance, disinterest in learning, and an inability to create positive relationships with others (Hobbs et al., 2019). If a student's behavioral manifestation of trauma is misunderstood as a problem behavior that can be adjusted through behavioral modification and not through mental health treatment for the underlying cause, then the trauma, and its behavioral symptomology, will continue to persist (Massachusetts Advocacy for Children, 2005). As such, it is a widely held belief that if teachers are able to identify trauma symptoms correctly, they would effectively respond to student behavior. A seminal study highlighting the need for trauma training for teachers came out of the Netherlands in 2012 (Alisic et al., 2012). The majority of teachers in this study self-reported a lack of knowledge and training needed to successfully work

with traumatized students (Alisic et al., 2012). Specifically, elementary school teachers stated that due to a lack of guidance, they were both unclear in their role with the student and how to effectively assist children following trauma exposure (Alisic et al., 2012). However, research finds that trauma-informed training can help to increase trauma knowledge and reduce trauma-related difficulties for teachers (Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). Providing trauma-informed supports and training for teachers, such as recognizing how community violence may manifest in the classroom and promoting an understanding of how to build trust and safety with their students, may also help to support teacher practices and support teacher attachment (Sonsteng-Person et al., in press). With this call to increase teacher knowledge on correctly identifying and responding to student trauma, several studies have implemented and evaluated teacher trainings.

Research has explicitly focused on teacher training. In one study, the Heart of Teaching and Learning: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success (HTL), a trauma informed-teacher training, was implemented in a high school for girls in a residential facility (Day et al., 2014). The outcomes measured at pre and post were student perceptions of teacher behavior and student post-traumatic stress symptoms. Results of a one group, pre-posttest design indicate no statistically significant difference in any measure (Day et al., 2014). Next, a teacher training in an early childhood education center in Appalachia utilized the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) framework and trained teachers on implementing social-emotional curriculum and understanding trauma-informed care principals and practice (Shamblin et al., 2016). The outcome variables, teacher confidence and competence, were measured pre- and post-intervention. The results of a paired-sample t-test reveal that the training results in a statistically significant increase in teacher confidence and competence, specifically for coping with challenging behaviors in the classroom (Shamblin et al., 2016). Along with individual trainings, teacher trainings are often included as components of more extensive trauma

interventions. These studies have found that teachers attending the trainings saw an increase in student support (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017), and referrals for problem behavior (Parris et al., 2015). However, the frameworks, trainings, populations, and measures for these evaluations vary. With a lack of uniformity in implementation and evaluation, it is necessary for in-depth research on the manifestation of trauma in schools to identify a useful framework for future trainings.

While teachers are significant buffers following student trauma exposure there are several ways in which teachers can further harm students. As indicated above, teacher bias has the potential to harm students within the educational setting (Goldin et al., 2022; Joseph-McCatty et al., 2022). Researchers have sought to understand how to address this bias in schools. Particular focus has been paid to teacher education programs as they have been identified as a significant source of perpetuating deficit narratives of Black and Brown communities. Solorzaño and Yosso (2001) claim that the use of racial stereotypes as well as deficit based theories in teacher education are used as a means to justify teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards students of color. They list out three stereotypes that justify teachers' harm towards students of color: (1) intelligence and education stereotypes that justify low educational and occupational expectations; (2) personality and character stereotypes that justify placing students of color in separate schools and classrooms, and; (3) physical appearance stereotypes that are used to justify teachers' attempts to "dumb down" their curriculum and teaching style for students of color (Solorzaño & Yosso, 2001). This becomes a more significant issue when schools are located within neighborhoods that the media or the police have described as violent or ridden with drugs, gangs, and crime. Combined with these stereotypes, research has developed theories that seek to identify the reason that students of color have been reported statistically to have lower academic attainment compared to white students, or what is commonly referred to as the "education gap"

(Solorzaño & Yosso, 2001). These theories further justify teachers' beliefs around the unequal outcomes of students of color in schools as they place blame on students of color, ultimately perpetuating the deficit narrative (Solorzaño & Yosso, 2001).

Bettina Love (2019) expands on these issues within teacher education programs through her explanation of what she terms the "Teacher Education Gap," where white student teachers are taught about Black and Brown student's pain but never the cause of that pain. Building off of research that has identified that teacher education programs fail to prepare white teachers to teach diverse students, she argues that oftentimes programs provide one diversity class where white teachers are taught about the "ills" that plague communities of color (Love, 2019). These classes ultimately fail to teach the context of White supremacy's role in creating and maintaining poverty, violence, failing schools, and the like. This leads teachers to believe that students of color are traumatized while ensuring the role of whiteness in this trauma is ignored (Love, 2019). When teachers have a limited understanding of the students, the school, the community, and the context in which they are going to teach, they run the risk of believing the school system is just and that it is the students that need remediation (Love, 2019). For example, in their study on teacher responses to trauma during the pandemic Goldin et al. (2022) found that educators on twitter believed that they needed to save students in their schools. Underlying this desire to save students was the assumption that schools operate as the only safe spaces for students, that communities and families traumatize students, and the desire to feel good about oneself (Goldin et al., 2022). A majority of the teachers that wanted to save students showed a lack of awareness of trauma resulting from systemic harm as well or any effort to address it (Goldin et al., 2022). Other educators on twitter challenged problematic tweets by highlighting harmful assumptions about who is and isn't traumatized as well as discussing student and family assets, describing the role of race in trauma-informed care, and explicitly addressing the impact of the educational

systems on this process (Goldin et al., 2022). The challenging of problematic thinking is of particular importance to note as it highlights educators' ability and desire to interrupt harmful practices derived from trauma-informed care. Through their recognition of the harmful practices embedded within the system of education, these educators were pushing against the reproduction of racism and trauma (Goldin et al., 2022). As research identifies the harmful impact of training teachers on the current pathological approach to trauma-informed care, particularly as it relates to deficit narratives surrounding communities of color, it is necessary for research on violence-related trauma in schools to understand how and why teachers not only respond to trauma but also how they identify it.

While talking about teachers and teacher trainings it is important to note that researchers have warned against using the concept of the bad teachers as a way to enforce individual blame for an institutional problem (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). This blame is heard among schools, policy makers, and the media through complaints about “bad” or “lazy” teachers who, it is claimed, are not committed to their students (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). While teacher trainings have been focused on as a pertinent aspect of providing trauma informed care in schools, it ignores the larger traumatizing impact of the educational system on both the teacher and the students by placing the responsibility of effectively responding to traumatized students on the teachers.

Micro

Finally, this review will discuss the micro level of trauma-informed care in schools (Kataoka et al., 2018). Current research has focused particular attention on increasing school based mental health services.

School Based Mental Health

There are two main mental health interventions that schools currently use for violence related trauma. First, Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) is an evidence based program created to address violence related PTSD. It that has been proven to decrease post-traumatic stress, depression, and psychosocial dysfunction and has been implemented in various cities throughout the U.S. since 2001 (Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, n.d.). This program is run in schools on both group and individual levels (Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, n.d.). CBITS was created for delivery by mental health professionals in schools and consists of 10 group sessions, 1-3 individual sessions, 2 parent psychoeducational sessions, and 1 teacher education session (Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, n.d.). The Child Post-Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale (CPSS) was used to evaluate student participants at baseline, 3 months, and 6 months which found that participants' symptoms improved and that improvement was sustained even at the 6 month mark (Stein et al., 2011). However, teachers reported that participants' shyness, anxiety, learning skills, and acting-out only improved slightly (Stein et al., 2011).

Next, the Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET) was created out of the CBITS model for use by nonclinical school personnel such as teachers (Jaycox et al., 2009). This includes the same cognitive-behavioral approach and 10 group sessions but excludes the individual sessions and parent sessions (Jaycox et al., 2009). In a study implemented to measure the efficacy of the implementation of SSET by teachers and school counselors that had no mental health training it was found that participants again had a decrease in violence-related PTSD and depression (Jaycox, et al., 2009). Teachers reported small improvements of participants behavior in the classroom but parents did not report an improvement in behavior (Jaycox et al., 2009).

Although school based mental health services are promising, Crosby (2015) argues that most school-based mental health programs do not typically screen and assess for traumatic stress

problems and therefore do not address the trauma either through counseling or referral. Furthermore, while these individual supports are necessary to ensure students are able to obtain the help they need, they must be combined with other levels of intervention in schools in order to be effective (See Kataoka et al., 2018 for example). While individual or group treatment has been found to be effective this is meant to be short term treatment which means that students that are exposed to continuous trauma such as community violence exposure continue to be exposed to violence which can result in trauma. As such, this limited trauma treatment is less likely to be effective (Hodgon et al., 2013). If the focus of treating violence and/or trauma exposure is only on the mental health of the student, either in groups or with individual mental health treatment, and they are sent back into violent communities or school system then the underlying cause of the trauma will continue to go unaddressed and trauma treatments will continue to be ineffective. In order to truly heal we have to transform the systems that cause the trauma in the first place.

Statement of the Problem

Children that live in violent communities are exposed to assaults and murders of family members, peers, adults, community members, and perpetrators of violence (U.S. Department of Justice, Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012), which can prevent children from feeling safe within their communities and schools. The various outcomes of community violence exposure among youth are well documented and include negative and varying impacts on educational outcomes. As research determines that post-traumatic stress is a mediator between this relationship (Mathews et al., 2009), being able to identify and intervene in traumatic childhood events could positively impact children's mental health and educational success (Gonzalez et al., 2016) following exposure to violence. While schools can be significant buffers of environmental stress, and act as a main entry point for students to receive mental health services, it can be challenging for schools located within violent communities to protect and aid

in children's development (Farmer et al., 2003; Isaacs, 1992). Critical research highlights the significant role of teacher and school staff decision making when responding to students. This understanding is applied to the current study as it describes how individual decision making influences the identification, treatment, and outcomes of trauma within schools. Furthermore, just as previous research identifies the impact of racism on both behavioral policies (Losen et al., 2012; Losen et al., 2015) and school climate (Laurito et al., 2019) among Black and Latinx students it also denotes the role of racial bias present in teacher's classroom practices following trauma exposure (Joseph-McCatty et al., 2022). As such, there is a dire need for research that is rooted in understanding how schools can effectively address violence-related trauma both outside of and within schools.

Although there has been a drastic increase in the development and implementation of trauma-informed trainings and care among schools and teachers, there is not a consistent approach, framework, measure (Thomas et al., 2019), or evaluation of these trauma-informed interventions (Whitaker et al., 2019). Of particular concern, schools throughout the U.S. are adopting trauma-informed schooling but with limited thought on how to improve the performance of children of color. This is particularly harmful as evidenced through the failed color-blind adaption of multicultural education and cooperative learning (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In an attempt to address racial inequities in school outcomes a school reform movement has taken hold, however this reform often focuses either on the individual student or the individual school staff working towards addressing the "achievement gap" (Germain, 2022; Love, 2019). The adaptation of trauma-informed care that fails to identify and mitigate harmful practices embedded within the education system as well as the community runs the risk of individualizing the social problem of trauma, perpetuating a deficit approach and ultimately reinforcing educational inequality. To ensure this does not happen in the trauma-informed

schools' movement, in-depth research is needed to inform school wide policies and programs that seek to mitigate the impacts of exposure to violence-related trauma.

While psychological and educational research identifies that exposure to trauma during childhood can interfere with students' performance in school and future outcomes, missing is a multidisciplinary, race-conscious approach that identifies organizational variables that influence the quality of care for students and staff. As there is a need to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how institutional factors (re)produce violence-related trauma in schools this study utilized a grounded theory case study of three Los Angeles high schools that critically examines institutional actor's decision-making when identifying and responding to student's trauma. Analysis of interviews with principals, teachers, and other school staff highlight the structures that create or perpetuate oppressive conditions in under-served schools. Findings detail the nexus between teacher education programs, district policies, resources, staff biases, and collective well-being. Situated within the context of COVID-19 and the protests of the police murders of Black men and women, participants grappled with understanding their roles in schools with high incidents of student trauma but limited resources or protocols for responding. As schools are increasingly adopting trauma intervention practices that provide individualized solutions to complex social problems implications call for the transformation of harmful practices embedded within the educational system.

Chapter 3

Methods

The following chapter presents the research questions studied, the epistemological framework that guides the research design, followed by the researcher's statement of reflexivity, which will situate the researcher's experience in the context of the topic of inquiry. The chapter will explain the research design, data collection, analysis, and limitations.

Research Questions

Although schools are increasingly adopting programs that seek to address trauma (Maynard et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2019), there is less focus on schoolwide approaches to trauma, leaving a clear gap in understanding of how schools can buffer or exacerbate the relationship between violence exposure, trauma, and educational outcomes. It is necessary to generate in-depth knowledge of what teachers and school staff identify as trauma, how they address this trauma, and what individual and institutional factors influence this process. To do this, the current study uses a grounded theory multisite case study design to develop a conceptual framework that describes the process through which teachers and school staff perceive and respond to violence-related trauma exposure throughout three high schools in Los Angeles County, California. The current study answers the following research questions:

1. How do teachers and school staff from three high schools in Los Angeles County perceive the ways that trauma has manifested in their schools?
2. How and why do these teachers and school staff respond to students exposed to trauma?
3. How do teachers and school staff understand their responses to student trauma?
4. How do teachers and staff describe institutional policies and systems of support [available or utilized] to respond to trauma within their schools?

Epistemological Framework

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, which posits that knowledge is derived from the social context through interactions, interpretations of interactions, and understanding of these interactions (Vygotsky, 1962). Social constructivism states that individuals' understanding of the world is derived from their own experiences through which they develop various and multiple meanings for objects or things (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meaning is created through interactions with others, historical norms, and cultural norms present in an individual's life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In particular, Charmaz's (2008) constructionist approach is used in this study. This approach encompasses four key tenants: (1) multiple realities are constructed based on particular conditions; (2) the process of conducting research emerges from interactions; (3) the positionality of researcher and participants must be considered; and (4) data is created by the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2008). Therefore, as the researcher, I understand that my prior knowledge and theoretical lenses influence my research process (Charmaz, 2008).

Situated in this epistemology, the researcher understands that teachers' and staff's interpretations and reactions to trauma are shaped by their social position. The meaning that teachers and staff derive from the manifestation of trauma exposure in schools and their interactions with the larger systems in which they frequent may vary based on their experience with trauma and violence and others' reactions to it. Therefore, the goal of this study was to solicit the meaning participants' attribute to their identification and responses to students' violence-related trauma to develop a pattern of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher focuses on specific contexts and interactions among individuals to understand their historical and cultural settings. From this, the researcher sought to interpret the meanings that others give to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the social constructionist epistemology, the researcher understands that their own experiences and identity influence their interpretations of

participants words (Charmaz, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to utilize reflexivity and analytic memoing as a tool for rigorously and continuously scrutinizing their prior knowledge and preconceptions (Charmaz, 2008). The constructivist epistemology can be found throughout this proposal in the methods, data collection, and analysis as she sought to gather a deeper understanding of a shared experience.

Statement of Reflexivity

As constructivists state, the researcher and the research process shape the way data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Birks et al., 2014; Charmaz, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). As prior assumptions and experience impact the research process, the researcher must reflect on their own experiences within the phenomenon they wish to study. It is of particular importance within a social constructivist framework for the researcher to situate themselves and acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences (2018). This, known as reflexivity, is how the researcher discloses their understandings about their own biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My research, the theories that I resonate with, and the topics discussed in this study have all been influenced by my personal history of trauma and experience within education, my professional experience as a teacher and social worker, and my role as an academic researcher. As such, I practiced reflexivity throughout this study to reflect on how my professional background, personal experiences, and prior assumptions influence the research process, from the questions that I ask to my data collection and analysis. As a white, cis, hetero, woman that has practiced in the fields of education and social work it is imperative for me to practice reflexivity to understand how and if I am reproducing the harms that my research seeks to upend. In the following section I will present my identity and how it is related to my research. I will

conclude by describing the accountability process that I undertook during my data collection and analysis.

I grew up in Southern California in a neighborhood east of Los Angeles in San Bernardino County and therefore acknowledge that my experiences in K-12 education are removed from those of the schools that I partnered with. Through this acknowledgement I started and ended my interviews with memos that described how I was feeling and identifying any assumptions that I had about what was said, or not said in the interviews regarding the education system. Furthermore, my identity as a white, cis, hetero woman has impacted how I was treated in schools. Although I attended a high school that was majority Latinx enrollment, similar to the schools that I partnered with in this study, I understand that my experiences within my community, and in particular within my schools, does not align with that of the schools that I partner with. In order to ensure that I centered the work of individuals that have experienced and studied race in schools I grounded this study in critical race theory in education and healing justice. Through analytic and reflexive memoing I attempted to understand the impact of my own identity on the research process.

Along with my personal experience growing up, I acknowledge that my professional experiences as a middle school teacher and trauma practitioner have lead me to develop an understanding of how exposure to violence can sometimes lead to traumatization in children and how schools are often ill-equipped to handle this trauma. While I am a trauma survivor, I do not have first-hand experience witnessing, hearing about, or being a victim of violence within my community. Although I am aware, through my personal experience, how a student can manifest trauma in schools, this is not generalizable. In my professional experience I worked as a middle school teacher in Brooklyn, New York where some of my students disclosed to me their exposure to violence in their homes and communities. There were times where I believed that

behavior and academics that I was witnessing among these students were directly related to these experiences outside of school. I witnessed how in- school interventions often ignored what the student needed and, in turn, labeled them as delinquent and unsuccessful. Because of this experience, I changed my career trajectory to focus on the impact of violence-related trauma in children. I subsequently moved to Detroit, Michigan where, as a trauma practitioner, I worked closely with individuals and communities impacted by trauma from exposure to violence within the community. For example, I lead homicide support groups throughout elementary schools and the community and teen dating violence groups in various high schools. I provided crisis intervention, trauma support, and case management for survivors and witnesses of homicide and violent crime, focusing specifically on children and adolescents. As a previous teacher and trauma counselor, I have witnessed how exposure to violence can overwhelm children and impact their success in the classroom. Nevertheless, I understand that while I worked closely with young people within communities with high rates of violence, I did not grow up in similar neighborhoods and have therefore only developed hunches based on observations and interactions.

Based on my own experiences, I am aware that I maintain the assumption that violence-related trauma impacts whole schools, particularly how teachers and other school staff understand and respond to students and schools in systemically impacted environments. To rigorously challenge my assumptions rooted in my identity and experience I used reflexive memoing throughout the research process. Through these memos I interrogated how I relate to the participants and/or the process being described and how my assumptions could potentially impact my analysis. This tool allowed me to extract my own biases from the process to the best of my ability resulting in a better understanding of how and why teachers and school staff perceive violence-related trauma in three Los Angeles high schools. Along with this, I worked in

community with other researchers as we created a collective analysis and writing group that met weekly. During these meetings we discussed our analyses and checked any underlying assumptions influenced by our identities. While we were working on different projects this allowed me to utilize external checks on my process. Finally, conducting and analyzing these data was oftentimes triggering for me. I got through these difficulties by relying on my spouse for support as well as reaching out to peers. I often reached out to another qualitative researcher, Victoria, who was working through their analysis at the same time as me. Together we discussed how our data were impacting us and supported each other getting through challenging interviews and transcripts. This not only provided me a safe space mentally but also gave me the opportunity to reflect on how my own experiences and perceptions could impact my analysis. Overall, reflexivity gave me a deeper understanding of my personal experience, my role as a researcher, and the stories that were shared with me.

