THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG WHISTLE-BLOWING, RETALIATION AND
IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2012

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Existing whistle-blower research has found that retaliation affects the whistle-blowing process. However, there is little literature focusing on the personal and emotional effects that retaliation can have on the whistle-blower’s life. Furthermore, while whistle-blowing has been studied in various organizational contexts, both public and private, virtually no research exists on whistle-blowing in the context of the public school system. This study examines the effects of the whistle-blowing process, specifically the effects of retaliation, on the life of the whistle-blower through a narrative identity construct in the context of the Texas Public School System. This study utilizes narrative analysis to understand the relationship between retaliation and the whistle-blowers’ narrative identity. The analysis reveals that whistle-blowers’ decisions to disclose instances of wrong-doing are motivated by their desired narrative identities. Furthermore, this study shows that retaliation has the greatest effect when it directly attacks the whistle-blowers’ identities.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Brian Richardson, for his enthusiastic support of this project. Words cannot express my deep appreciation for his encouragement and guidance throughout this process. I would also like to thank my committee members. Dr. Allison, thank you for introducing and sharing with me your love for narrative theory and for your unwavering support of this project. Dr. Wang, thank you for your kindness and for continually “cheering me on,” during this endeavor.

This project would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. Lynn, because it is impossible for me to put into words what your love and support mean to me, I will simply say, “Thank you.” I would like to thank Hunter and Alyssa for “taking up the slack” at home and Garrett for sharing his senior year with my thesis. I am blessed to have such a wonderful family. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the participants who willingly shared their personal stories with me. Thank you all.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I used to be a great mom—foster mom, hardworking, loving and dependable. People respected me. Now I’m a crazy person—a troublemaker, a horrible parent. This is who I’ve become in many people’s eyes. It has changed who I am.

*Anonymous whistle-blower*

Aristotle said, “All men by nature desire knowledge.” While most view knowledge as profitable, those who have spoken out against organizational wrongdoing may see knowledge as a tragedy, specifically the tragedy of unwanted facts about the way the world really functions. These individuals are then faced with the ethical choice of what to do with that knowledge—the choice to remain quiet and safe, or to speak out and risk retaliation (Alford, 2007).

The anonymous whistle-blower quoted above chose to speak out after she witnessed wrongdoing in the public school her children attended. She was a well-respected woman in her small community—a stay at home mom, community volunteer and foster parent who helped several children find a stable and secure home—but that was before she chose to become a whistle-blower. What followed her decision to blow the whistle was a visit to her home from Child Protective Services, an investigation into allegations of neglect, and immeasurable emotional and psychological trauma for her and for her family. The investigation turned up nothing and the report was permanently deleted from her file, but the damage was done. The knowledge gained by this whistle-blower and her decision to speak out, severely altered her life. This account highlights the possible suffering endured by whistle-blowers, an outcome frequently experienced by those who report organizational misconduct (Jackson et al., 2010; Liyanarachchi & Newdick, 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999).
Indeed, numerous forms of retaliation have been identified in past studies, including changes in job duties (Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999), job termination (Alford, 2007; Bok, 1980; Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999), isolation (Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999), and even death threats (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011). Notably, researchers (Dworkin & Baucus, 1998; Masser & Brown, 1996; Near & Miceli, 1995) have shown that before these acts ever occur, simply the perceived threat of retaliation can have an effect on the whistle-blowing process by influencing both the individual’s willingness to report wrongdoing and the preferred method used to report an incident, i.e. external, internal, or anonymously. Additionally, the mere belief by the whistle-blower that retaliation may occur can affect the success of the whistleblowing process (Jackson et al., 2010; Liyanarachchi & Newdick, 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). However, when the threat becomes reality, the act of retaliation can result in severe personal and emotional consequences for the whistle-blower.

The harsh personal consequences that many individuals face after disclosing acts of misconduct have included the loss of homes, jobs, families, and friends, followed by depression, distrust of others and mental or physical decline in health (Alford, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2007; Henik, 2008; Jackson et al., 2010). However, perhaps the greatest loss described by many whistle-blowers is the loss of personal identity. Alford (2007) showed that retaliation has the power to destroy, marginalize, and even metaphorically murder the person who speaks out, or as one individual asserted, create the belief that others wished her “to have never existed” (p. 232). These expressions of personal identity destruction are not uncommon among whistle-blowers. Rothschild and Miethe (1999) witnessed what sociologists refer to as a “master status” (the
primary identification label from which society views an individual) among the whistleblowers in their study:

For most of our whistle-blowers, the experience of whistle-blowing and its aftermath has been so traumatic that their “master status” is now defined by their act of whistle-blowing. Their new identity—one based on the act of whistle-blowing—defines and engulfs nearly everything in their lives…Embattled and embittered, the typical external whistleblower becomes viewed by management and coworkers as a loose cannon and a social outcast, thereby reinforcing the salience of the whistle-blowing ordeal in the formation of the whistle-blower’s personal identity and future life chances.