Research Design

Currently, quantitative studies on the links between community violence exposure, post-traumatic stress, and low educational outcomes have produced mixed results (Hardaway et al., 2014). Furthermore, teacher and staff perceptions of, and responses to, students and schools located within neighborhoods burdened with high rates of violence are missing. As such, a qualitative study is necessary for further exploration. Qualitative research is a vital tool of inquiry utilized when a complex problem needs to be explored and is not adequately captured with quantitative measures and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While current evidence demonstrates a relationship between community violence exposure, post-traumatic stress, and educational achievement the how's and whys of this relationship are both unclear, warranting a qualitative approach to inquiry. In particular, a constructivist grounded theory, multisite case study design was used to composite individual perceptions of, and responses to, student

manifestation of violence-related trauma within three high schools. Results inform a conceptual framework that describes the institutional influence on teacher and school staff decision making when identifying and responding to students' trauma exposure.

A constructivist grounded theory approach was used throughout data collection and analysis to study the social process for identifying and responding to students exposed to violence-related trauma. Constructivist grounded theory is used to answer these “how” and “why” questions as it studies action within social and institutional contexts (Charmaz, 2008). Combined with this, a multisite case study design was used to glean insight into the unique institutional factors that influence teacher and school staff decision making (Yin, 2018). In particular, a case study approach allowed the researcher to identify how specific district and school policies influence the actions elicited through grounded theory interviews.

Constructivist grounded theory

Several distinct strategies employed in grounded theory studies (Charmaz, 2014) are present throughout the design and analysis of the current study. First, data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously (Charmaz, 2014). Following each interview the interviews were transcribed using REV and coded. Next, the researcher analyzed the actions and processes present in the data during initial line by line coding (Charmaz, 2014). Third, the researcher used constant comparative methods during secondary coding (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher also used focused coding to test the most salient initial codes against the data (Charmaz, 2017). Next, through axial coding the researcher drew on the data to develop new conceptual categories and inductive analytic categories through this systematic data analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz, 2015). This allowed the researcher to employ theoretical sampling as she refined categories and ensured breadth and depth to each of the categories. When more information was needed to understand a category or process, the researcher utilized theoretical sampling to gather targeted

information (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, the researcher ensured that category properties were saturated with enough data to provide a complete understanding of the meaning of each category (Charmaz, 2014). This resulted in the ability of the researcher to create the conceptual framework identified in the results. True to grounded theory, data collection and analysis were an iterative process that used intensive interviewing and constant comparison of the data through coding (Charmaz, 2014).

Multi-site case study

Along with grounded theory, this study used a multi-site case study design. Case studies investigate a current phenomenon in-depth in its real-world context (Yin, 2018). In this study, the context consists of the school, district, and community. The phenomenon of interest is teachers' and school staff's process to identify and respond to student trauma. There are several distinct features of case studies, three of which were applied to this study. First, the research questions asked "how" and "why" (Yin, 2018) in order to understand how teachers and school staff are responding to student trauma and why they respond in this way. Next, the researcher had no control over the phenomenon or the context and attempted to understand how the context influences the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Finally, the research was focused on a bounded system of the school (Stake, 1998). Three cases, or schools, were used to understand the same phenomenon in various contexts (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). This study sought to understand the school's response to students exposed to community violence and trauma in great detail and depth. With a constructivist lens, the study captured the different perspectives of teachers and staff to understand how they explain and experience the phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Data were gathered from 23 in-depth semi structured interviews with 13 teachers and 10 school staff in Los Angeles County. Recruitment occurred during the stay at home orders from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter uprisings from May 2020 until February 2021. Two separate interview guides were used for High School teachers (Appendix E), and High School staff (Appendix F). Based on the constructivist epistemology and grounded theory methods, questions were broad and general to allow the participants to construct the meaning of a situation. By being open to any possible answer, the researcher allowed the participants to define what the process of identifying and responding to student trauma meant to them (Charmaz, 2014). Teachers and staff were asked to describe the most recent, the first, and the most memorable times that they were aware of a student exposed to trauma dealing with that exposure in the school or classroom. Throughout these stories, participants were probed to talk about what they were thinking and feeling, how they responded, what factors influenced this response, who else was involved, and how they felt about it. These probes elicited a thorough representation of the process involved in identifying and responding to student trauma.

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select each school, or case. This allowed the researcher to select cases that would glean insight into the issue of central importance, responding to violence-related trauma in schools (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three high schools were selected based their participation in the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Trauma and Resiliency Program. Each of the schools was in the second year of implementing the Community Schools Initiative. As employees of schools participating in this program, teachers, and staff had some level of exposure to trauma trainings. This ensured that the staff were meaningfully similar in their awareness of the topic and that the school offered similar resources through funding from the county. Overall, school staff consisted of social workers, security guards, administrative

staff, and leadership. Particular staff was targeted for recruitment using theoretical sampling (Chamraz, 2014) to better understand the processes that teachers were describing. Following IRB approval, participants were recruited via snowball and theoretical sampling. The school principal sent out an initial recruitment email introducing the researcher, explaining the project, and directing interested participants to a survey monkey page. No more than two reminder emails were sent. Interested participants were directed to a survey monkey page (Appendix C), where they were asked for their first name, email address, and phone number. From this initial recruitment phase, 27 individuals expressed interest in an interview. Once they filled this out, the researcher sent the 27 potential participants an email to introduce the project, send the research information sheet (Appendix D), and set up a date and time for the interview. When needed, a reminder email was sent. If there is no response after the initial email the researcher conducted a reminder phone call. No more than two emails and one phone call were utilized. Twenty-four participants scheduled an interview, with one participant as a no show and no response, resulting in 23 participant interviews. Before each interview, respondents were given a research information sheet, explained their rights as a participant, and provided oral consent for participation in the interview (Appendix G). Interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes. All interviews that took place over the phone or zoom were audio recorded and transcribed using REV. The participants were emailed a \$10 amazon gift card following their interviews.

Supporting evidence for what Love (2019) describes as the consequence of White flight following *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools in urban centers, such as Los Angeles, are “hypersegregated.” In this sample, Latinx students comprise over 90% of the student body while the white student population ranges from 3% to below 1%. The general demographics of neighborhoods and schools the participants came from are presented in Table 1. School #1 is located within a neighborhood with predominantly Latinx residents, whose median household

income is about \$50,000, and whose crime rate is similar to that of the national average. The school has around 2,000 students who are predominantly Latinx and identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. They are reported to have 5 academic counselors and 1 counselor and no social workers. School #2 is located within a neighborhood with predominantly Latinx residents, although slightly lower compared to School #1. The median household income is around \$60,000 a year and the crime rate is reported to be lower than School #1 but similar to the national average. The school has around 1,000 students that are identified as predominantly Latinx and socioeconomically disadvantaged. They are reported to have 4 academic counselors and no counselors or social workers. Finally, School #3 is surrounded by a neighborhood with predominantly Latinx residents, a median household income of around \$50,000 and a crime rate in between School #1 and School #3 but overall similar to the national average. The school has around 2,500 students that are reported to be predominantly Latinx and socioeconomically disadvantaged. The school reports having 6 academic counselors, 7 campus security officers, 2 psychologists, and 1 social worker.

Of note, the participants that responded to recruitment for this study do not reflect the hypersegregation that Love (2019) identifies. In other words, while the student body is made up of predominantly Latinx students, this sample consists of predominantly Latinx teachers and school staff. As seen in Table 2, 10 of the participants were from School #1. Six of these were teachers and 4 were school staff. Six staff identified as Latinx or Hispanic, half identified as female and half identified as male. Their years of experience ranged from 5 to 22 and all but 1 teacher stated they had received training on how to identify trauma and all but 2 participants said they received training on how to respond to trauma. At School 2 there were 7 interviews, 3 were with teachers and 4 were with school staff. All but one of these participants identified as Latinx, Hispanic, or Chicax. Five identified as female and the remaining 2 identified as male. Their

years of experience in K-12 schools ranged from 4-27. All participants stating they received training on how to identify trauma- the majority of which described their trainings on abuse and substance use- and all but two state they received training on responding to trauma. Finally, there were 6 interviews that took place at School 3. Of these 4 were teachers and 2 were school staff. The majority of participants identified as Latinx or Chicanx, 4 identified as female and 2 identified as male. They had between 3 and 27 years of experience in schools. Similar to school #1, all but 1 participant stated they received training on how to identify trauma and all but 2 indicated they received training on how to respond to trauma. Of the 23 participants, 6 stated they had received training on the impact of violence on their students, 4 of which worked at School #1.

Analysis

To create a framework that explains how schools respond to traumatized students, analysis was based on grounded theory analytic methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018) that utilize coding to move data from concrete statements to generate theories (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding was used as a starting point to provide “analytic leads” that were explored in later data collection (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher stuck close to the data during the initial coding phase and remained open to all potential theoretical directions (Charmaz, 2014). Process coding was used during this initial coding phase to identify what was happening in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Process coding uses gerunds to identify actions in the data and highlights the action-interaction that the participant uses to reach a goal, solve a problem, or identify consequences (Saldaña, 2016). By naming the data, the researcher attempted to understand the views and actions of the participants (Charmaz, 2014). All of the codes identified in the initial phase were tentative and used to determine if more data was needed to support and create the emerging conceptual model (Saldaña, 2016). From this, it was determined that more interviews from school staff were

needed to obtain a clearer picture of the collective school process. During the second round of coding, axial coding was used to trim down the initial codes to inform analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Like initial coding, axial coding is an emergent process as the initial codes were compared against the data (Charmaz, 2014). The most striking codes were identified and compared to the rest of the data (Charmaz, 2015). This coding method follows systematic procedures to move the data from narrow units of analysis to broader units (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A code book with the most salient codes was created while the researcher used focused coding on nine interviews, with 3 participants from each school. This code book was then used against the remaining interviews and adjusted. This process allowed the researcher to become clearer on the dimensions and properties of potential categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Once coding was completed, codes were formed into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Clusters of the richest focused codes were placed into 3-4 categories (Pieters & Heilemann, 2011). Memos were used to define the properties of the categories and check those categories against the data (Charmaz, 2015). Each category consisted of properties that embody the meaning of the category (Pieters et al., 2012). Each category was then be compared to determine if there is a relationship between them (Charmaz, 2014). Analytic memos were then used to determine the greater meaning and relationships between the categories to identify the conceptual framework presented here (Charmaz, 2015).

Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness

It is a significant ethical concern for the researcher to question whether or not she interpreted the data correctly. While positivist researchers identify rigid steps for ensuring reliability throughout quantitative research, qualitative research has developed methods to ensure the quality and rigor of their studies (Billups, 2014). In particular, trustworthiness has been widely used as a framework for evaluating qualitative research. Trustworthiness includes five

main elements: credibility, dependability, transferability, conformability, and authenticity (2014). While these strategies are employed in qualitative research to ensure reliability, critical researchers have identified them as rigid structures that are typically applied to semi-structured data collection and are not supportive of the grounded theory methodology (Morse, 2015). As such, the researcher has adapted the methods of triangulation, thick description, and peer review (Morse, 2015).

First, the method of analytic triangulation was used in this study in order to ensure trustworthiness (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Analytic triangulation was adapted in this study as the researcher approached the data across participants and cases, or schools. Furthermore, the researcher approached the data multiple times through a variation of coding methods. This allowed the research to apply the CRT and healing justice lenses to the data as she considered all analytic angles. Throughout the coding process she asked how her data align or converge and she made sense of these areas. She also challenged and therefore revisited her interpretations based on what she learned from new data and analysis (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022).

Next, thick description was used to determine internal reliability. Typically, qualitative researchers employ methods such as standardized coding protocols and intercoder reliability with the goal of replication. In other words, the coding process is said to be reliable when there is a standardized system that can be replicated by outside researchers. However, this study used a constructivist grounded theory design that focused on interpretive coding where initial process coding consisted of the researcher identifying what the data signify and, later on what the data signified in the context of all of the interviews (Morse, 2015). While only one person conducted this coding process, the researcher checked their most salient codes against their data during focused coding to ensure that what was identified in the first cycle coding was validated against

the data (Charmaz, 2015). This ensured that the researcher was able to provide a thick description of the data that were gathered. This thick description included extensive detail and explicit descriptions during the data collection process (Billups, 2014).

Finally, the researcher employed peer review throughout data collection and analysis as a tool to prevent researcher bias and advance the conceptual development of the study (Morse, 2015). The researcher did this by presenting her findings weekly to peers which allowed these researchers to ask questions about the data and analysis process. This allowed the researcher to hear other perspectives regarding the data as well as hear her own voice. However, as she was closest to the data she takes ultimate responsibility over the findings described in this study (Morse, 2015).

Overall, the researcher understands the requirement of a rigorous research process as an ethical issue. She understands that she holds power in interpreting participant voices through her own (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022) and therefore took mindful action to ensure that she, to the best of her ability, was interpreting the data correctly.

Chapter 4

Results

A constructivist grounded theory multiple case study design was used to explore how teachers and school staff perceive, are impacted by, and respond to the manifestation of trauma derived from community violence exposure in three High Schools in Los Angeles County, California. Analysis of interviews with principals, teachers, and other school staff resulted in a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that delineates how individual identification and responses to trauma are situated within and uphold institutional power. Within the context of COVID-19 and the protests of the police murders of Black men and women, participants grappled with understanding their roles in schools with high incidents of student trauma but limited resources or protocols for responding. Findings highlight a four-step process (Figure 2) for identifying and responding to student trauma: (1) the power of identifying trauma; (2) shaping course of action for traumatized students; (3) the hidden toll of bearing witness to trauma and institution, and; (4) the cumulative impact on current and future students. This process is embedded within individual and institutional factors that significantly impact school functioning. As seen in Table 3, this process comprises four themes and their underlying subthemes. The subthemes detail the influential individual and institutional factors within each step as it answers the four research questions posed.

First, the study sought to answer *how do teachers and school staff from three high schools in Los Angeles County perceive the ways that trauma has manifested in their schools?* This question is answered throughout the theme the power of identifying trauma. Teachers and school staff ultimately hold the power to define what constitutes a traumatizing experience, primarily as abuse, suicide, and parent relationships. The factors that influence *how* teachers and school staff have come to define these student experiences as traumatizing are subsumed by the

three subthemes of (1) *the ways of “knowing” trauma*, (2) *“That person is so nasty:” Biases, personal experiences with trauma and relationships with students*, and (3) *learning from the state, the school, and the credentialing programs*. Participants identified instances of trauma through assumptions, self-disclosure, forced self-disclosure, class assignments, and shared experiences. Both individual and institutional factors influenced these ways of “knowing” trauma. The second subtheme identifies the individual factors that influence ways of “knowing” as the perception of context or biases, individual relationships with students, and personal experiences of trauma. First, participants’ perceptions of the students, families, and community in which the school was located were influenced mainly by participants’ race, the neighborhood they grew up in, and their socioeconomic status. On the other hand, personal experiences with trauma and relationships with students were consistent across participant demographics and roles in the school. Finally, institutional training was the primary reason participants knew or didn’t know what constituted a traumatizing incident. Findings were similar across schools, demographics, and years of experience. Overall, findings indicate that most teachers and school staff perceived trauma as an individual occurrence resulting from instances of abuse and suicide or suicidal ideation. Largely missing from these perceptions were community and school factors.

Second, the study asked *how and why do teachers and school staff respond to students exposed to trauma?* This was answered in the theme shaping course of action for traumatized students. This theme is broken down into two subthemes which highlight the interaction of individual and institutional factors that shape the course of action following the identification of trauma. The first subtheme, *“a gut feeling:” identity, relationships, and experiences*, highlights the most significant sources of individual influence when choosing to respond to trauma. Within this subtheme, individual biases, primarily derived from demographic identity match, account for the differences in how teachers and school staff respond to student trauma *within* schools. Next,

institutional factors that influenced responses to trauma are detailed in the subtheme *the presence of paternalism in policies, resources, trainings, and laws*. The power inherent in policies, resources, training, and laws shaped what action could be taken after deciding to respond.

The third and fourth themes answer the research question *how do teachers and school staff understand their responses to student trauma?* In the theme *the hidden toll of bearing witness*, participants highlight how they interpret their responses to student trauma and the considerable impact this has on their own well-being. This was further explicated in the theme *the cumulative impact* as it highlights how interpretations of responses to trauma influence future responses to students. First, the *hidden toll of bearing witness* consists of three subthemes. The first, *“it feels kinda helpless:” burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and helping*, identifies the outcome of witnessing student trauma. The second subtheme, *“I would say it was even traumatic for me:” coping skills, relationships, and professional expertise* highlight the individual factors influencing how teachers and school staff understand their responses to student trauma. A small number of participants were able to describe how they leveraged their coping skills, supports, and professional expertise to make sense of their response to student trauma. These individual factors were again transcendent of personal demographics. The third subtheme, *“we’re always thinking about our students:” inadequate responses, (un)available supports, coping in the system*, then indicates the institutional factors that influence this interpretation. Although the education system prioritizes the needs of students, there is a gap in resources or protocols that ensure proper care for students and families. Ultimately causing burnout and secondary traumatic stress then influence future responses to student trauma. The theme *the cumulative impact* describes how participants’ responses to trauma impacts the understanding of their relationships with their students and their role in schools. In the subtheme, *“now that you mention it:” needed distance from students*, participants describe how their awareness of their limited ability to

respond to student trauma within the educational system has led them to create distance from their students. This was primarily heard among teachers and school staff working in schools for more than 5 years. The cumulative impact was also influenced by institutional factors identified in the subtheme “*do more with less: saving the students*.” Participants describe how they attempt to understand their ability to respond to student trauma within the confines of the education system. The desire to save their students, and the belief that they can save their students, perpetuates their hypervigilance in identifying trauma and, in turn, their burnout when confronted with the reality of their role.

Finally, throughout each theme, the study answered research question 4 *how do teachers and staff describe institutional policies and systems of support [available or utilized] to respond to trauma within their schools?* Each theme has subthemes that illuminate the institutional factors that teachers and school staff leverage when identifying and responding to trauma. These institutional factors are critical as they transcend individual teacher and school staff demographic factors. These subthemes, as described above, are: (1) *learning from the state, the school, and the credentialing programs*, (2) *the presence of paternalism in policies, resources, trainings, and laws*, (3) “*we're always thinking about our students:*” *inadequate responses, (un)available supports, coping in the system*, and (4) “*do more with less:*” *saving the students*. Understood as a personal problem, the concept of trauma creates and maintains a deficit framework that blames students and their communities for experiencing systemic causes of harm. Results stress that without addressing harmful policies and practices throughout the educational system, violence will continue to be (re)produced.

The Power of Identifying Trauma

The power of identifying trauma rested in the hands of teachers and school staff, often without formal training or structures in place. Individual and institutional power were wielded by

determining who or what constituted a traumatizing incident. Identification was largely dependent on how they became aware of the student's traumatizing incident, teacher and school staff's personal experiences, and information that they have received from the school. Overall, trauma was described by the majority of teachers and school staff as the death of family members, instances of abuse, and suicide or suicidal ideation. Some participants mentioned accidental physical harm, student difficulty with parents, and, only twice, racism. In particular, all participants from School #1 and School #2 all described acts of gang violence within the community impacting the school. Those from School #3 were less likely to describe any instances of community violence as potential traumatizing acts.

Ways of "Knowing" Trauma

As seen in Figure 2, participants identified whether or not their students were traumatized in various ways. Identification happened through assumptions, student self-disclosure, information from school staff, or shared experiences. These methods of identifying trauma were disrupted by virtual learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The subsequent difficulty teachers and school staff had identifying student trauma virtually calls into question the efficacy of current methods for trauma identification.

First, assumptions before talking to a student and, in some cases, even after, were among the most frequently described ways of identifying trauma by most participants. Juan, a Latinx male from School #1, compiles his assumptions into a list of incidents he deems traumatizing. "Some of these students might be homeless, or they might be in homes where they're being abused. It's such a common or public knowledge that these conditions exist...." The inherent challenges that come from exercising power, evident in the creation of a list of "common" incidents, are described by Sesali, an Italian female from the community surrounding School #3,

as she emphasizes, “the most important thing about [identifying trauma] is understanding that we don’t know.” She further specifies:

Just because a kid’s quiet and a good student doesn’t mean they’re not experiencing trauma. They just manifest it in different ways. It’s really easy to say that the kid who’s loud or who’s troubled, or who’s doing drugs, probably has trauma. But really, we need to understand that all of the students have that potential.

Sesali contends with assumptions that she has previously made about students and their potential to experience trauma. She highlights that one cannot be sure what a student has experienced if the student does not tell us. While Sesali describes the importance of not assuming that a student isn’t traumatized, when asked if she was aware of students exposed to some type of violence within the community, she states, “no, it’s just more of a general demeanor of certain students, where you could just kind of tell that they’ve had these experiences.” Sesali assumes that students who are “troubled” or “loud” are traumatized but worries that the trauma among the “good” students is getting ignored. There is an apparent tension within this concern of assumptions. Participants acknowledge the harm of assuming “good” students are not traumatized but don’t challenge the assumption that all seemingly “bad” students are traumatized.

Next, students’ self-disclosure of trauma was depicted as both voluntary and forced. The majority of participants who maintained meaningful relationships with students linked knowing about trauma through the student’s voluntary self-disclosure. Trusted relationships between students and their teacher or school staff encouraged students to disclose the events of their lives. As Eden, a Hispanic female from the community with 27 years of experience, points out,

In this case, she said, “Can I talk to you? I need to talk to you. I have something that's bothering me.” And it just was instinctual to listen to her whole thing, and like I said, we have a really good rapport. I guess it's a funny thing to say because if we didn't have a good rapport, she probably wouldn't have come to me.

Good rapport also comforted students following identification of abnormal student behavior. When teachers followed up with a student after noticing a change in student behavior in the classroom, students voluntarily self-disclosed experiences of trauma. On the other hand, there were multiple instances where students were forced to self-disclose trauma through class assignments or the need to defend themselves when facing punitive consequences for their behavior. Following a student's disclosure of being sexually abused through a class assignment, Jessica said, "It wasn't until [the student] had to write a specific personal narrative that she decided to write about this." While Jessica felt like it was healing for the student to use this assignment to disclose her trauma, a school counselor describes her disdain for this type of forced self-disclosure, "...look at the topic, look what you asked them to write about. What did you expect? And I don't think they realize what they're opening themselves up to... I don't think they're equipped to deal with it." In this quote, Ines highlights how forced self-disclosure of student trauma can be harmful to students and staff who either don't know how to respond to it or, like the counselor, are now being forced to respond without the student's consent. On the other hand, class assignments were also leveraged to process current events. For example, Cedrick, the only interviewee that brought up the Black Lives Matter movement, states, “some of them had students do flip grids... on what's going on with George Floyd's death... this is important not just for us as the school to acknowledge what's going on, but it's important for our students to express themselves.” While these class assignments provide “the opportunity to

create the space” for processing shared experiences when they force one or two students to disclose their trauma it can be harmful.

Along with assumptions and self-disclosure, participants were informed of student trauma from another school staff member. A notification typically occurs following the death of a family member. The principal at School #2 describes his system for informing staff of the death of a student’s parent, “the attendance person has to know... because she has to clear the absences. And then, she informs the teachers that there was a death in the family and the student will be missing a couple of days. So the teachers know.” Omar describes his clear protocol notifying staff of the student’s trauma. Furthermore, Sesali describes how she was made aware that a student had lost a family member to COVID “from the counselor.” Although teachers were typically informed of the death of a student’s family through other school staff, teachers were relied on as “frontline workers” responsible for identifying other instances of student trauma. Reliance on teachers to provide academic knowledge and emotional support can be harmful to both students and schools. This became particularly evident during COVID, where teachers were forced to teach on a block schedule, spending limited time with their students. Like Isaiah, the Principal at School #3, describes, “our frontline people are not connecting with them, and the kids aren’t feeling that connection and aren’t sharing as much.” The identification of students’ trauma overwhelmingly lies in the hand of teachers, signifying an alarming institutional problem that chances the mislabeling and harm for students and their families.

Finally, shared experiences of trauma were heard among almost every participant at School #1 and School #2. Teachers and staff at School #1 identify an incident of sexual assault committed by a school staff member against a student. They collectively recount how this incident resulted in trauma across the whole school. At School #2, the murder of a student and a student suicide were cited as shared trauma experiences throughout each interview. At school #2,

Zalina describes how the trauma of the murder of a student became shared through a school announcement and email. Jessica tells how a student's suicide impacted her classroom, “all of us kind of had to navigate that trauma together when [student’s name] committed suicide.” In these shared experiences, participants describe how they responded to their feelings and those of their students.

These methods for identifying trauma were placed under the microscope during COVID as most teachers and school staff maintain that it was essentially impossible to identify student trauma virtually. Dennis, a teacher at School #3, discusses why the principal asked students to keep their cameras on, “...if there is something going on at home, maybe we can help in one way or another.” But, he laments that “for the most part, most kids are not turning on their cameras.” Without seeing their students, teachers attempted to stay connected with their students through other means. This included being available to students on their virtual platform after class, assessing where students were mentally through check-ins at the start of class, and creating assignments to provide updates on their lives. Cedrick compares the ability to identify trauma in person to identifying it virtually “...here on site, we can see things, we hear things, and we can address it, even in identifying students’ moods. Virtually online, it’s harder. Because you don’t always see it, you don’t hear about it.” This need to visually see students to determine their well-being was reiterated by Nineli, who states that she believes trauma always has a “visual clue that student is in need of help, whether it’s their behavior or their performance in class or attendance.” It is unsurprising then that all schools noted their inability to tell if a student was traumatized. Without noticing changes virtually, teachers and school staff cannot “see” trauma. Cedrick concludes that “you’re at the kids’ disposition to have them reach out to you.” Eden describes the importance of student agency during remote learning when she proclaims, “if they

don't reach out, then I don't know how else to [identify trauma]." And with this, the overreliance on "seeing" trauma becomes upended during the pandemic.

Participants' stories of identifying trauma are largely missing methods that encourage family and student agency over their own disclosure. Only one participant emphasized the need for a system to ensure students had the choice to disclose trauma or ask for supports. Ines, a school counselor, desires to "empower the student to make that choice for themselves... and parents too." An overall lack of control of students and families to identify their own trauma upholds the identification of trauma as an act of power. Teachers and school staff identified seemingly "traumatic" experiences through assumptions, voluntary self-disclosure, forced self-disclosure, and shared experiences. The power of identifying trauma is embedded within both individual and institutional factors.

"That Person is so Nasty:" Biases, Personal Experiences, and Relationships with Students

As teachers and school staff maintain the power of identifying who or what is traumatizing it is necessary to understand the individual factors that influence their identification of trauma. Three aspects of one's identity largely influenced the identification of trauma: biases, personal experiences with trauma, and relationships with students. Through their identities, teachers and school staff determine who is traumatized and from where this trauma derives.

Perceptions, or biases, of the school and the community surrounding the school, had a significant impact on how teachers and school staff perceived the well-being of their students. Individuals' perceptions of the students, families, and community in which the school was located were influenced mainly by whether or not participants' identities matched that of their students. The majority of those whose identities matched that of the school were more likely to describe the students and their families through the assets they bring to the school. On the other hand, most of the participants with identities that did not reflect the schools were more likely to

use deficit thinking when describing the community. The influence of identity is evidenced in two participants varying descriptions of the context of School #1. Cole, a White man from San Diego who has worked at the school for 15 years uses deficit thinking when he describes the community and families as “poor, low socioeconomic status, lack of parental involvement, uneducated, uninformed for the most part.” Whereas Cedrick, a Latinx male from the community who has worked at the school for 20 years described his perception of the students and their families by identifying their assets when he states, “I feel that students are more receptive, parents are more receptive to wanting support, to wanting the school to put together workshops to support parents.” While both of these participants worked at school #1, their perceptions of the students and their families differ because Cedrick grew up in the school community, whereas Cole did not. In fact, on multiple occasions, Cole directly describes that his identity and experience growing up is the opposite of the students in School #1. This difference in perceptions highlights the significance of creating a genuine connection with the community that teachers and school staff are working in and how that connection ultimately shapes how you perceive and respond to your students.

This is not to say that all individuals not from the community could not perceive their students through an asset lens. The majority of those that described the community through a deficit framework were typically outsiders lacking any aspect of shared identities with their students, such as race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status. However, a small number of participants noted that they did not understand the community while building meaningful relationships with students and families. For example, before accepting her current role, Nineli, a Middle Eastern female, did not live in California and had no meaningful understanding of the community surrounding the school. Although she described her first few months of work as “this is a challenging group of students that I don’t have any experience dealing with ever in my life,”

she did not maintain this deficit narrative throughout the interview. Interestingly, while Nineli was not from the community and had an initial perception of shock, she described herself as having a similar racial/ethnic identity and growing up with a similar socioeconomic status. Perhaps this is why she goes on to describe the school by saying, “the students were friendly, staff are friendly.” Nineli’s outsider experience is in stark contrast to Cole, whose identity had no similarities to his students. From these examples it becomes clear that the nuance of one’s identity influences how they perceive the school that they work within.

While there were individual differences within each school, broadly teachers and school staff from School #1 and School #3 were said to have grown up within the community. For example, staff from School #3 state, “there’s a lot of the teachers that attended the school, and there’s a lot of pride in the community, a lot of pride in the school.” On the other hand, the staff at School #2 were not said to be from the community. In fact it was stated that, “the majority of the students are Latino, but then you get to the staff... and its majority White teaching staff.” This difference in identity match across the three schools is significant to note as one’s identity and perception of the community are inextricably linked.

Along with biases in perception of context, participants referenced their own experiences of trauma and the similarities to those of their students as the reason they knew a student was traumatized. For example, Karla describes how her concerns for students were brushed aside throughout her interview. In one instance, she told school leadership, “we need to make sure we have extra support with this kid,” but lamented that “nobody believed me.” It was not until the student stole a car on campus that leadership told her she was right. At the end of her interview, she described her own experience of trauma, and it finally clicked; she realized that because of her own experiences, she can identify warning signs in student behavior that others do not see. Multiple teachers and school staff described this hyper-awareness of student behavior,

particularly when their experience with trauma mirrored that of their students. On the other hand, several interviewees hadn't experienced incidents they would deem traumatizing. For example, Priscilla stated that she "clearly do[es]n't have that experience." Rooted in this belief, she assumes that her students are more likely to be traumatized than her. Although she describes this as a benefit, she details that without this experience, she has "to try very hard to listen, understand what's happening and then help the student figure it out." These participants were always on the lookout to ensure that their students weren't acting in a way that might indicate that they were experiencing trauma. Whether hyper-aware or hypervigilant, it is clear that teacher and school staff experiences of trauma significantly impact the meaning they place on student behavior.

Finally, relationships with students were a significant element among most participants when identifying student trauma. Teachers and school staff who postulated having close relationships with their students were more likely to report learning of student trauma through self-disclosure. For example, Trinity stresses the importance of building meaningful relationships with her students, resulting in students' feeling of comfort confiding in her. She describes how she learned about how a student witnessed the arrest of his father following a domestic violence incident with his mother,

I figured there was something going on. I left him alone, I went on with the class. So when I was done with the class, they were doing their work, and he asked me, "can I step outside." And I'm like, "sure, step outside." I let him go outside. After about three minutes I said, "let me go check on him." So I got out there, and he was crying, and he was stooped down crying. I was like, "oh my God."

By building a previous relationship with this student, he knew he could ask Trinity to step outside when he needed it without facing a consequence. As Trinity talks with the student, he

entrusts her with a detailed description of what is happening at home. The significance of relationship-building becomes evident when Trinity later describes how this student was unwilling to open up to the counselor even though “he would come [to my class] during lunch, he would just come and sit down. Even though sometimes he doesn’t like to talk about it.” Through both the disclosure and the act of seeking a place of comfort during lunch, it becomes clear that Trinity built a trusting and meaningful relationship with her student. On the other hand, Isobelle described her first time responding to a traumatized student and how she negatively interpreted her student’s behavior without a relationship with her student. It was only after she suspended the student that a colleague made her aware of the student’s trauma. Isobelle learned that her student was hoping to get suspended from school so he could find a way to get food to feed his sister as his mother, in her drug addiction, was unable to care for them. Learning of this, Isobelle regretted her punitive response to the student’s behavior.

When a person is nasty, you can’t just say, “That person is so nasty,” and stuff like that. You can’t just make that conclusion right away. You have to know why is he doing that. Is there any reason? He might have a bad experience, or there must be reason. Always give the benefit of doubt, and see why he’s doing what he’s doing. You can’t just jump to conclusion.

From this experience, Isobelle reiterates the harm assumptions of students’ behavior can cause. Together the experiences of Trinity and Isobelle exemplify the significance of relationships in the varying ways through which teachers and school staff identified trauma.

Participants’ perception of the community, personal experiences with trauma, and relationships with students influenced how they identified trauma. The majority of those who did not have meaningful relationships with their students and whose perception of their students was based in a deficit framework most often identified trauma through assumptions both before and

after talking to the student. On the other hand, the majority of participants that described students and families as an asset to the school and described having meaningful relationships with their students were more likely to report learning about trauma through voluntary self-disclosure. Furthermore, participants who had previous experiences with trauma described being hyperaware of student's behavior and those that had no prior experience described being hypervigilant, assuming that their students were traumatized. Overall, the personal experiences of teachers and school staff gleans insight into how biases and personal experiences influence the identification and response to a student's trauma.

Learning from the State, the School, and Credentialing Programs

While varying individual factors influenced how and why teachers and school staff identified trauma, institutional training was the primary reason they knew or didn't know what constituted a traumatizing incident. Trainings were held during pre-service training, school training, which consisted of required state training.

The majority of participants, regardless of years in school, describe not receiving pre-service training specific to identifying trauma. Pre-service training, or training in teacher education programs, typically centered on creating assignments on social-emotional learning. For example, Priscilla, a third year teacher, who mentioned her awareness of student trauma stemmed from assignments, indicated she "adapted" these "from master teachers and other pedagogical classes that I took during my credential." This was further reiterated by Cedrick, a 20 year vet, as he indicates that he received training on social-emotional learning through his school counseling program. Missing from pre-service trainings was any mention of trauma.

The majority of participants highlight that trainings received from schools, or in-service, were solely focused on the state's yearly mandatory training. These include trainings on suicide or suicidal ideation and mandatory reporting of abuse and neglect. As such, teachers and school

staff frequently identified instances of trauma surrounding reports of suicide and alleged abuse. Dennis describes that “every year” teachers receive mandated reporter training that covers spotting abuse and neglect and the process for reporting. Cedrick, an assistant principal, supports this when he states that “during the summer training,” teachers learn about how to “address situations of, you know, where students come in and maybe share sexual molestation, or rape.” Training greatly influences how teachers and school staff identify trauma outside of their own identities. However, the training from teacher education programs and schools are narrow in their focus on who or what constitutes a traumatizing incident. Consequently, most incidents that participants describe as traumatizing trauma are suicide and abuse, consistently reinforced topics.

Largely missing from all of these were trainings that identified community factors, such as violence, that influenced trauma and how institutional factors cause various instances of trauma. In fact, of the seven participants that stated they had received some type of training around the impact of community violence on schools, most of them said this was obtained through conferences or other sources outside of an official school capacity. Meaning that identification of trauma was focused on individual experiences, ignoring institutional influences of harm.

Overall, the power of identifying who and what constitutes trauma lay in the hands of institutional actors. The perceptions of the school and community among teachers and school staff influenced how instances of trauma were identified through assumptions, self-disclosure, forced self-disclosure, class assignments, and shared experiences. In addition, personal experiences and, therefore, perceptions of trauma and relationships with students impacted how trauma was identified. Created and upheld by individuals, institutions influenced trauma identification primarily through trainings. As a result, teachers and school staff mainly labeled abuse, suicide, and parent relationships as traumatizing. Collectively perceptions of context,

individual relationships with students, personal experiences of trauma, and education institutions' training all influenced how and why teachers and school staff identified trauma.

Shaping Course of Action

Following identification, teachers and school staff decide how they respond to the trauma. Education institutions shape the course of action following student exposure to trauma through paternalism or their intent to ensure the safety and well-being of their students. Therefore, similar to identifying trauma, shaping the course of action is engulfed within instances of individual and institutional power as initially deciding how to respond to trauma is the responsibility of the individual who identified it. Cole wrestles with this power of decision making, "I mean that one's touchy, so there's two roads you could have taken...." With multiple options for teachers and school staff to respond to students, it becomes essential to understand what factors influence this decision-making. Combined, individual and institutional factors shaped the course of action following the identification of trauma. As seen in Figure 2, the course of action consisted of individual responses to student trauma, criminalizing students, or referring out for resources. Individual responses are understood as talking to students, offering emotional support, and ensuring leniency on classwork. Criminalization of student trauma included contacting CPS, the police, or security, and suspension of the student. Referring out for resources involves contacting school leadership or counselor or personally referring the student to available resources. Rarely, participants internalize student trauma by avoiding discussions with their student or questioning their response to the student.

"A Gut Feeling:" Identity, Relationships, and Experiences

In the process of responding to trauma, an individual's identity, their relationships to students and school staff, and their own experiences with trauma influenced how they decided to respond to trauma. As individuals held so much power over shaping the course of action, it

becomes concerning when Nineli states the reason for her response was “just like a gut feeling.” Most participants describe this gut feeling when responding to students, a fact that highlights the significance of understanding what personal factors led to that “gut feeling.” Through analysis of interviews with teachers and school staff, identity match, relationships with students and staff, professional experience, and personal experiences with trauma were the most significant individual factors described when responding to student trauma.