Additionally, the impact on a person’s life is quite likely to remain powerful for many years, even decades (Alford, 2007). From the points of view of these whistle-blowers, revealing that someone in power has committed a wrongdoing may change a person to the core—or as the foster mom discussed above stated: *It has changed who I am.*

In order to understand the negative consequences whistle-blowers may face and the traumatic effects these consequences have on a person’s life, expressly their personal identities, I examine these effects through the construct of narrative identity.

**Theoretical Framework**

In his commencement address to the 2005 graduating class of Stanford University ("Find what you love," 2005), Steve Jobs described his life in terms of three seemingly unrelated events: dropping out of college, enrolling in a calligraphy class, and founding the world’s second largest company. He described to the class how, after quitting college, he decided to enroll in a calligraphy course, a class that by his own admission had no real life application for him. He explained how years later he used what he learned from that class to create the font system that computer users now take for granted. These three events became inextricably linked together for Jobs:

*It was impossible to connect the dots looking forward. But it was very, very clear*
looking backwards, ten years later. …You have to just trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future…because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow your heart even when it leads you off the well-worn path—and that will make all the difference.

During the commencement speech, Jobs described a portion of the narrative structure of his life—a pattern of events that served to create meaning in his life and construct his identity.

Identity is defined as the sense of the self and the relationship of self to the world—“a system of beliefs or a way of construing the world that makes life predictable rather than random” (Kriesberg, Northrup, & Thorson, 1989, p. 55). Fundamentally, identity is an individual’s answer to the questions “Who am I?” and “What is my purpose?” (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 365). For many personality psychologists, the answers to these identity questions can be viewed through the construct of a life narrative, or life story, which refers to an “individual’s internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self” (McAdams, 2008, p. 242). The narrative identity perspective posits that lives of individuals are not simply a series of events, but rather are constituted by a human consciousness of relationships and connections. Thus, identity takes the form of a narrative structure complete with settings, scenes, character, plots and themes (McAdams, 2004). Simply put, individuals view themselves as the authors or creators of their own life narratives and construct their identities from the plots they form, or the choices they make.

Central to this idea of the human awareness of relationships and connections is the human orientation towards time. Humans have an awareness of past events and experiences, while performing actions in the present, and anticipating the future. Thus, life identities are in part constructed when the author makes choices for future actions based on the identity he or she desires to create, forming an expectancy of future events (Bruner, 1987; Carr, 1986; Somers, 1994). In other words, there is an undeniable “connection between temporality and identity”
(Crossley, 2000, p. 531). Jobs illustrated this linkage between time and identity when describing the relationship between the events of his past, the expectations for the future, and how these events worked together to create his identity: the iconic Apple entrepreneur.

When expectations for the future fail to materialize or when the unity of our constructed plots are compromised by unexpected or traumatic events, our identity can become fractured (Bruner, 2002; Carr, 1986). These unexpected events—or as Aristotle termed the moment of peripeteia—disrupt the continuity of our life story throwing us into what feels like a random occurrence of events. Carr (1986) described this moment as the “dark and looming outer limit of experience” (p. 88). As the authors of their own narratives, human beings strive to regain normalcy or continuity after a moment of what Allison (personal communication, Fall 2011) referred to as the abyss, by developing a “style” that is “true to who we are” (Bruner, 2002, p. 4). In other words, individuals strive to restore equilibrium and a sense of normalcy to their lives by once again interpreting the past and “connecting the dots.” Thus, in the construction of life stories it becomes imperative that individuals’ narrative structure “makes sense” or that their stories have a “narrative coherence” (Crossley, 2000). This, in essence, becomes an individual’s “life’s work”—to form a personal identity.

The life narrative of the whistle-blower plays out in multiple settings, including the organization in which the individual witnesses the act or acts of misconduct. In this study, I will focus on whistle-blowers in the Texas Public School System.

Texas Public School System

With a few exceptions (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011; Richardson, Wheeless, & Cunningham, 2008), little whistle-blowing research has been conducted in the context of
educational institutions. The public school system provides an excellent context for the study of whistle-blowing for the following reasons: First, as previously mentioned, past whistle-blowing researchers have identified various forms of retaliation. The public school system adds another dimension of possible retaliation: children. Many employees of school districts have children who attend the local schools, and this fact alone could influence the whistle-blowing process, specifically as it relates to the consequences of retaliation. Second, parents and community members expect that public school employees will conduct themselves in an ethical manner (Tracy & Muller, 2001). The public school “setting,” with specific rules, practices, and expectations offer an advantageous context in which to study identity formation from a narrative perspective. Third, the public school system is an organization, which by virtue of its function, operates within a culture of support, loyalty, and “team spirit.” The consequences of blowing the whistle in this type of culture could have far-reaching implications for the whistle-blower because of what may be perceived as a lack of allegiance to the school. Finally, the considerable number of stakeholders in the educational process—parents, community members, businesses, and other community organizations—suggests far reaching consequences for acts of misconduct in the public school setting. For these reasons, the Texas Public School System is an appropriate context for the study of the whistle-blowing process and its effects on the whistle-blower.