First, the majority of participants describe how their identity influenced their relationships with the students and their relationship with the community at large. For example, Cedrick at school #1 describes the implications of teachers and school staff being from the community as it “ensures that [staff] understand what issues students are facing because, again, they’re part of the community, they see it, they hear it... and people really advocate for students and for the community.” Cedrick explains that even the principal is from the community which collectively results in a shared “vision that’s created by the school itself.” In fact, the principal for School #1 is not only from the community but also went to the high school, and taught at the high school prior to becoming principal. Interestingly, this school was the only one of the three that had a clear protocol for responding to student trauma. While School #1 sounds like the ideal school, there are apparent variances in school staff’s identification with the community. Cole, a counselor at School #1, identifies as a white male who grew up in a middle-class neighborhood where most of the students in his high school “dug school.” The fact that neither his race/ethnicity nor his socioeconomic status matched the community was present throughout his responses to student trauma. When talking about his time working with a homeless student, he states, “...he’s so used to bumming the streets, and kind of unwilling to learn a new system so that it can make his life better.” Cole’s assumptions around what the student needs to be successful are evident. Although Cole maintains a meaningful relationship with this student, his

biases rooted in his personal experience influence what he thinks the student needs. Instead of seeing the student's assets, he blames his student for not working hard to "make his life better." It is evident then that even in a school with close ties to the community, biases still influence how teachers and school staff respond to student trauma.

Next, the relationships that teachers and school staff build with the students significantly impact how they decide to respond to students' trauma. The correlation between teachers' relationships with students and their classroom management skills is described by a security guard, "this is funny because I know who the good teachers are, and I know the teachers that need the help. Good teachers, I get a call to their classroom maybe once every six months. They have full control of their class." From his observations, Luis indicates that teacher-student relationships aid in response to students, traumatized or otherwise. This relationship becomes particularly pertinent when participants have not received training on effectively responding to students that have experienced trauma. For example, Nineli questioned how she responded to a student who had experienced sexual assault as a young girl. "I don't know, there is no ... Like we're not prepared as teachers to say, 'Oh, this is how you handle this kind of situation' ... It's just a gut feeling that you need to be sensitive toward their feelings...." While she, like many others, describes the gut feeling she had when responding, we later learn that this gut feeling was, in fact, derived from the relationship that she built with her student. Through her rapport with the student, Nineli was able to ascertain what her student needed, "I have her in one of my classes, she's also a member in my club, so I had a lot of time with her to maybe build that trust..." She compares her ability to respond in this instance to a student with whom she did not have a trusting relationship. She learned about the death of this student's parent from the school counselor. Nineli questioned how to respond to the student as he was not willing to open up to her, "...okay, I can't help you. Let me call and inquire and see if the counselors know anything

more that could be helpful,' because he wasn't sharing anything with me." As Nineli knew she was limited in her ability to respond, she referred to the school counselor to best support the student. Sesali from school #3 expands on this as she describes the significance of her relationships with her students and school staff when responding to student trauma when she states,

And it's also, the squeaky wheel usually gets the oil. I'm usually the teacher that refers people to stuff more than others do. Because I am also the person asking questions of my students that other teachers don't bother to ask. So, I don't know if my experiences are typical because I think that I go out of my way to try and talk about these issues with my student.

Through her relationships, Sesali is more likely to identify student trauma and go out of her way to advocate for her students or refer them to the available resources on campus. Indicating that relationships with school staff were just as important when responding to student trauma for both teachers and school staff.

Meaningful relationships and collaboration between teachers and school staff guarantee that students and staff are substantially supported. Cesar describes how these relationships can ease the burden of having just one staff respond to students, "so everyone kind of has a piece of the puzzle. So you don't just hold onto your little piece. You kind of say like, 'Here's my piece, put it together with all the other pieces.'" The need to include multiple staff members for an effective response is further described by Cedrick "it did take our district school psychologist to also do one on one check-ins with her. And then with me, it was more like a temperature check...It was also about reaching out to our teachers..." These relationships among teachers and staff allow for a holistic response to students that have experienced trauma. Furthermore, relationships are mechanisms through which teachers obtain informal support when they are

unsure how to respond to students. For example, Juan describes, “I found out that no matter what question I have, there’s someone who will help me with that. And that one person usually helps me with a lot of things.” While relationships ensured support was provided to both students and staff, relationships were also necessary to know who at the schools could be trusted. Cole indicates that relationships help him decide who to disclose student information to, “...there are some teachers I wouldn’t say a word of this to them, and then there’s some others that I would, and some in the middle. It’s literally you got to get to know the people you’re working with otherwise, it could really turn out bad.” The need to also identify what counselors can be trusted is described by Amina, “I’ve worked with some of the counselors, and they have great rapport with the students. So it seems like the students feel comfortable coming to the counselors, even on their own, and asking for support or just somebody to talk to.” In this sense, trusting relationships among school staff and students gave students the power to disclose their trauma and ask for the help they need

Furthermore, professional experiences influenced how the majority of teachers and school staff responded to students as decision-making was often based on previous interactions with students experiencing trauma. Without a formal process for responding to a student whose father died from suicide, Esmeralda describes how she knew how to respond to the student and her family because, “I’ve been in education for a long, long time....” This reliance on experience is reiterated by Cole as he describes how he decided to call home and states that although “1 out of 100” times his decisions to call home was harmful, “it’s worked out for the betterment” of students most of the time. Due to his apparent success with calling home to respond to the student’s trauma, he continues to take this action. Karla highlights how leveraging professional experience is a direct response to a lack of formal training, “going to school, you don’t really get the real learning you need to learn to work with students, you kind of figure it out

as you go.” Although professional experience is used, without any formalized training in deciding how to respond to students that have been exposed to trauma, it runs the risk of harming both staff and students.

Finally, personal experiences of trauma influence teachers’ and school staff’s connections and reactions to their student’s exposure to trauma. Personal experiences of trauma led to a willingness to “go above and beyond” for students. For example, after describing how her 5th-grade teacher saved her from dangerous home life, Karla reflects, “I think that I became that teacher that helped me. *Long pause while crying.* And I think that’s why I do a little bit more for my students. Because I guess I see myself in them and feel like I’m helping myself out.” The connection between Karla’s experience with her teacher exemplifies a deeper connection, and therefore response, to students who have been traumatized. Trinity also reflects on how her experience with trauma influences how she responded to her student when she saw him “stooped over and crying.” She describes how her initial response was to talk with him and provide emotional support. When asked why she responded in this way, she states, “I come from trauma... I didn’t have enough adults to talk to when I was going through my hard life ... I know talking about it kind of helps. I think that’s why I wanted him to talk to me.” Trinity essentially responded to her student by providing him what she needed, a trusted adult to confide in. Personal experiences with trauma also influenced reactions to crises. Omar describes his response to students following a student’s murder, “I grew up in the streets and saw a bunch of that stuff. So I think that’s why I’m calmer than a lot of folks in the same situation, that they get startled.” Decision-making and knowing how to respond following awareness of traumatizing incidents are influenced by the teacher and school staff’s personal experiences with trauma.

Responses following the identification of trauma are left to the decision-making of individual teachers and school staff. With an inability to remain objective when deciding how to

respond, schools must understand how individual experiences shape the course of action. Results indicate that connection to the community, relationships with students and school staff, professional experience, and personal experiences with trauma are the most pertinent individual factors that influence decision-making. While individual identities influence the course of action, these are often limited by institutional factors.

The Presence of Paternalism in Policies, Resources, Trainings, and Laws

Following trauma exposure, shaping the course of action was almost always reinforced through paternalistic institutional policies and practices. Participants almost always cite the influence of institutional factors on their responses to students. While they were primarily described as a hindrance to how teachers and school staff could respond, some were said to be helpful. Overall, institutional factors that shaped the course of action consisted of school policies, resources, trainings, and state laws.

First, even in their absence, policies influenced how most teachers and school staff responded to trauma. Schools typically only had protocols for responding to suicide ideation or incidents requiring mandated reporting. For example, as a counselor, Eden from School #2 indicates a lack of protocol outlining how she should respond to a student's disclosure that she had been raped years ago. Eden explains that they have protocols "...obviously for any type of abuse or obviously suicidal ideation, stuff like that. But, not for this, we don't. That's the hard thing.... there was nothing specific that I knew I had to follow." Without a specific protocol, Eden harnessed her individual experience and personality by responding to the student in a way that felt meaningful to her. However, these responses could quickly turn punitive. For example, at school #3 Dennis reacts to suspected trauma by calling security. Although he had security remove the student from the classroom, he further states that "we have the right to suspend from our class for two periods on that first instance, I didn't suspend him from the class." Removing

the student from the class was described by Dennis as the protocol for responding to student trauma in the school. Within this punitive protocol, Dennis's decision to not suspend the student but instead send him out of class can be re-interpreted as an act of compassion as the office was the only place that Dennis knew the student could "get support." On the other hand, School #1 was the only school with a straightforward protocol as Amina describes,

What we have our teachers do is submit a referral. The referral is basically if the teachers see or hear anything.... so if a student has a mental health need, they will be referred to the counselor, who then refers them to the health collaborative. And the health collaborative will connect them with a therapist.

With the variation across these three responses, it is evident that effective school policies and protocols are essential. While teachers and school staff are typically blamed for responding punitively, the issue stems from the school. This highlights the need to move beyond training teachers to prevent further harm to students by transforming the institutional factors that perpetuate harm.

Next, resources, or a lack thereof, were described as essential for responding to student trauma. For example, Dennis's decision to call security was directly linked to school protocol *and* the available resources as he states, "we have several school site security... there's one for our building and one for another building. And so, as soon as we call downstairs, they'll go ahead and tell that security guard to go up to that specific room." With such a wide availability of security guards on campus, it was a quick and easy solution for Dennis to address the situation. Even the counselors cited a lack of resources as Cole describes the challenges he faced, "because he wasn't homeless... he's not a foster kid, so basically it was just me and him." A lack of available resources through the district offices made it hard for Cole to do anything meaningful for the student. Of concern, the counselors were often described as the catch-all for

responding to student trauma. Teachers and leadership heavily relied upon them to ensure that students obtained needed resources. Available resources were directly linked to funding. To support a student following a suicide attempt, Cedrick describes the resources he tapped into, “we have a mental health collaborative here on campus so, through the district, and we partnered up with 35 different mental health agencies, so we can refer out.” While school #1 had funding from the district, the principal for School #2 had to write grants to finance necessary resources. Therefore, school and district level resources must be assessed when determining how well a school can respond to student trauma. Without the proper resources, even the most well-intentioned schools cannot adequately address student trauma, creating a continuous cycle of need. Teachers and school staff across the three schools assessed the effectiveness of available resources. For example, teachers differentiated between counselors that they deemed effective and those they avoided sending their students to. When describing this challenge, Sesali states, “who the counselor is makes a difference. Because the two senior counselors this year, one of them is excellent. The other one is horrible and doesn’t do his job. So, it’s just, it’s a crapshoot.” Counselor effectiveness becomes particularly concerning at schools that assign counselors based on grade level and name. Counselors face the same challenge with teachers. The counselor at School #1 stated that some teachers consistently have problems with the students, yet others can build meaningful relationships with the same students. These assessments highlight the significance of having available supports on-campus that match the needs of the students and staff. This reinforces that the power of responding to student trauma lies in the hands of the teachers and school staff.

Next, state training, teacher education programs, and informal trainings all shaped the course of action. In fact, the most cited responses to student trauma- calling CPS, referring to the counselor, or talking to the student- are all rooted, in part, to training received. For example,

Zalina describes mandated reporter trainings, "... you have to take the class every year. This is how you report, you're a mandated reporter. You have to fill out the form. You have to do the online thing. You have to do the phone interview. It's a whole thing." Due to this yearly training, Zalina identifies trauma as abuse or neglect and responds by calling CPS. The impact of required mandated reporting training is visible throughout the interviews as teachers and school staff describe abuse and neglect as the primary source of student trauma. Furthermore, the majority of teachers explain the lack of training from their credentialing programs. Although teacher education programs are created to prepare teachers to work with students, Emmanuel highlights that "in my credential program there was never really any curriculum that spoke to how to handle trauma. I mean, there's classroom management..." The training gap in credentialing programs led to teachers informally learning how to respond to student trauma during their first year of teaching. For example, Isaiah describes how he learned how to respond to student trauma through a school social worker his first year teaching, "I think that's where I really got my training... I was just fortunate...because, for most teachers, you don't know... I can imagine if I didn't have them there, I really wouldn't know what to do." If it were not for a social worker's availability and commitment to informally training Isaiah on responding to student trauma, his student would never have gotten the support she needed to ensure her safety. Those that received informal training in their first year described themselves as "super lucky" to have extra help. As Cesar states, "that was in my first year at [school name]. [the counselor] was the one that was saying, 'If anything happens or you hear anything, send them to me. We have the training. We're dealing with all that.' They probably dealt with it more than me." Because of these initial interactions, Cesar now ensures he refers students "to the right people" as their response to trauma. Mandated trainings, teacher credentialing programs, and informal trainings in the first

year all significantly impact how they learn to identify and respond to student trauma in the future.

The majority of teachers frequently cite laws that impact how they respond to students. These laws primarily included confidentiality and mandated reporting. First, confidentiality is said to cause a lack of communication from school staff following referrals, limiting their ability to respond to students effectively. Sesali states that “because of confidentiality issues, the counselors have to limit sometimes how much information they share with us. So, I appreciated the heads up. But all it was, was a heads up.” Confidentiality laws inhibited how successful she felt in supporting her student following the death of a family member. While Sesali understands the “fine line” between divulging information that potentially causes further harm to the student, she highlights that she is often unsure how to best accommodate students. What would be helpful, in her opinion, is if counselors would, at the very least, divulge “what the topic is, so I could either avoid the topic or be prepared if I bring up that topic, that...it might affect the student negatively.” Cedrick, the assistant principal, describes how he successfully navigates confidentiality laws. While he doesn’t disclose everything to teachers he does tell them what to look out for and what to do if they saw specific cues, “if you see this, you need to make sure you notify me or our school psych, or her school counselor.” As such, he maintains confidentiality while also ensuring that he is helping both the teachers and the student be successful in the classroom. Confidentiality even impacted how effective participants saw the resources at the school. Overall, confidentiality laws are described as barriers to adequately supporting students following exposure to trauma.

Along with confidentiality, laws enforcing mandated reporting came up as the *only* response to trauma on multiple occasions. For example, when asked about an incident that they believe a student was exposed to trauma, Zalina describes what she believes was a helpful

response for responding to assumed student trauma, “we have to fill out an abuse report, and with the abuse report, we are robots. We’re like the secretary, we fill out the form, we don’t investigate... it’s so mechanical that it’s not really like we’re connecting to the kids if we hear that they’ve been through a trauma.” As mandated by law, this protocol does not allow teachers and school staff to build relationships with students. In fact, Angie describes how mandated reporting actually damaged her relationship with her student as she describes her most impactful experience with student trauma. Angie recalls having to report a student’s experience of sexual abuse by a family member after her student trusted her with the story. She details the impact of this experience on her, the student, and her family:

So I did end up reporting it, and they told me they were going to send someone. I believe it was a Friday because she told me, ‘Please don’t say anything.’ And I told her I was going to have to. Because she hadn’t told mom, I called her and said, “Look, I reported it. Someone is going to go to your home, and your mom is going to find out. So I think it might be better for you to tell her than for a social worker or police officer.” She was crying, she said, “Miss, why did you do that?” And it just broke my heart because I felt like... *long pause while crying*... sorry... *long pause while crying*... I thought, “I can’t betray her.” ...*long pause while crying*... the reason it’s still very emotional for me is because I feel she just never really recovered from that [crying].... I had to go talk to my principal, and he said... “You have to do it,” and I said, “I know I have to, but it’s just hard.” I just had to do what was right, even if the students hate me, I have to do what’s right... Unfortunately, what’s right isn’t always what’s best for them... It will be difficult for me to get over just because the downward spiral she had after. She was already getting into problems and then after that, the fact that she

had to think about it all over again and then I think some of the other family members... Her mom believed her, but her other family members who found out, I think didn't believe her.

Angie recalls having to break the trust of her student by reporting an incident that happened years earlier, opening old wounds for the student. Angie understands how being a mandated reporter, in this instance, harmed the student and harmed her relationship with the student. However, a select few described the positive outcome that came from this law.

With this, there is a tension between mandated reporting harming students and mandated reporting saving students. Esmeralda describes how she reported the sexual abuse that a student and her sister were experiencing by a grandparent.

The whole investigation took place, and as a result, the children were removed from their home, they went to different places. Years later, one of them graduates from a major university. Another one, I was out shopping with my son and happened to be a manager of a store, and the young woman said, "Do you remember me?" ... and I'm like, "I do remember you," and she thanked me. She was like, "Oh my gosh, that was the hardest thing ever, but I want you to know that," because after they were taken away, I didn't ever see them, and this was years later. And she said, "that was the best day of my life because we got out of that situation," and then she went on to tell me about her success in college and starting her own family and all those kinds of things.

Esmeralda described this as the most impactful experience she had ever had as she felt like she was able to substantially change the lives of the two girls for the better. This was heard again by Karla, who talked about her own experience with trauma at the end of the interview. "So I actually, when I was in fifth grade... *crying*... I told one of my teachers how my dad was, and

she called DCFS, and I'm grateful because he was horrible." She goes on to describe this teacher as the woman that rescued her. Like the two girls in Esmeralda's story, Karla explains how mandated reporting saved her and altered her trajectory. With this evident tension, one is left wondering what system can be implemented that ensures not just the safety of a select few, but the safety of all?

Finally, all school responses to student trauma changed during the pandemic. This responsibility primarily fell on the role of school leadership as schools started to go above and beyond to better support students and their families. This was done by increasing visibility, providing extra resources, and holding flexible availability. At School #3, Isaiah describes how their school worked to become more visible. "I have to make myself available. I have to provide more information. And teachers and everybody, that's the big difference is I have to do the outreach. I have to put myself out there because that's my job now. People want information. People want resources." Isaiah follows this up by describing his desire to continue this level of care after virtual learning has ceased, "we have to be the hub, and we need to go out there and make people feel comfortable." School #2's school leadership made house visits to students that they had not heard from in a few days and sent care packages to students when they lost a loved one to COVID. School #1 took this a step further by creating a survey and sending it out to families to identify their needs and then refer families to the necessary resources. With this change in role, school leadership moves away from focusing on disciplining students to provide care for students and the school community. Overall, COVID changed the way many teachers and school staff thought about the role of the school. As Emmanuel describes, "public schools serve more than just this idea of education. It's very much a center for social services and outreach."

Several institutional factors inform how teachers and school staff are, or are not, able to respond to student trauma once it has been identified. As the district heads institutional decision making, it is imperative for those with decision-making power to be aware of the community's needs so that they are clear on what resources, policies, laws, and trainings are needed within each school. As Cole describes, "it seems like the people at the top don't really get a pulse of what this community needs." Furthermore, the changes implemented during COVID that led to an increase in visibility, resources, and availability should be continued into in-person learning as it changed the role of the school from one of harm to one of support.

Overall, individual and institutional factors once again interact to shape the course of action following the identification of trauma. Findings identify that an individual's identity, their relationships to students and school staff, and their own experiences with trauma are the most significant sources of individual influence when choosing to respond to trauma. Furthermore, policies, resources, training, and laws shaped what action could be taken after deciding to respond. While participants described their utmost concern as the well-being of their students, the power that schools place over individuals' decisions to respond to trauma and then the institution's influence over what the course of action could be was paternalistic in nature. The process of navigating this interaction, combined with the outcome of the course of action, influences the collective well-being of teachers and school staff.

The Hidden Toll of Bearing Witness

How teachers and school staff understand the outcome of their identification and responses to student trauma leads to the hidden toll of bearing witness. This impact is often hidden or ignored by the school, whose priority is the well-being of students. The emotional responses among teachers and school staff ranged from sadness, to fear, to anger, to completely shocked, and sometimes a combination of sorts. Following the emotional descriptions of the outcome of their

response to student trauma, teachers and school staff either processed these feelings or avoided them entirely. As seen in Figure 2, the impact resulted in teachers feeling burnout, experiencing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, and, on rare occasions, thinking that they helped.

“It Feels Kinda Helpless:” Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Helping

“It feels kinda helpless” primarily derives from the combination of overwhelming exposure to student trauma and the hopelessness of working within a system that cannot properly help its students. Participants were only asked to describe three incidents when they were aware that one of their students was exposed to trauma, yet they often told more. In some interviews, participants listed off incidents, like a checklist in their mind, describing one traumatizing situation after another. As Cole states, “I mean there’s so many, there’s so many.” Yet, at the same time, participants were unable to care for their students within the educational system effectively. They relate feelings of hopelessness derived from the lack of ability to protect the student or provide the student with the support they believed they need. With an inability to help a student who lost a family member to COVID Cesar states,

I can’t do anything. I mean, it feels kind of helpless. There’s nothing I can do. I can say nice words, but I just feel like they’re insufficient, but you just do your best to just try to be as empathic as you can be and just tell them that stuff that I can take care of, “Don’t worry about it. It’s not a concern. There’s real stuff going on right now, but deal with your family and let me take care of the rest.”

Exacerbated by the disproportionate harm of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and school staff described the burnout that came from caring for hundreds of students without meaningfully changing their situations. Although Cole recognizes the fact that he can only do so much, he depicts the toll this takes, “you cry because you’re just like, ‘I can’t help this kid, it’s just completely out of my hands.’” Time and again, participants match their list of students that have

been harmed with their inability to help. From this comes a harsh reminder that the system might not be made for their students to be well. Jessica divulges their frustration with this system, "...it's kind of unnerving, aggravating, that children still remain unprotected." And from this comes "a sense of being overwhelmed as we wish we could do more, but we can't." Constantly engulfed in student trauma without any real way to address it, participants' narratives evoke feelings of secondary traumatic stress.

Teachers and school staff frequently express symptoms of secondary traumatic stress through their avoidance, hypervigilance, and vivid recollections of their students' trauma. Participants repeatedly avoided talking about their own feelings of each incident, instead focusing on their student's feelings. Sesali states, "it's one of those things where you learn how to compartmentalize" things that come up in work and her home life. The need for Sesali to compartmentalize or avoid soon becomes clear. Following the disclosure that one of his students was sexually assaulted by a teacher for several years, Cedrick states, "you feel helpless, and you think like, man, could I have done anything about it? Could somebody else have maybe seen the signs or maybe, identify that maybe something wasn't there? It makes you feel helpless, it makes you feel like, now you have to almost be on guard." Questioning his response, Cedrick describes how this hypervigilance manifests in his current school,

I often think about that, and when I see students or when I talk with students, and I do sometimes have to stop myself and think like, okay, I can't assume that every student is dealing with this, so maybe I just need to listen from a different angle or from a different perspective. But I think it's almost like human nature to want to just help out and to pick up on cues and think like, I wonder if this is what they meant, right? Or this is what's going on, and they're trying to mask it with this information.

While Cedrick questions his hyperawareness, he cannot help that he is brought back to that first moment. This re-experiencing was heard throughout the interviews as participants paint a vivid picture of the first time, the most recent time, and the most impactful time they were aware of a student exposed to trauma. Jessica describes, in detail, her recollection of a time she was exposed to a student's trauma,

She wrote about being left in the care of a grandparent, and her mother would work nights. And so, she was molested by an uncle repeatedly over a period of years. And apparently, when the mother found out, because the student, I guess, tried to commit suicide when she was 12. And that's when the mom found out what was going on. And I remember, in the essay, I mean, it's like if I were reading it right now.

Hearing this narrative, one is pulled into the teacher's memory as she herself is reminded of her student's writing. As participants describe the student, the incident, the way they responded, their voices often pause, thinking through the impact, thinking of how this changed the way they understood their roles. They questioned their responses and why this happened to their student. Their care is heard through their urgent desire to protect their students, to do right by their students. As Dennis describes the first incident he was aware of the harm done to a student; he asks himself, "...why are they doing this to you?" then again, after a long pause, he asked, "why is this happening to you?" And eventually, he decided, "...this is what it's like to be a teacher in [neighborhood]. And you just have to suck it up, and you have to keep going forward and try to do the best you can for these kids." And with this, the failure of the system to provide what the students need is felt throughout the school resulting in symptoms of secondary traumatic stress among staff. Teachers and school staff describe their avoidance of thinking about the trauma,

their hypervigilance in attempting to identify other instances of student trauma, and how they re-experience learning about the traumatic incident through their vivid narratives.

While most participants describe the emotional toll of bearing witness to student trauma, several participants believe that they were able to help their students. Participants convey going out of their way to offer comfort and support to their students. Some teachers and school staff felt like they helped by going above and beyond for their students. When Jessica describes her response to the death of a student's parent, "I just picked up a couple of little gifts at the hallmark store... Perhaps I went out of my way, but I felt like it was appropriate, and I think the family appreciated it." Outside of school hours, Jessica believed that she helped the student by showing the family she cared and was thinking of them. Others describe that they helped by either hearing directly from their students or assuming that their response was helpful. For example, as previously stated, Esmeralda's response to her student's disclosure of sexual abuse was later said by that student to have changed her life. On the other hand, Zalina filed a CPS report against a student's stepfather for what she assumed was abuse without ever talking to the student. Zalina concludes, "I was glad in some small way I was helping" because she was "able to get her help" by connecting her with a social worker. By going out of their way, hearing from the student, and assumptions, teachers and school staff indicate that they were able to help their students.

How teachers and school staff understand their identification and responses to student trauma falls under the theme of the hidden toll of bearing witness to trauma and the educational system. This process impacts teachers and school staff emotionally and physically. This impact is often hidden or ignored by the school, whose main priority is the well-being of the students. The outcome of bearing witness to trauma is highly influenced by individual coping skills, supports, and professional experience. These individual factors are anchored within and dependent upon institutional factors of inadequate responses, institutional supports, and the ability to cope with

the educational system. The hidden toll of bearing witness is (re)produced through institutions as individuals attempt to navigate the schools while having their well-being deprioritized by themselves and their school leadership.

“I Would Say it was Even Traumatic for Me:” Coping Skills, Relationships, and Professional Expertise

What is interesting to note about the individual factors that teachers and school staff describe utilizing to care for themselves is that there was often a pause as they thought about this, questioning how *do* they care for themselves amidst all this trauma? While participants were more likely to describe the ways they cared for their students as a way to cope, a select few told of their skills, supports, and professional expertise as means to regulate following each incident.

First, less than half of teachers and school staff described the coping skills that they have learned through practice over the years. Typically, participants listed skills or activities to practice self-care such as mediation, yoga, or going on a walk. Some teachers and school staff listed hobbies outside of school, such as smoking meats, bowling, and the like. With each hobby came an ability to unwind once they got home from work. Not many teachers or school staff describe caring for themselves in this way. However, the ones who prioritized their well-being were more likely to identify the impact trauma exposure has on them. And perhaps it was through this recognition of their trauma that they knew they needed acts of self-care to cope.

More often cited, relationships with colleagues, family, and friends shaped their ability to process their exposure to student trauma. Teachers and school staff describe talking with their colleagues to either decide how to respond to a student or process what happened with a shared student. For example, Isaiah explains how his relationships with staff help him process traumatizing incidents, “when you have colleagues that you can bounce things off. And we do share students. So to a certain extent, it’s the camaraderie and support.” Furthermore, Eden

describes that although she does have supportive familial relationships, their ability to understand her experience at the school is limited. “But my colleagues, we’re in the thick of it together and all the protocol and stuff that my husband doesn’t really understand. So it was them that really helped me through.” Though teachers and school staff cite the support of their family and friends as aiding in their ability to cope with exposure to student trauma, it was most often the support from colleagues that were the most beneficial.

Finally, through professional experience, teachers and school staff recognized the limitation of their role in the school. They grew in their ability to respond to student trauma, allowing them to cope with various outcomes. Cole, a counselor for more than 20 years, stated that he recognizes that “you can only do what you can do” within your limited role in the school. As he reckoned with his limited role, Cole found comfort in the fact that at least he is attempting to try and “reach out and take a chance,” hoping to make an impact. Along with this, length of time in schools impacted how participants described how they are affected by witnessing student exposure to trauma. When recollecting the most impactful time bearing witness to student trauma, almost every teacher described an incident that happened in their first year. Without hesitation, Isaiah exclaimed, “oh, that would be my first year teaching back in 1992.” Why these first exposures to student trauma stick out the most to teachers, even decades later, was elaborated on by Dennis,

...that first time was, I would say it was even traumatic for me because I don’t think I was prepared. I think I had dealt with, as an instructional assistant or even as a student seeing other people neglected or even abuse. But the fact that as an educator, now you’re in charge, you’re playing a vital role in their lives.

Although teachers are placed in classrooms during their credentialing program, they are not responsible for student outcomes. The first year alone in a classroom places the sole

responsibility, and perhaps *liability*, of ensuring the safety of their students. Teachers often vividly remember these incidents as they describe how unprepared they were to handle them. These first instances of exposure to trauma are vital as they impact how teachers and school staff identify and respond to student trauma in the future.

Overall, teachers and school staff had trouble identifying their methods for caring for themselves following trauma exposure. While they were more likely to describe how they cared for their students, some discussed coping mechanisms they leveraged outside of school hours. Others describe the significance of their relationships with colleagues and family and friends as ways to process. And others describe how their professional experience influenced how they felt following exposure to student trauma. All of which are linked to the gap in care provided by schools.

“We’re Always Thinking About our Students:” Inadequate Responses, (Un)available Supports, Coping in the System

Institutional factors largely influence adverse outcomes following trauma exposure through the institution's lack of care and support for students and staff. This was primarily assessed through inadequate support for participants from schools, (un)available institutional supports for students, and formalized protocols in the educational system.

Teachers and school staff detail the available supports for their mental health following exposure to student trauma. This primarily consisted of a pamphlet with a hotline to call for brief mental health treatment, training on self-care, and support provided by school leadership. For example, as she describes resources available to her, Nineli states, “they tell us that if we need to talk to somebody, if... we’re traumatized, there’s people to talk to on campus.” Juan specifies formal training provided to staff, “we have this wellness webinar, and... at least once a week, I do get wellness checks... different things to take care of ourselves, to make sure that we’re not

just teaching and dishing it out, but we're kind of replenishing ourselves. So there's a lot of links and resources they put on there." While Nineli and Juan have access to resources to care for their well-being, they describe not taking advantage of these resources. Juan connects this to the fact that teachers are "very caring and they're more compassionate toward others than we are to ourselves, and we're always thinking about our students and how, in effect, they're impacted by different conditions." Of concern, this conveys that within education, teachers are not taught to care for themselves. This sentiment reverberates throughout each interview, and even as Ines identifies the difficulty she has had during COVID, she details her inability to care for herself.

I'm dealing with my own stuff. I need therapy, and I'm not in the right state to offer support when I need support. But it falls on me to take care of that. I need to do it for myself, but I mean, I don't know that our school or our district really thinks... I don't think they realize we have our own social-emotional issues and need support too. But I think it's definitely something that we need.

Ines elucidates that school systems do not prioritize staff well-being as their primary concern is the students. This is verbalized by Nineli, who has "more of my concern for my students." In this sense, it becomes an either-or situation; either my students are well, or I am well. Questioning how schools can care for both the staff and the students exemplifies the hidden toll of bearing witness.

Furthermore, support for teachers and school staff changed during COVID. Angie, the principal for School #1, indicates that in "the first week we didn't meet at all. I was too overwhelmed... [the staff] just expected me to like have it together like I've been through this before." But later on, Angie was able to work out what she needed so that she could provide "wellness activities and seminars" for the teachers. However, Emmanuel assesses these self-care trainings as "just painful." He elaborates by saying that

Structures of racism have existed, continue to exist in all aspects of our daily lives. There really are very, very few programs that address that. Even now, I mean we know that the majority of teachers in schools period are predominantly white. If they're the ones that have the authority in this structure of learning and authority, that's a big issue that needs to be addressed, and it's a bigger issue than, let's say, a workshop.

Emmanuel is the only participant that highlights that harm comes from racism and that to be well, racism and racist structures need to be upended. This becomes a conundrum for schools in that the damage rooted in the education system cannot be fixed through one-time training on self-care. When self-care in and of itself is ineffective as it trains teachers and school staff to learn to live with systemic harm. To truly heal, more considerable systemic change is needed.

As teachers and school staff are taught to prioritize the well-being of their students over themselves, it is of no surprise that the (un)available supports within schools takes a mental toll. This makes it challenging for teachers and school staff who believe their responses aren't enough. For example, Jessica feels like they are unable to respond to traumatized students as, "...there's also the time constraints...we have to have instructional minutes, et cetera. So I just feel like the response is never adequate or enough." Furthermore, Rosa, a teacher, struggles with her inability to provide care for her students, "it's not to say, I don't want to help them, but I'm not necessarily equipped with the skills and all the training..." While she later describes that she tries "to make sure they have the resources they need," this becomes a hindrance as many schools are without resources. Multiple participants, particularly from school #2 and School #3, attribute the void of mental health supports on campus to their feelings that institutional responses are never enough.

On the other hand, available student supports alleviated sadness when hearing about a student's situation. For example, when asked how she coped with her feelings after learning about a student that was homeless, Nineli focused on her ability to "take action" for her student. This need to provide care for the students was heard again by Sesali, who laments "that it's hard to not let [student trauma] impact you." They go on to state that they figure out a way to "alleviate" their own difficulty processing student trauma by saying, "I should research this. Or maybe I should put her in contact with this person. Or I have a friend who's a therapist, maybe she could do pro bono work with this person." While she takes on this extra "emotional labor," she states that she doesn't mind doing it. Overall, many teachers and school staff describe coping by helping students. However, what happens with this ability to cope when the school's response is "never enough?"

While navigating institutional factors that limited how much teachers and school staff could support their students, participants cited their ability to respond through formalized protocols. Schools said to have a clear protocol in place for responding to specific types of student trauma allowed staff to regulate their emotions in times of crisis. Isaiah highlights the significance of having protocols for responding to suicidal ideation,

But yeah, it's a lot. Now that you ask about it, it's very stressful. But for the most part, we stay calm, and we just follow protocol. And that's why I think it's important to have these things written down and these protocols because if you don't and you don't practice, or you don't have the experience, it's very easy to forget steps.

These instances were almost robotic as Cedrick describes the steps for responding to student suicide and how this helps him cope "with situations like that." However, he indicates that the availability of resources is an essential factor in the success of protocols, "we needed to provide

counseling, again, because we partnered up with those agencies, that ensures that we can bring crisis counselors on campus to address that, but also to support our teachers.” This once again emphasizes the necessity of resources. Overall, teachers and school staff struggle with prioritizing their own well-being over that of their students. Those that expressed difficulty coping with exposure to student trauma indicate that the school responses are not enough for the students. On the other hand, those who said they could cope were actually describing their ability to cope with the school system, not the actual exposure to student trauma. It becomes imperative then to ensure that schools prioritize the provision of supports for teachers, school staff, and students.

Participants describe experiencing a range of emotions as they detail how they attempted to provide care for their students. Through this urgency in caring for students, teachers and school staff were often unable to care for themselves. While they could describe the individual factors such as their relationships with colleagues and their professional experiences, they were less likely to identify coping strategies that they leveraged to ensure their own well-being. In fact, through the prioritization of student needs, the education system maintains that teachers and school staff should not care for themselves. This becomes particularly concerning due to the school system’s gap in resources or protocols that ensure proper care for students and their families. As such, a lack of support for themselves and their students often leads to burnout and secondary traumatic stress among teachers and school staff. The cumulation of the mental and physical impact of bearing witness to student trauma ultimately influenced how teachers and school staff understood their role in identifying and responding to student trauma in the future.

Cumulative Impact

Ultimately, the overlap of individual and institutional factors that teachers and school staff navigate creates a cumulative impact of trauma on the school systems. The inability to

prioritize one's well-being within the educational system holds consequences for current and future students. As seen in figure 2, participants detail two options for coping with the collective harm of the education system, creating distance from students or accepting one's role in the school.

“Now That You Mention It:” Needed Distance from Students

For the majority of teachers and school staff, there is an apparent tension between caring for themselves and caring for their students, with their care for students ultimately taking precedence. When asked how instances of exposure to trauma impacted them, most participants had to think, with a “now that you mention it” or “I haven't thought about that before.” Underscoring how schools often center students' experiences and collectively ignore their impact on school staff. For example, Isaiah states, “now you're bringing this up, and I'm like, ‘Oh yeah, it is traumatic.’ But we're sometimes desensitized to certain things, which is terrible.” While he describes it as desensitization, it can also be attributed to the fact that staff are taught to center the student experience, sometimes at a high cost to their own well-being. In an attempt to care for themselves, teachers and school staff describe the distance they create from their students. This distance is evidenced in creating boundaries or leaving the schools that have harmed them. Isaiah alludes to his need to distance himself from his students following the murder of his student.

We extend ourselves, but you also got to know where to cut it off ... And that's actually the reason I left my first school. I got burnt out, and I had to make a change, and that's when I came to [School #3]. And from there on, I don't think I made the connections like I did when I was in elementary. At that school, it was interesting. I was a godfather for some quinceañeras. But then I said, “Now I have

to be a little more,” ... And I still get to know kids, and I care about them, but not to that point that I did there. And it’s been good to do that.

Throughout this interview, Isaiah jumps from the urgent need to care for his students to knowing that he needs to first care for himself. When does the act of caring for yourself become an act of caring for your students? How can you care for them if you are burnt out and have nothing left? As so eloquently stated by Isaiah, he was left with the reality that “you try to impact people, but by and large you do your job, and you do the best you can, and you’re unfortunately not going to be able to change everybody’s life, right?” Through this, we begin to understand the role of a teacher in students’ lives, in the schools, and even arguably the most important aspect, their own lives.