This study is warranted for the following reasons: First, no researchers have linked whistle-blowing and identity formation, opening the door for future studies in this area. Second, given that the effects of misconduct in schools and the negative consequences for whistle-blowers’ lives and identities can be encompassing, my study can reveal effective coping methods for whistle-blowers, specifically in regaining the sense of one’s identity, opening the door for the development of a coping framework for those who choose to speak out. Finally, the findings of
this study can provide directions for future research in both whistle-blowing and narrative identity scholarship.

While many researchers have explored the effects of retaliation on the whistle-blowing process, only a few have addressed the impact retaliation has on an individual’s personal life; no researchers have addressed the role that retaliation plays in altering a whistle-blower’s perceived identity. To explore the negative consequences whistle-blowers may face and the traumatic effects these consequences have on a person’s life, this study will utilize narrative analysis to examine the identity formation and transformation that whistle-blowers experience during and after the whistle-blowing event. My purpose will be to explore the relationship between the whistle-blowing process, specifically retaliation, and identity transformation of the whistleblower through the construct of narrative identity theory.

Summary

Researchers (Carr, 1986; McAdams, 1996), have claimed that human beings construct their identities through the “stories they live,” by using past events to predict future events, and to make choices in the present that makes future expected outcomes more certain. When an unexpected event occurs, especially one that is devastating or traumatic, identity is impacted, and the individual attempts to restore order and unity in the narrative structure. The whistle-blower may experience various levels of retaliation for speaking out, and the effects of retaliation can be traumatic for the individual, essentially altering the narrative and identity. In this study I will explore whistle-blowing and its consequences on whistle-blowers’ lives, specifically on their narrative identities.
In Chapter 2, I review published research on the whistle-blowing process and whistle-
blowing in the context of the public school system in Texas. Further, I provide an analysis of
identity research, specifically as it applies to narrative identity. Finally, I summarize the various
contexts in which the construct of narrative identity has been utilized to study personal identity.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this thesis, I utilize narrative identity theory to examine the relationship between the whistle-blowing process and identity construction. In Chapter 2, I accomplish the following: first, define whistle-blowing and provide an overview of past whistle-blowing research; second, describe literature related to the Texas Public School System, specifically concerning acts of misconduct, culture, and loyalty; third, provide an overview the various approaches to the study of identity, and review the development of identity research up to and including the emergence of narrative identity theory.

Whistle-Blowing

Near and Miceli (1985) defined whistle-blowing as “the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to affect action” (p. 4). Researchers estimate that approximately one-third of all U.S. employees have observed unethical or illegal activities in their workplace with less than half making the decision to disclose (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). While some studies have laid claim to a demographic profile of the classic whistle-blower (see Miceli & Near, 1990), larger sample studies have shown no empirical support for the claim that there is a way to distinguish the whistle-blower from the silent observer (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). In other words, no “typical” whistle-blower exists (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). One common attribute these whistleblowers do share, however, is the likelihood of experiencing retaliation.
While many factors increase the likelihood of retaliation against a whistle-blower—the use of external channels to disclose (Dworkin & Baucus, 1998; Near & Miceli, 1986), failed attempts at remaining anonymous (Miceli & Near, 1994), lack of support from supervisors (Near & Miceli, 1986), and cost of corrective measures to organization (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999)—retaliation is a real threat for any individual who makes the decision to speak out (Alford, 2007; Henik, 2008; Jackson et al., 2010; Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999).

Researchers have found that “neither gender, age, race, educational attainment, nor years in the job can protect the whistle-blower from retaliation” (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999, p. 125). Moreover, legislative attempts to shield the whistle-blower from retaliation cannot guarantee protection from the consequences of speaking out. Indeed, researchers (Miceli, Rehg, Near, & Ryan, 1999) have discovered that legislative approaches have been ineffective at reducing instances of retaliation against the one who discloses instances of misconduct.