Along with creating clear boundaries with their students, teachers and school staff also described moving schools or moving districts. For one teacher, Dennis, this was because of the normalization of violence within the school and school leadership’s tepid response to the violence. He states, “I was there three years at [school name], and in those three years, I knew of five students getting killed in the community. That was being brought onto campus the rival gangs, and the hate and the violence were common on campus.” When describing one incident of a threat of murder that drove a student out of the district, Dennis describes the school response when he states that, “nothing really happened to them.” Unable to cope with a school system unwilling to make any meaningful change to protect students, Dennis left the school.

Teachers and school staff describe the distance that they create between themselves and their students in an attempt to care for themselves in a system that teaches them to prioritize the well-being of their students. Participants descriptions of their desensitization to trauma, their decreased involvement in students’ lives, and moving schools all has a cumulative impact on current and future students.

“Do More with Less:” Saving the Students

Finally, there is a sense of acceptance or change in how participants understood their role within the schools, in part a defense mechanism against an urgent need to “save” students. Of particular concern is Isaiah’s earlier depiction of teachers as “frontline workers” as Cedrick further describes this need for teachers to do more than just teach,

Teachers know that it’s also important for them to kind of follow up with the student, to check in with a student because part of our work in education is not just to teach kids and move them on, but it’s to foster collaborative relationships with them. It’s to build positive relationships with them.

Although teachers articulate their desire to save and protect students, this role of the savior takes a toll on their well-being and ultimately impacts their ability to respond to future students. This saving also extends to school staff and leadership as Isaiah denotes that “when you’re a principal at a high school, you’re on call 24/7.” He connects his sense of urgency when responding to student trauma to the fact that “people know we’re mandated reporters and we have to follow up right away. We can’t wait.” And, towards the end of his interview, Emmanuel concludes, “a lot of the nitty-gritty of the school falls on the vice principals’ shoulders, and they’re overworked. Teachers are overworked. Counselors are overworked. Every year we’re asked to do more with less.” And yet, as Esmeralda describes, the school, when there is a trusting relationship between the school, students, and the community, can be a place where “...families will, I mean they cry with us, they laugh with us, they may share some of those things that are so troubling....” While teachers and school staff are aware of the harm that comes from being overworked and heavily relied on, they have a strong desire to ensure the safety of their students. These tensions can be seen in the cumulative impact of trauma on schools.

Without the ability or knowledge to prioritize their well-being within the educational system, teachers and school staff experience burnout and secondary traumatic stress. These ultimately impact how they understand their relationships with their students and their role in schools. Participants describe creating distance from their students by creating boundaries or moving schools. They also describe their internal tension with the way that they understand their role in the school. Teachers and school staff are aware that the education system limits how much they can do for their students. However, their desire to save them, and their belief that they *can* save them, perpetuates their hypervigilance in identifying trauma and, in turn, their burnout when confronted with the reality that in their role, they actually cannot save the majority of their students.

Conclusion

To better understand and meaningfully address the consistent (re)production of violence-related trauma in schools, it is necessary to understand the constant interaction between individuals and the education system. Results inform a conceptual framework that identifies the process for addressing student trauma in schools. The four steps in this process lead into one another other, creating a cyclical response to trauma in schools. Throughout each phase, individual actions are embedded within institutions as individuals both create and uphold the education system. First, teachers and school staff ultimately hold the power of defining what constitutes trauma. Without formal training or structures in place, individuals' perception of the context of the school, how they became aware of the student's traumatizing incident, their personal experiences, and information they received from the school influenced what they identified as traumatizing. This identification of trauma then led to responses to trauma. Next, the individual identification of trauma, combined with institutional factors, encourages paternalism as the only response to trauma in schools. As there were multiple options for

teachers and school staff to respond to students, shaping the course of action largely depended on the intersection of individual and institutional factors. Findings identify that an individual's identity, their relationships to students and school staff, and their own experiences with trauma are the most significant sources of individual influence when choosing to respond to trauma. Furthermore, policies, resources, training, and laws actually shaped what action could be taken after deciding to respond. Third, this response leads to the demoralization of those “caring” for students. A combination of the lack of available resources and support for students and themselves and their students often leads to teachers and school staff describing feelings of burnout or symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. Finally, combined, each of these factors holds a cumulative impact on current and future students. Teachers and school staff are overburdened with the task of filling multiple needs of students while maintaining their academic success. Faced with a lack of funding and resources, teachers and school staff resort to distancing themselves from their students or continue to harm themselves as they seek to save their students. Without addressing the educational factors that cause harm, trauma will continue to be (re)produced throughout schools.

Chapter 5

Violence exposure, trauma, and educational outcomes are inextricably linked, cyclically influencing one another and impacting adolescents' current and future well-being (Mathews et al., 2009; McGill et al., 2014). These experiences can be caused and often exacerbated by racism embedded within institutions. Research has identified that systemic racism leads to higher rates of violence among Black and Latinx communities (Burrell et al., 2021), higher rates of suspension and expulsion among Black and Latinx students (Losen & Skiba, 2010), and an increased risk of polyvictimization (Douglas et al., 2020) and misdiagnosis of trauma among Black and Latinx students (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020; Saleem et al., 2021). Experiences of trauma and post-traumatic stress impact adolescents throughout their lives, trickling down into schools ultimately perpetuating inequities that uphold marginalization. While the individual impact of violence exposure and trauma on youth is clearly delineated, less research highlights the institutional impact. As such, this study sought to elucidate the individual and institutional factors that influence how and why teachers and school staff identify and respond to student trauma. The results from a constructivist grounded theory case study design clarify how institutional policies and practices influence individual participants' actions in the schools. Grounded in critical race theory for education and the healing justice framework, findings inform a conceptual framework that answers the study's four research questions. The conceptual framework describes how individual and institutional policies and systems of support influence the process through which teachers and school staff identify student trauma, respond to student trauma, and the personal and professional impact of their identification and response to students. Findings challenge the individual pathological approach to trauma as it highlights the collective reality of historical inequities embedded within education.

Discussion

Ladson-Billings (1998) outlines five tenants of critical race theory in education: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. These were used to critically analyze the results. First, the tenant of curriculum is extended to trauma-informed care in schools as I applied it to analyze how the required trainings teachers and school staff receive in pre-service and in-service limits their ability to identify and respond to trauma. This is heard throughout the process of the individual and institutional pathways of trauma (re)production in schools (Figure 2). Participants have a limited understanding of what constitutes trauma and how they can respond to it in turn impacting their own emotional well-being. Next, I align instructional strategies from CRT in education to CRT in trauma-informed care to understand how trauma is identified and responded to in schools. As identification largely falls on teachers, or “frontline workers,” the failure of responding to trauma in schools has been attributed to the personal failure of teachers who are described as “bad” or “not caring” (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). This supports Khasnabis and Goldin’s (2020) critique on trauma-informed care as they argue that these solutions typically focus on individual behavior and academic outcomes, rendering the systemic causes to harm invisible. This leads to the application of assessment in CRT to trauma-informed care. Typically, trauma-informed care is implemented in schools to address inequality in behavioral and academic outcomes (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). As such, assessments of trauma-informed care typically include individual behavior and learning outcomes (Maynard et al., 2019). Much like CRT in education, findings from this study call on assessments that measure the systemic causes and outcomes of trauma. Next, the tenant of school funding is used to critically examine the funding provided to schools to hire mental health professionals. As evidenced in this study, there is limited funding to properly support trauma once it has been identified. In fact, schools typically receive funding to hire school resource officers to respond to student behavior in schools (Joseph et al., 2020). Without adequately

funding mental health personnel such as social workers and psychologists to address trauma, even well-intentioned schools run the risk of further harming students through criminalization (Joseph et al., 2020). The final CRT in education tenant of desegregation is used to understand identification and responses to trauma within three high schools that have predominantly Latinx students and families. Findings indicate that, typically, teachers and school staff whose identity matches that of their students are less likely to assume that their students are traumatized and more likely to provide individualized responses to students and their families.

By applying CRT in education to trauma-informed care in schools, one can further elucidate why Khasnabis and Goldin (2020) argue that through racist frames, “trauma is frequently interpreted and weaponized to injure, blame, and pathologize” (pg. 54). The following discussion will further detail how each of these five tenants shapes individual and institutional influences of the four processes identified within the pathways of trauma (re)production in schools conceptual framework: (1) the power of identifying trauma; (2) shaping course of action; (3) the hidden toll of bearing witness, and; (5) the cumulative impact on current and future students.

The Power of Identifying Trauma

The theme of the power of defining trauma highlights how assumptions, relationships with students, teachers’ own experiences, and institutional policies determine whether teachers and school staff decide if someone is traumatized. In particular, the interpretation of student and community needs and identification of trauma were largely influenced by biases stemming from personal experience and institutional training. As Khasnabis and Goldin (2020) argued, findings indicate that the identification of trauma is inextricably linked to systems.

The definition of who or what constitutes a traumatizing experience was controlled by teachers and school staff. The most common situation deemed traumatizing for students was that

of actual or assumed familial abuse. The focus on family is an act that healing justice organizers claim does little to address systemic harm (Kindred, n.d.). This is of particular concern given data were collected during a global pandemic, with some interviews taking place during the nationwide protests of the police murders of Black individuals. These broader systemic issues were not cited as traumatizing for the students. In fact, when asked how participants responded to trauma during COVID, most said that they weren't because they no longer saw the students and were therefore unable to identify visible signs of abuse occurring at home. The limited number of teachers who described the impact of the pandemic on students cite the loss of a family member due to COVID, not the collective experience of trauma. This rigid understanding of trauma as an individual problem supports what Khasnabis and Goldin (2020) when they argue for the necessity to “see, recognize, and name the systems that contribute to trauma” (pg. 54).

The primary ways of “knowing” trauma can be traced back to personal biases and training that teachers and school staff received. While previous research identifies that teachers’ ability to successfully respond to violence-related trauma stems from trauma knowledge gained from trauma trainings (Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2020), participants in this study were more likely to indicate that their awareness of trauma came from yearly mandated reporter trainings. Essentially leading to defining trauma solely as familial abuse. These findings are of no surprise, as education personnel are the highest reporters of alleged abuse (Harvey et al., 2021). Previous research indicates that because of mandated reporting laws, schools are required by law to call CPS when they have concerns about students’ safety or believe the family needs support services (Harvey et al., 2021). This apparent training gap highlights the more significant systemic cause of limited awareness of trauma among school personnel. In other words, teachers and school staff cannot be held solely responsible for the inability to identify varying causes of trauma as this furthers the individualization of trauma. Instead, a critical examination of funding and

curricular requirements within credentialing programs must be taken. This supports the Trauma-Informed School System Framework (Kataoka et al., 2018) as it emphasizes the need for the larger institution of education to commit to caring for students holistically, starting in credentialing programs.

Of note, three topics rarely, if at all, came up when talking about traumatizing incidents: racism, exposure to violence within the community, and systemic trauma. First, systemic racism as a cause of trauma was only mentioned by one individual within the study. This is particularly surprising as these interviews took place during the racial uprisings of 2020. However, this furthers recent work, which finds that trauma resulting from systemic racism typically results in misdiagnosis in schools as disengagement or inability to perform (Saleem et al., 2021). As research indicates that the collective experience of systemic racism causes traumatic stress (Powell, 2021), school personnel must be aware of this impact to expand their understanding of the causes of trauma. The school itself can be a source of systemic racism as education is embedded within racist structures (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), making it necessary for the education institution to understand the traumatic impact of systemic racism. Next, violence within the community was talked about by every participant in only one school and was limited to describing gang violence. In particular, participants described either one or two incidents where students were victimized by gang violence but attributed this to their involvement with gangs. This is surprising as a plethora of research identifies the impact of violence exposure within schools (Busby et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2016; Hurt et al., 2001; McGill et al., 2014; Voison et al., 2016). However, there is a gap in research that identifies school supports following exposure to violence within the community (Ozer et al., 2017), indicating that perhaps this is a training topic missing in credentialing programs. Furthermore, the school community and participants in this study primarily identified as Latinx students. A recent systematic review

focused on the experiences of violence exposure among Latinx communities highlights a lack of research focused on violence outside of the individual or the family (Santacrose et al., 2021). Findings from the current study hint that the classification of violence as an individual problem among Latinx communities can be extended to the school system. Finally, trauma was described mainly as happening *outside* of the school, lacking any indication of awareness that schools themselves can be places that cause trauma among students and staff (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). This can include bullying (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019), zero-tolerance policies (Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016), violence in the curriculum (Venet, 2021), and teacher and school staff biases of students they work with (Venet, 2021). Ignoring trauma derived from violence within the school system encourages perpetuating a deficit narrative about the students and limits responses to trauma by focusing on solving individual problems without addressing the systemic factors that contribute to harm. The healing justice framework demands that we heal individuals *and* transform the systems that cause harm in the first place (Kindred, n.d). By ignoring institutional causes of trauma, schools continue to perpetuate harm as students are (re)traumatized.

Finally, teachers and school staff identified student trauma largely based on assumptions and self-disclosure. First, due to the current focus of research on individual trauma, it is of no surprise that participants were more likely to identify trauma through assumptions following changes in student behavior. Education research has focused on the behavioral impact following trauma exposure. This research indicates that traumatized students have more discipline referrals, are more likely to be suspended or expelled (Perfect et al., 2016), and are more likely to be mislabeled with a learning disorder or behavior problems (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; Goodman et al., 2012). As research focuses on behavior following traumatic exposures, it is evident that well-intentioned school personnel maintain hypervigilance to identify student trauma

through behavior. While school staff must decrease student criminalization following trauma exposure, it is also essential to understand that a change in behavior does not constitute trauma. Or, on the other hand, that “good” behavior is not an indicator that a student has not experienced trauma. Although awareness of behavioral changes can potentially intervene in the school-to-prison pipeline, it runs the risk of pathologizing trauma and reinforcing deficit narratives primarily among students of color (Love, 2019). Finally, self-disclosure came in two forms, voluntary and forced. Participants describe that building meaningful relationships with students can aid in identifying trauma. This extends current research, which indicates that teacher-student relationships are protective factors for student success (Astor et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). However, forced self-disclosure through assignments or the threat of punishment also occurred. Forced disclosure based on assignments highlights a particularly troublesome outcome of socio-emotional learning that has been adopted throughout teacher credentialing programs. Findings indicate that teachers believe that curriculum can provide students with the opportunity to process their “trauma,” potentially triggering students as teachers are not fully prepared to address students’ mental health. This finding brings together the arguments that deficit-based theories are used in teacher education programs to justify changes in the curriculum (Solorzaño & Yosso, 2001) and maintain the belief that students of color are traumatized (Love, 2019).

While this study extends current research by indicating other ways of knowing such as shared experience, self-disclosure, and other staff members, missing from these identification methods was the ability for students or their families to self-refer for needed resources. This highlights the fact that within schools, students do not have the agency to determine the visibility of their mental well-being. Without providing students and their families the opportunity to inform schools what they need, schools can perpetuate feelings of distrust between themselves and their students (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). Instead, trauma-informed schools should

critically examine how their policies and practices impair trust to become a site of healing. When answering the research question how do teachers and school staff perceive the ways that trauma has manifested in their schools it is evident that research has been unsuccessful at understanding how a lack of proper training and institutional support allow personal biases to influence perceptions of trauma.

Shaping Course of Action

After teachers and school staff are made aware of a student's trauma, assumed or otherwise, they then have the power of deciding what course of action to take. These theme answers research question two which asks, how and why do teachers and school staff respond to students exposed to trauma? Findings indicate that a connection to the community, relationships with students and school staff, professional experience, and personal experiences with trauma all impact the "gut feeling" teachers and school staff use when responding to student trauma.

The majority of participants who did not have a connection to the community through their own identity were more likely to use deficit thinking when describing students and their families. Deficit thinking derived from personal biases impacted the course of action by focusing on "fixing" students and not the systems that caused harm (Venet, 2021). This is particularly important as healing justice highlights how individualized behavioral modification does little to address the social conditions that cause harm and further pathologize oppressed communities (Kindred, n.d.).

Next, several teachers and school staff cite that their relationships with students influence how they respond to student trauma. These responses often included offering emotional support to students and asking the students what they needed. This furthers current research that indicates that connections to teachers act as protective factors for student trauma (Astor et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Furthermore, relationships amongst school staff were pertinent in

navigating the systemic factors that inhibited effective responses to student trauma. As current research indicates that school leadership significantly influences a school's culture (Capps et al., 2022), it is crucial for school leadership to build relationships among staff members, as findings highlight that schools can create effective responses to student trauma through meaningful relationships.

Finally, professional and personal experiences were noted to impact responses to trauma. One of the most meaningful professional experiences was when teachers and school staff responded to student trauma for the first time. The perceived outcomes following participants' responses influenced how they responded to student trauma in the future. What was particularly important with these first experiences was the informal training provided by school social workers or other counselors. However, as current research highlights, schools do not have the funding to hire mental health personnel (Joseph et al., 2020) to provide these effective informal supports. Therefore, school districts must reallocate funding to ensure school sites have access to social workers and psychologists. Along with professional experience, personal experiences with trauma influenced how teachers and school staff responded to trauma. Meaning that they decided to respond to trauma based on what did or didn't help them. Findings highlight how these personal experiences can also act as a positive when responding to student trauma. Answering how and why teachers and school staff respond to students exposed to trauma it is evident that personal experiences impact how and why teachers and school staff respond to trauma.

Interspersed throughout the individual factors were institutional factors that had to be navigated when responding to student trauma. These consisted of policies, resources, trainings, and state laws. Mandated reporting laws and confidentiality were the most cited reasons for shaping the course of action and influenced policies and training. Of note, mandated reporting for both suicide and suspected abuse were the *only* clear protocols available for teachers and

school staff at school #2 and school #3. It is, therefore, no surprise that mandated reporting was the method most utilized by teachers and school staff for responding. These findings are particularly concerning because CPS reports from schools are less likely to show evidence that child maltreatment occurred and are less likely to result in increased resources for children (Harvey et al., 2021). Signifying the need for schools to create protocols that ensure students and families are referred necessary support and services before asking school personnel to call CPS. Along with mandated reporting laws, confidentiality laws limited how school staff could assist each other when responding to students' trauma. As informal mentorship was highlighted as a significant factor for deciding how to respond to students, it becomes imperative to further research the impact of confidentiality laws and collaboration among school staff (Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Informal training and mandatory trainings from the state significantly impacted how teachers responded following the identification of student trauma.

Furthermore, a lack of protocol and resources were cited as factors that influenced how teachers and school staff responded to traumatized students. These findings advance the argument that under the guise of trauma-informed care, teachers and school staff are expected to manage the impacts of societal harm without any access to resources (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). In this sense, without proper resources, even well-meaning schools can fail to address student trauma adequately. Through the overreliance on calling security in one school, this simultaneously supports and expands research that has identified that school funding primarily involves hiring school resource officers (Joseph et al., 2020). As this response was only prevalent in one school it highlights the need to further understand how counselors and school leadership are unable to refer students and their families to necessary resources. Which extends Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) argument that property is key to understanding how race impacts education inequity. It broadens the conceptualization of property to available mental

health resources and supports. The property argument is evidenced in this study through the identification of a lack of protocols and resources for responding to student trauma. This strengthens the notion that if society believed that every student deserves a high-quality education, schools would be fully funded, even when their families cannot pay expensive fees (Venet, 2021). These findings answer research question 4 as it highlights how institutional policies and systems of support impacted responses to trauma within schools.

The Hidden Toll of Bearing Witness

The aftermath of attempting to navigate the individual and institutional factors that impact one's ability to identify and respond to student trauma is heard in participants' experiences of burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and feeling like helped. From this, findings answer research question 3 as it indicates the impact of how teachers and school staff understand their responses to student trauma.

Participants describe their multiple memories of responding to student trauma. Heard in the reflection of these memories is burnout and symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. This comes from caring for hundreds of students without meaningfully changing their situations. Of note, only school #1 provided school personnel training in self-care. However, a focus on self-care encourages the individualization of trauma as it ignores the larger institutional factors that teachers and school staff identified as harmful. Without enacting meaningful change to the educational processes that make responding to student trauma impossible, teachers and school staff will continue to be harmed by the profession. While current research identifies the potential of teachers experiencing secondary traumatic stress (Hydon et al., 2015), findings extend this work by identifying harm stemming from the education system.

Furthermore, through the prioritization of the well-being of students, it is challenging to care for oneself. Although school staff and teachers could describe how they leveraged

relationships with staff and friends and family outside of the school for emotional support, they were less likely to illustrate leveraging other coping skills to ensure their well-being. In fact, when asked about their feelings following their experience with students, most participants had to think, admitting to never having considered it before. Implying that the well-being of school personnel was rendered invisible, even to themselves. While previous research raises concern about schools' potential to trigger traumatized students (Hodgon et al., 2013), findings further highlight that responses to student trauma in schools can also trigger teachers and school staff. The education system requires teachers and school staff to care for their students above themselves while simultaneously providing inadequate resources to respond to student trauma. Leaving school personnel unable to care for both students and themselves.

Of note, participants who indicated that they thought their responses were helpful for the student and therefore felt good about them were less likely to express feelings of burnout or secondary traumatic stress (Hydon et al., 2015). This indicates that providing students and their families with needed care lessens the impact of exposure to trauma. However, teachers and school staff who stated that they helped the student were less likely to report meaningful relationships with their students, and therefore the outcome of their work with the student was based on assumptions of the situation. This highlights an interesting occurrence that partly explains why teachers and school staff later describe building boundaries and not getting as deeply involved with their students as the only way to care for themselves. If you are unaware of what is happening with the student, you do not have to respond inadequately and, therefore, can continue not to be impacted. But what if a school system was created that provided necessary supports for students? Would teachers and school staff then be encouraged to build more meaningful relationships with their students? Findings highlight the lack of available supports for teachers and school staff to successfully process and cope with exposure to student trauma,

extending the answer to research question 4 to include institutional policies and systems of support to respond to their own trauma within their schools.

The Cumulative Impact

Finally, participants' ability to respond to students, the outcome of these responses, and the impact on their own emotional well-being collectively impact how participants understand their relationships with their students and their role in schools. Findings detail two options for coping with the collective harm of the education system, creating distance from students or accepting one's role in the school. Although teachers and school staff were aware of their limitation in their ability to meaningfully respond to student trauma, they internalized the responsibility of identifying and responding to students' experiences of trauma that occurred outside of the school. Participants' focus on students furthers research that identifies a teacher's need to save students is rooted in the assumption that the school is the only safe space students have (Goldin et al., 2022). There was a tension in participants' awareness of the limitations of their role and their overwhelming desire to save their students, ultimately leading to a decline in their mental well-being. To protect themselves from burnout and secondary traumatic stress, participants describe distancing themselves from their students by creating boundaries or moving schools.

In general, most of the participants lacked an overall understanding of the traumatizing aspects of the school system, even when they themselves fell victim to it. While current research focuses on improving school climate and encouraging school personnel to participate in self-care activities (Hydon et al., 2015), findings highlight the need to ensure teacher and school staff retention through the transformation of harmful school policies and practices. Although districts maintain control over schools by deciding and implementing school budgets, policies, school staff, and programs (Capp et al., 2022), participants did not mention the school district's impact

on anything other than mandated reporting. As such, findings expand on research where school staff indicate that they did not believe school districts significantly influence school climate (Capp et al., 2022). Participants in the current study were not only less likely to indicate that issues derived from the district but were also more likely to find fault within themselves or other staff at their school. Without an awareness of the institutional impacts of the school on both students and school personnel, trauma embedded within the education system will continue to be (re)produced.

Findings support the Trauma-Informed School System Framework (Kataoka et al., 2018) as it highlights the significance of engaging with the whole school and district when addressing trauma. It further expands this framework as it identifies specific policies and practices embedded within education that create harm. While schools must, as Kataoka et al. (2018) argue, implement school practices through a trauma lens, findings highlight the need to also recognize that schools are themselves places where this violence-related trauma is created, often unknowingly. As such, schools and districts must also acknowledge how teacher training, school policies, and the like collectively create barriers to the social-emotional growth of students as well as holistic healing from collective trauma. Overall, the concept of interest convergence (Bell, 1980) is used to critically analyze the change that schools are willing to make when they ascribe to trauma-informed care practices. Framing trauma as an individual problem, addressing it with individualized solutions, placing blame on teachers when the “solutions” fail to produce changes in behavioral and academic outcomes, and lacking efficient funding to hire mental health personnel are all issues seeped within trauma-informed care in schools. However, by touting the use of these programs to address trauma, schools can claim that they are helping students, all while never having to systematically change their practices. In sum, the use of interest convergence allows us to understand how the solutions being implemented fail to

address the full scale of the problem. By extending CRT in education to this study, it is clear that one must understand how race is the leading cause of inequality in schools (Ladson-billings & Tate, 1995). In other words, for trauma-informed care to be effective, it must move beyond an individualized understanding and approach to trauma.

Implications

Findings detail how personal and institutional power in schools (re)produces violence-related trauma. Grounded in CRT in education and healing justice, implications call for the transformation of harmful education practices throughout three levels: pre-service, district, and school. School personnel should lead anti-oppressive educational transformation by (1) addressing individual biases and racism by providing anti-racist training to all current and future school personnel, (2) utilize community-engaged methods to identify student and familial needs to create necessary healing practices in schools, and (3) advocate for policies that would reimagine the training, funding, and resources provided to schools.

Pre-Service

The power of identifying trauma highlights the need to provide comprehensive training to school personnel in pre-service and in-service training, as teachers and school staff are heavily relied on to respond to trauma. Findings denote that trauma identification depends on biased assumptions and the burden of mandated reporting. This forces teachers and school staff to primarily define trauma as familial abuse, rendering other causes invisible. Participants report that credentialing programs' lack in-depth discussions of trauma. As such, pre-service programs must provide training on the identification of trauma. This should include anti-bias and comprehensive trauma training that includes systemic causes of trauma. These trainings can pull from current implicit bias trainings (Devine et al., 2012) and include trainings on the larger impact of systemic racism on schools and communities. Pre-service training around trauma

should be included in credentialing programs that extend beyond socio-emotional learning training. Teacher education programs should critically examine how aspects of socio-emotional trainings risk forcing potentially harmful assignments onto students. While trauma-informed schools require teachers to provide trauma-informed care, pre-service programs have not prepared teachers to do so. Researchers have only just begun to understand culturally responsive trauma-informed teacher preparation (Thomas et al., 2019). Therefore, teacher education programs should provide comprehensive training that highlights historical trauma, systemic racism, and other causes of trauma.

District

Teachers and school staff attribute their inability to effectively respond to student trauma following identification to various institutional factors that must be addressed at the district level. First and foremost, school districts need to adequately provide funding to respond to the multiple types of student trauma. Teachers and school staff consistently describe their inability to provide meaningful responses to students based on their lack of adequate resources within the school. As school districts control schools by deciding and implementing school budgets, policies, school staff, and programs (Capp et al., 2022), these policy changes must happen at the district level. Funding that ensures that schools can provide mental health resources to address trauma is necessary as even well-intentioned schools run the risk of further harming students through criminalization (Joseph et al., 2020).

Furthermore, only one school in this sample had a clear protocol for responding to suspected trauma. Currently, the only district-wide protocols for responding to student trauma are calling the police for suspected suicidal ideation or calling CPS to file an alleged abuse child maltreatment report. Similar to the focus in pre-service, these mandatory trainings from the district leave all other causes of trauma hidden. As such, superintendents should create district-

wide protocols implemented at each school to respond to student trauma with a clear plan to reinforce these protocols at each school. Furthermore, yearly in-service trainings on identifying trauma, including experiences of racism, are necessary to provide school staff with a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a traumatizing experience.

Finally, district leaders should employ community-engaged methods to identify what students, their families, and school staff need to respond to student trauma successfully. As the head of institutions, it is imperative for those with decision-making power to be aware of the community's needs to be clear on what resources, policies, laws, and training are needed within each school. As Cole describes, "it seems like the people at the top don't really get a pulse of what this community needs." This will ensure that students and their families are given agency to determine the most pertinent issues and allow school personnel to play a role in the decision-making process. It is also necessary for schools and districts to understand how current school policies and practices negatively impact student success and staff well-being. It is recommended that schools and districts interested in becoming trauma-informed evaluate the impact of current school practices and transform those that cause harm.

Schools

Findings also necessitate changes at the individual school level to ensure student, family, and staff well-being. Solorzaño and Yosso (2001) call for the inclusion of community voices when making decisions or creating knowledge. Currently, the power to identify and respond to trauma rests in the hands of school personnel. To mitigate the potential harm this can cause, schools should create self-referral models that put the power back into the hands of students and their families. This could be modeled after the self-referral form School #2 implemented during the pandemic. Through a referral form, students and their families could receive needed care.

The significant influence of the informal mentorship provided during teacher and school staff's first time responding to student trauma encourages schools to formalize mentoring partnerships for new staff. The mentoring partnerships should consist of support from teachers, leadership, and mental health professionals on campus. Turning informal mentorship into a formalized process for new personnel ensures a shared understanding of how the school handles trauma. Previous research has identified training that should occur at the pre-service, district, and personal levels to ensure schools are dedicated to the process (Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Combined, comprehensive training and self-referral models will allow schools to ensure that the first step to providing trauma-informed care is properly in place.

Finally, schools must create a culture of care for teachers and school staff to address burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Previous research indicates that this can be achieved through reflective supervision that discusses how to best support students and includes how to best support teachers (Venet, 2021). The supervision should be ongoing and include critical reflections of the current district and school policies and practices that harm school personnel. Through this supervision, meaningful relationships among school staff will be built, and staff input on school and district-level policies will be ensured.

Limitations and Future Research

While the research topic and design employed by this study will move the field forward, the data collection and design present several limitations. Data were collected during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and during the civil unrest following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Responding to the current context the researcher adjusted the interview guide to include questions that ascertained how teachers and school staff were able to identify and respond to student trauma during virtual learning. However, a common response was that they weren't. As such findings from this study are unclear on how distance learning

influences the conceptual framework. Future studies should therefore seek to apply the conceptual framework to schools that operate primarily online. Furthermore, the sample consisted of predominantly Latinx teachers and school staff. This indicates that their perceptions of the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in 2020 might differ from teachers or school staff who identify as Black. A small number of participants from this sample brought up these events when discussing potentially traumatizing incidents with students. It is therefore necessary for future research to glean a clearer understanding of how trauma derived from police violence impacts schools.

Along with data collection there were several aspects of recruitment that could have impacted findings. First, the study used snowball and criterion sampling (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). As such, the perspectives found in the study might not reflect those of all teachers and staff members working within the schools and the districts within Los Angeles County. However, qualitative work is not intended to be generalizable. As such, future research should employ quantitative methods to statistically test the conceptual framework created from this study. Likewise, the sample is limited to schools that have participated in the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Trauma and Resiliency program, and as such, does not reflect the views of individuals that might not have received trauma interventions within schools. Future research should include schools that have not been provided extra supports from their school district through external funding in order to gain a clearer picture of how typical school funding impacts identification and responses to trauma. Of note, the participants that responded to recruitment for this study do not reflect the hypersegregation that Love (2019) identifies. In other words, while the student body is made up of predominantly Latinx students, this sample consists of predominantly Latinx teachers and school staff. Due to this fact, it is understood that those that have responded are not representative of the general population. While a lack of

generalizability does not discredit the significance of qualitative research, it is recommended that future research test the conceptual framework that was developed here in different school districts in order to determine what aspects of the framework transfer over to different populations.

Tables and Figures

Table 1

Table 1

Neighborhood and School Demographics of the Sample of three High Schools in Los Angeles County, California.

School Name	Crime Rate (2018)	Race/Ethnicity	Median Household Income	Number of Full Time Support Staff	Total Student Enrollment	Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Student Enrollment by Group
School #1	307.3	Asian: 0.8% Black: 8.5% Latinx: 87.5% White Only: 2.4% Other: 2.8%	\$49,684	Academic Counselor: 5 Counselor: 1 Librarian: 0 Paraprofessional: 2 Psychologist: 1 Social Worker: 1 Nurse: 1 Speech Specialist: 0.25 Resource Specialist: 2 Other: 24	2,181	Asian: 0.2% Black: 6.6% Filipino: 0.0% Latinx: 92.5% White: 0.3% Other: 0.2%	English Language Learners: 17.7% Foster Youth: 0.4% Students with Disabilities: 9.0% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 86.5%
School #2	246	Asian: 12.6% Black: 3.3% Latinx: 63.6% White Only: 18.8% Other: 6.9%	\$60,227	Academic Counselor: 4 Counselor: 0 Librarian: 1 Paraprofessional: 1 Psychologist: 0.5 Social Worker: 0 Nurse: 0.2 Speech Specialist: 1 Resource Specialist: 0 Other: 1	1,245	Asian: 1.4% Black: 1.4% Filipino: 1.0% Latinx: 92.1% White: 3.4% Other: 1.2%	English Language Learners: 16.4% Foster Youth: 0.6% Students with Disabilities: 15.6% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 82.7%

School #3	275.9	Asian: 13.4% Black: 1.3% Latinx: 77.9% White Only: 7.2% Other: 2.8%	\$53,677	Academic Counselor: 6 Campus Security: 7 Counselor: 0 Librarian: 2 Paraprofessional: 0 Psychologist: 2 Social Worker: 1 Nurse: 0.4 Speech Specialist: 0.6 Resource Specialist: Other: 4	2,532	Asian: 0.6% Black: 0.3% Filipino: 0.5% Latinx: 96.2% White: 1.6% Other: 0.7%	English Language Learners: 20.6% Foster Youth: 0.3% Students with Disabilities: 16.7% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 89.1%
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Table 2

Table 2

Interview Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics

Pseudonym	Race	Age	Gender	Years in K-12 Education	Grades Work With	Roles in school
School 1						
Cesar	Hispanic/Latino	37	Male	5	7th, 8th, 10th	Teacher
Juan	Latino	49	Male	5	K-12	Teacher
Isobelle	Asian	69	Female	18	K-12	Teacher
Nineli	Middle Eastern	38	Female	6	9-12	Teacher
Cole	White	50	Male	15	9-12	School Staff
Trinity	African American	48	Female	17	7-12	Teacher
Cedrick	Latino	41	Male	20	9-12	School Staff
Emmanuel	Hispanic	52	Male	18	8-12	Teacher
Angie	Latina	43	Female	22	9-12	School Staff
Amina	Latina	40	Female	15	K-12	School Staff
School 2						
Rosa	Chicana	37	Female	4	11, 12	Teacher
Eden	Hispanic	46	Female	27	9-12	School Staff
Zalina	Hispanic	31	Female	3.5	9-12	Teacher
Jessica	Hispanic	52	Female	15	2nd, 4th, 5th, 9-12	Teacher
Omar	Latino, Mexican	43	Male	22	9-12	School Staff
Esmeralda	White	59	Female	34	PreK-12	School Staff
Luis	Hispanic, Native American	59	Male	13	9-12	School Staff
School 3						

Sesali	Italian	42	Female	20	7-12	Teacher
Dennis	Latino	50	Male	23	6-12	Teacher
Priscilla	White	25	Female	3	9-12	Teacher
Karla	Chicana	42	Female	18	6-12	Teacher
Ines	Latino	37	Female	15	9-12	School Staff
Isaiah	Chicano	53	Male	27	K-12	School Staff

Table 3

Table 3

Themes identified from interviews with teachers and school staff (24) working throughout three high schools in Los Angeles County (2020-2021).

Themes	Subthemes
The power of identifying trauma	<p>Ways of “knowing” trauma</p> <p>“That person is so nasty:” Biases, personal experiences with trauma and relationships with students</p> <p>Learning from the state, the school, and the credentialing programs</p>
Shaping course of action for traumatized students	<p>“A gut feeling:” Identity, relationships, and experiences</p> <p>The presence of paternalism in policies, resources, trainings, and laws</p>
The hidden toll of bearing witness	<p>“It feels kinda helpless:” burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and helping</p> <p>“I would say it was even traumatic for me:” Coping skills, relationships, and professional expertise</p> <p>“We're always thinking about our students:” Inadequate responses, (un)available supports, coping in the system</p>
The cumulative impact	<p>“Now that you mention it:” Needed distance from students</p> <p>“Do more with less:” Saving the students</p>

Figure 1

A Conceptual Model for the Individual and Institutional Pathways of Trauma (Re)production in Schools

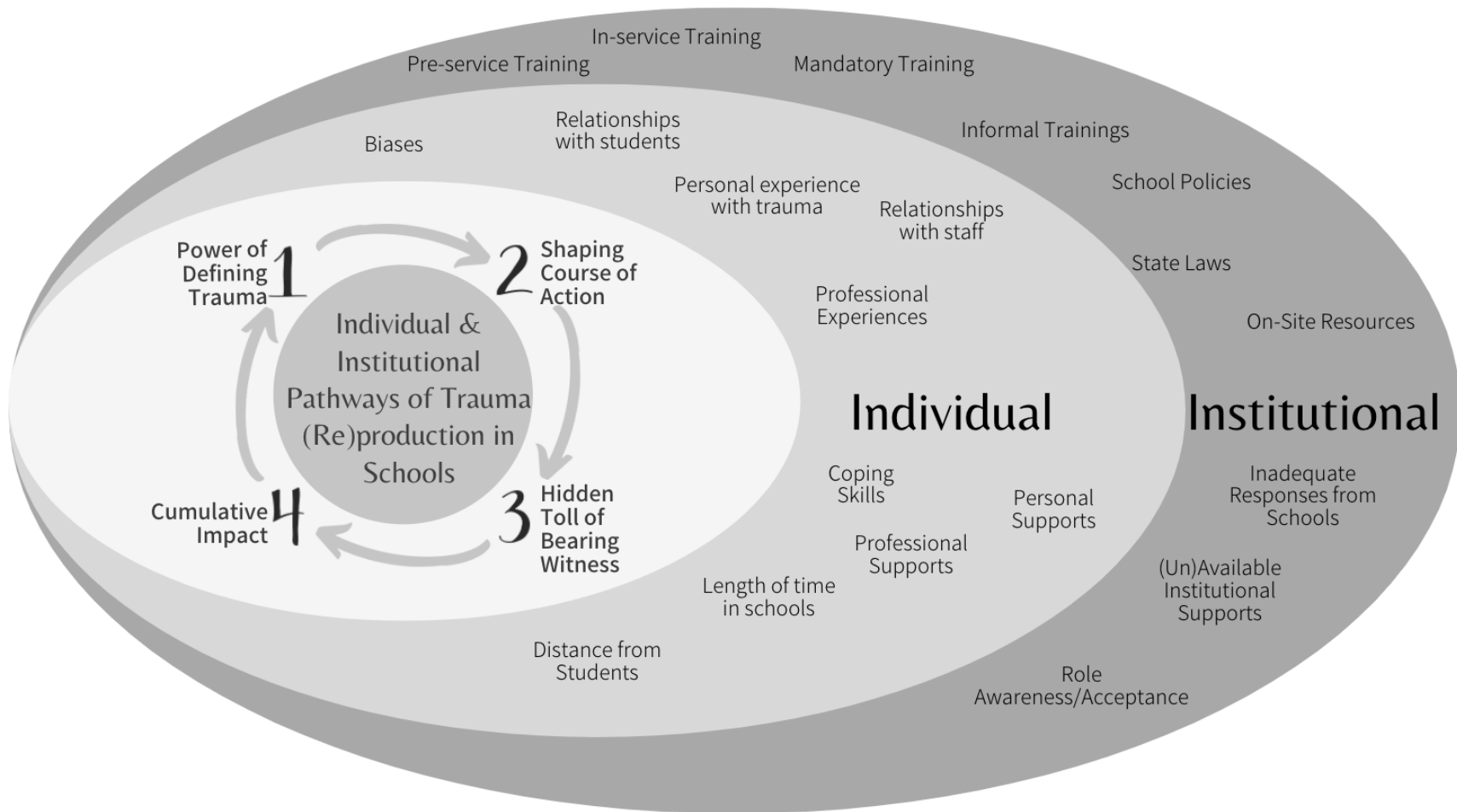
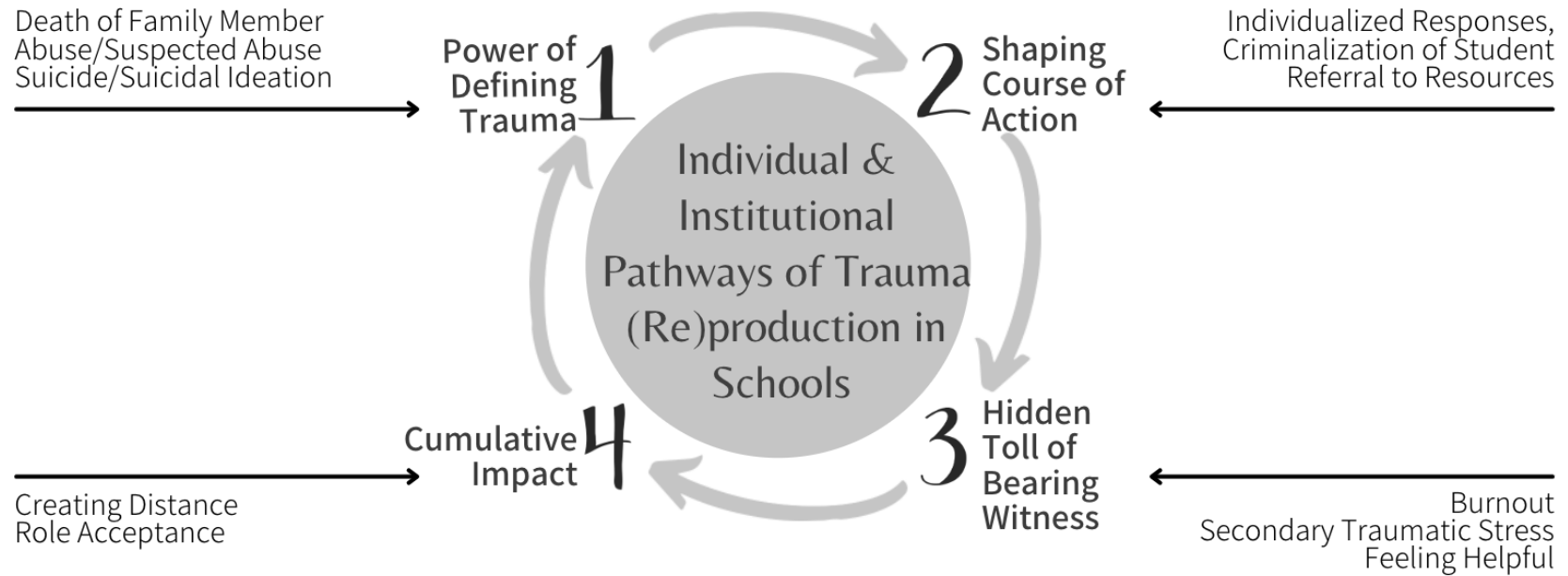


Figure 2

A Process Model for the Individual and Institutional Pathways of Trauma (Re)production in Schools



APPENDICES

Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Making the ‘Invisible’ Wounds Visible: A Case Study of Teacher and Staff Perspectives on the Impact of Community Violence and Trauma Exposure Among Students

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Melanie Sonsteng-Person, MSW a doctoral student at UCLA in the Department of Social Welfare under the supervision of Todd Franke, PhD, from the School of Social Welfare, at the University of California, Los Angeles. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a teacher or school staff member at within Los Angeles County. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is being done in order to understand how teachers and school staff describe and respond to the manifestation of exposure community violence and/or trauma exposure in schools. The goal of the interview is to explore how teachers understand, address, and are impacted by community violence and trauma exposure in schools.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this project, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

You will participate in an interview that will take place at a location most convenient for you or over the phone and will last for approximately 60 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. You have the option to say no to being recorded. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences when working with students exposed to violence and/or trauma. Participation is completely confidential. No information that can identify you personally will be asked for unless you volunteer such information. Your experiences make you an expert in this area.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take approximately 60 minutes.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated major risks or discomforts from participating in this study. One potential risk is the psychological discomfort caused by the questions asked in the interview. The research team is experienced and trained to be sensitive to the needs of participants, including any desire to withdraw participation. Upon completion of the interview, the interviewer will provide referrals for a variety of easily accessible services.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

While there are potentially minimal risks for participants, society at large could benefit from this study as it may provide valuable information that can inform future trainings and interventions.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?

Upon completion of the interview process you will be given a \$10 amazon gift card.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Withdrawal of participation by the investigator

The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. The investigator will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

Principal Investigator
Melanie Sonsteng-Person
Department of Social Welfare
Luskin School of Public Affairs

Faculty Sponsor
Todd Franke
Department of Social Welfare
Luskin School of Public Affairs

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Appendix B

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Conversation Starters/Perspectives of School and Community:

1. Tell me about how you came to work at the school you are currently in.
2. How would you describe the community that you work?
 - a. What is your experience working within this community?
3. How would you describe the school that you work in? Students? Staff? Leadership?
 - a. What is your experience working within this school?

Initial open-ended questions: I would like you to think about one specific incident with a student for the next few questions.

Student Behavior:

1. Please describe for me the most recent time this year that you were aware that one of the students in your classroom was exposed to trauma?
 - a. And how did you make that connection? *Probe if needed:* Was there a change in behavior or personal disclosure?
 - i. What did you notice first?
 - ii. What happened next?
 - iii. Is there anything about the student that stands out to you?

School Environment:

2. How did you respond? (and what were you thinking/feeling then?)
 - a. How did you decide what to do?
 - i. How did you know what was right or wrong?
 - ii. Looking back, what do you think of your response?
 - iii. Were there any resources available on campus that helped you or the student?
3. Who else in the school was involved either with you or with the student?
 - a. What did he or she do? How was he or she involved?
 - b. How did you feel about this response?

Teacher Mental Health & Support:

4. How were you feeling in the moment of the incident?
 - a. What were you thinking in that moment?
 - b. If at all, how did you respond to those emotions?
 - c. What helped you deal with this? *Probe if needed:* Are there any self-care tips that you use?
 - d. Are there supports from teachers or other school staff that help you deal with these types of situations?

School Structure:

5. Does the school have a protocol or supports for situations like the ones you mentioned?
 - a. Was this reinforced through the school culture or policies?
6. How does school leadership respond to situations like the one you mentioned?

Student Behavior 2:

7. Beyond this year, can you tell me about the first time that you were aware that a student had been exposed to trauma?
 - a. And how did you make that connection? *Probe if needed:* Was there a change in behavior or personal disclosure?
 - i. What did you notice first?
 - ii. What happened next?
 - iii. Is there anything about the student that stands out to you?

School Environment 2:

8. How did you respond? (and what were you thinking/feeling then?)
 - a. How did you decide what to do?
 - i. How did you know what was right or wrong?
 - ii. Looking back, what do you think of your response?
 - iii. Were there any resources available on campus that helped you or the student?
9. Who else in the school was involved either with you or with the student?
 - a. What did he or she do? How was he or she involved?
 - b. How did you feel about this response?

Teacher Mental Health & Support 2:

10. Can you explain to me how you were feeling in that moment of this incident?
 - a. What were you thinking in that moment?
 - b. If at all, how did you respond to those emotions?
 - c. What helped you deal with this? *Probe if needed:* Are there any self-care tips that you use?
 - d. Were there supports from teachers or other school staff that helped you deal with this?

School Structure 2:

11. Did the school have a protocol or supports for the situation?
 - a. Was this reinforced through the school culture or policies?
12. How did school leadership respond to the situation?

Student Behavior 3:

13. Beyond the specific types of trauma that you have already talked about please describe for me the most recent time you noticed a student that had been exposed to community violence, dealing with that exposure in your classroom? Also please tell me if you think they were traumatized in your estimation or not.
 - a. And how did you make that connection? *Probe if needed:* Was there a change in behavior or personal disclosure?
 - i. What did you notice first?
 - ii. What happened next?
 - iii. Is there anything about the student that stands out to you?

School Environment 3:

14. How did you respond? (and what were you thinking/feeling then?)
 - a. How did you decide what to do?
 - i. How did you know what was right or wrong?
 - ii. Looking back, what do you think of your response?

- iii. Were there any resources available on campus that helped you or the student?
15. Who else in the school was involved either with you or with the student?
- a. What did he or she do? How was he or she involved?
 - b. How did you feel about this response?

Teacher Mental Health & Support 3:

16. How you were feeling in the moment of this incident?
- a. What were you thinking in that moment?
 - b. If at all, how did you respond to those emotions?
 - c. What helped you deal with this? *Probe if needed:* Are there any self-care tips that you use?
 - d. Were there supports from teachers or other school staff that helped you deal with this?

School Structure 3:

17. Did the school have a protocol or supports for the situation?
- a. Was this reinforced through the school culture or policies?
18. How did school leadership respond to the situation?

COVID-19 Questions:

19. How are you able to respond to student trauma in the midst of COVID-19?
- a. How has this changed?
20. Have you seen a change in the school's response to traumatized students since COVID-19?
- a. What resources or supports are available for students now?
21. How about a change in the school's response to teacher's mental health since COVID-19?
- a. How has this changed?
 - b. Are there any additional resources or supports available to teacher's now?

Ending probe if needed: If I may ask, how has any personal past experience of trauma in your own life impacted your work in the school, if at all?

- a. In that situation, what helped you to manage your own experiences with trauma?

Demographic Questions

- 1. What is your age?
- 2. Where did you grow up?
- 3. Where do you currently live?
- 4. What race or ethnicity do you identify with?
- 5. What is your gender identity?
- 6. Could you tell me, to the best of your knowledge, what was the race/ethnicity and gender identity of the students you talked about in each incident?
- 7. Have you attended any trainings (either self-directed, pre-service, in-service, etc.) that have talked about how to identify when a student has been exposed to trauma? (Yes No)

- a. If yes, what topics did they cover?
- 8. Have you attended any other trainings (either self-directed, pre-service, in-service, etc.) that have talked about how to respond when a student has been exposed to trauma? (Yes No)
 - a. If yes, what topics did they cover?
- 9. Have you attended any other trainings (either self-directed, pre-service, in-service, etc.) that have talked about how to identify or respond to students exposed to community violence? (YesNo)
 - a. If yes, what topics did they cover?
- 10. How many years of experience do you have working in the classroom as a K-12 teacher?
 - a. At what grade levels?
 - b. What subjects did you teach?
 - c. How many years did you work in this capacity?

Appendix C

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

Conversation Starters/Perspectives of School and Community:

1. Tell me about how you came to work at the school you are currently in.
2. How would you describe the community that you work in?
 - a. What is your experience working within this community?
3. How would you describe the school that you work in? Teachers? Students? Staff? Leadership?
 - a. What is your experience working within this school?

Initial open-ended questions: I would like you to think about one specific incident with a student for the next few questions.

Student Behavior:

1. Please describe the most recent time this year that you noticed a student that had been exposed to trauma, dealing with that exposure in your school?
 - a. And how did you make that connection? *Probe if needed:* Was there a change in behavior or personal disclosure?
 - i. What did you notice first?
 - ii. What happened next?
 - iii. Is there anything about the student that stands out to you?

School Environment:

2. How did you respond? (and what were you thinking/feeling then?)
 - a. How did you decide what to do?
 - i. How did you know what was right or wrong?
 - ii. Looking back, what do you think of your response?
 - iii. Were there any resources available on campus that helped you or the student?
3. Who else in the school was involved either with you or with the student?
 - a. What did he or she do? How was he or she involved?
 - b. How did you feel about this response?

Staff Mental Health & Support:

4. How were you feeling in the moment of the incident?
 - a. What were you thinking in that moment?
 - b. If at all, how did you respond to those emotions?
 - c. What helped you deal with this? *Probe if needed:* Are there any self-care tips that you use?
 - d. Are there supports from other school staff that help you deal with these types of situations?

School Structure:

5. Does the school have a protocol or supports for situations like the ones you mentioned?
 - a. Was this reinforced through the school culture or policies?
6. How does school leadership respond to situations like the one you mentioned?

Student Behavior 2:

7. Beyond this year, can you tell me about the first time you that you were aware that a student that had been exposed to trauma dealing with that exposure in the school?
 - a. And how did you make that connection? *Probe if needed:* Was there a change in behavior or personal disclosure?
 - i. What did you notice first?
 - ii. What happened next?
 - iii. Is there anything about the student that stands out to you?

School Environment 2:

8. How did you respond? (and what were you thinking/feeling then?)
 - a. How did you decide what to do?
 - i. How did you know what was right or wrong?
 - ii. Looking back, what do you think of your response?
 - iii. Were there any resources available on campus that helped you or the student?
9. Who else in the school was involved either with you or with the student?
 - a. What did he or she do? How was he or she involved?
 - b. How did you feel about this response?

Staff Mental Health & Support 2:

10. Can you explain to me how you were feeling in that moment of this incident?
 - a. What were you thinking in that moment?
 - b. If at all, how did you respond to those emotions?
 - c. What helped you deal with this? *Probe if needed:* Are there any self-care tips that you use?
 - d. Were there supports from other school staff that helped you deal with this?

School Structure 2:

11. Did the school have a protocol or supports for the situation?
 - a. Was this reinforced through the school culture or policies?
12. How did school leadership respond to the situation?

Student Behavior 3:

13. Beyond the specific types of trauma that you have already talked about please describe for me the most recent time you noticed a student that had been exposed to community violence, dealing with that exposure in your classroom? Also please tell me if you think they were traumatized in your estimation or not.
 - a. And how did you make that connection? *Probe if needed:* Was there a change in behavior or personal disclosure?
 - i. What did you notice first?
 - ii. What happened next?
 - iii. Is there anything about the student that stands out to you?

School Environment 3:

14. How did you respond? (and what were you thinking/feeling then?)
 - a. How did you decide what to do?
 - i. How did you know what was right or wrong?
 - ii. Looking back, what do you think of your response?

iii. Were there any resources available on campus that helped you or the student?

15. Who else in the school was involved either with you or with the student?

- a. What did he or she do? How was he or she involved?
- b. How did you feel about this response?

Staff Mental Health & Support 3:

16. How you were feeling in the moment of this incident?

- a. What were you thinking in that moment?
- b. If at all, how did you respond to those emotions?
- c. What helped you deal with this? *Probe if needed:* Are there any self-care tips that you use?
- d. Are there supports from teachers or other school staff that helped you deal with this situation?

School Structure 3:

17. Did the school have a protocol or supports for the situation?

- a. Was this reinforced through the school culture or policies?

18. How did school leadership respond to the situation?

COVID-19 Questions:

19. How are you able to respond to student trauma in the midst of COVID-19?

- a. How has this changed?

20. Have you seen a change in the school's response to traumatized students since COVID-19?

- a. What resources or supports are available for students now?

21. How about a change in the school's response to staff's mental health since COVID-19?

- a. How has this changed?
- b. Are there any additional resources or supports available to staff now?

Ending probe if needed: If I may ask, how has any personal past experience of violence or trauma in your own life impacted your work in the school, if at all?

- a. In that situation, what helped you to manage your own experiences with trauma?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. Where do you currently live?
4. What race or ethnicity do you identify with?
5. What is your gender identity?
6. Could you tell me, to the best of your knowledge, what was the race/ethnicity and gender identity of the students you talked about in each incident?
11. Have you attended any trainings (either self-directed, pre-service, in-service, etc.) that have talked about how to identify when a student has been exposed to trauma? (Yes No)
 - a. If yes, what topics did they cover?

12. Have you attended any other trainings (either self-directed, pre-service, in-service, etc.) that have talked about how to respond when a student has been exposed to trauma? (Yes No)
 - a. If yes, what topics did they cover?
 13. Have you attended any other trainings (either self-directed, pre-service, in-service, etc.) that have talked about how to identify or respond to students exposed to community violence? (YesNo)
 - a. If yes, what topics did they cover?
 7. How many years of experience do you have working in schools?
 - a. At what capacity?
- How many years in this capacity?

Appendix D RESOURCE & REFERRAL LIST

Immediate Risk: Please call 911 or any of the numbers below if you feel you, or someone you know, is at immediate risk of danger.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Phone Number: 1-800-273-8255

National Helpline

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

Phone Number: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Findings a Therapist: The resources below will help you find a therapist in your area. The websites allow you to find some that takes your insurance, provides modalities of treatment you prefer, and specializes in the specific symptoms that you, or someone you know, might be experiencing. Typically to set up an appointment with a therapist you will call or email their office and ask for an intake appointment as a new client. Sometimes you have to call multiple places before you are able to get an appointment.

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Website: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Psychology Today Therapist Finder

Website: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

Trauma Resources: Below is a list of resources that can provide further information on trauma as well as ways to address secondary traumatic stress—the trauma that you or a provider might experience from witnessing or hearing about someone else’s trauma. The NIH resource list is a comprehensive list that includes free information for children and adults. The NCTSN website provides resources and training materials for individuals interested in learning more about trauma.

Sidran Institute: Traumatic Stress Education and Advocacy

Website: <https://www.sidran.org/>

Vicarious Trauma Toolkit

Website: <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>

National Institute of Health (NIH) Trauma Resource List

Website: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207198/>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

Website: <https://www.nctsn.org/about-us/structure-and-governance/national-center>

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