Once an individual makes the decision to speak out against perceived wrongdoing, he or she may experience various forms of retaliation. These include being forced to accept a change in job duties and increased work load (Bok, 1980; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999); job termination (Alford, 2007; Near & Miceli, 1986); being black listed with other companies in the industry (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999); social isolation (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999); coercion to remain silent, even by means of death threats (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) and forced psychiatric examinations (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). The belief that such retaliation can occur may influence the whistle-blowing process in the following ways: first, an individual may decide to remain a silent observer rather than risking retaliation by speaking out; second, the individual may seek anonymous methods of disclosure; and finally, the individual may decide to disclose through external rather than internal channels.
Contemporary organizations often function within complex systems and have limited means for facilitating exposure of wrongdoing (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007), depending on the willingness of employees to speak out. Blackburn (1988) claimed that the silent observer of misconduct can negatively affect the organization. Miceli and Near (1992) indicated that silence is harmful to the organization in the three ways: First, quality of work may suffer due to individuals’ withdrawal, as they may not devote resources to job related activities. Second, organizations in which misconduct occurs are likely to experience it again, as the organization may begin to rely on wrongdoing and depend on it for survival. Finally, organizations miss the opportunity to provide a sense of safety and well-being to their members, since whistle-blowers may warn organizational leaders of potential problems and circumvent possible personal or economic problems for their members.

When retaliation seems likely, whistle-blowers, rather than remaining silent, may seek grievance channels that offer the safety of anonymity (Elliston, 1982), especially in the case of individuals who are in low power, vulnerable positions within the organization (Miceli, Roach, & Near, 1988). Indeed, Miceli, et al. (1988) demonstrated that anonymous external whistle-blowers tend to be justified in their fear of retaliation, and their skepticism about the responsiveness of internal channels (Miceli et al., 1988). When individuals use anonymous channels to disclose acts of misconduct, distrust is created within the organization (Miceli et al., 1988), which can impede the search for truth (Elliston, 1982). As Elliston (1982) argued, “…blowing the whistle publicly may be ideal but one cannot demand it” (p. 172), especially when those individuals act anonymously in order to protect themselves from the consequences of retaliation. However, even when retaliation seems likely, whistle-blowers may decide (due to the likelihood of their identities being revealed or due to low expectation for whistle-blowing
success through anonymous channels) to disclose acts of misconduct openly (Miceli et al., 1988), either through external or internal channels (Dworkin & Baucus, 1998).

Dworkin and Baucus (1998) claimed that the choice of recipient (external or internal) is critical to the whistle-blowing process, since it can influence the response of the organization, the type of retaliation suffered, and the effectiveness of the process. They further argue that while external whistle-blowers tend to receive more severe retaliation than those who use internal channels, retaliation comes more swiftly to those who use internal channels to report wrongdoing, as managers may move immediately to discredit or fire the individual who reports misconduct. Additionally, Dworkin and Baucus (1998) showed that whistle-blowers who use external channels tend to be more effective in eliciting change in the organization. In summary, retaliation against those who report wrongdoing affects the success of the whistle-blowing process.

While an abundance of literature exists on the impact that retaliation has on the whistle-blowing process, only a few researchers have focused on the personal and emotional effects that retaliation can have on the whistle-blower’s life. However, using survey methods, Rothschild and Miethe (1999) identified several life altering consequences suffered by whistle-blowers who faced retaliation, such as severe depression, feelings of isolation, powerlessness, distrust of others, deteriorating health, severe financial difficulties, and family problems. While studies utilizing survey methodology can provide insight into the emotional difficulties suffered by whistle-blowers, some researchers have realized the need to understand the life altering consequences suffered by these individuals through their own words and stories (Alford, 2001; Jackson et al., 2010; Richardson & McGlynn, 2011). These studies utilized interview methods to bring to light the magnitude of suffering these whistle-blowers endure and, more importantly, to
develop an understanding of the “people they became” (Alford, 2007, p. 223). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the destruction of life and identity was a common theme that surfaced during these communicative interactions with whistle-blowers. This possible relationship between whistle-blowing and an individual’s identity is examined in the context of the Texas public school system.

Texas Public School System, Misconduct, and Whistle-Blowing

Scholars have studied whistle-blowing in a variety of organizational contexts, both public and private, including large corporations (Anand, Ashforth, & Joshi, 2004; Johnson, Sellnow, Seeger, Barrett, & Hasbargen, 2004), police organizations (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007), healthcare groups (Goldie, Schwartz, McConnachie, & Morrison, 2003), and government establishments (Blackburn, 1988). One area where limited whistle-blowing research exists is the setting of the public school system, even though the media contains an abundance of news articles relating to whistle-blower law suits and a variety of allegations of organizational misconduct, ("Carbon County School superintendent," 2010; Edelman, 1998; Jacobs, 2009; Manson, 2003; 2010; and Torres, 2011). In spite of the lack of whistle-blowing literature in the context of public schools, “standards” is a word familiar to educational administrators. Researchers (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005; Tracy & Muller, 2001) have found that leaders in public schools are expected to adhere to high standards such as religious and cultural diversity, student protection (e.g. prevention of child abuse and sexual harassment), standardized testing accountability, fiscal accountability, federal and local government mandates, and community expectations.
While the literature suggests that school systems and employees will adhere to high standards of conduct, there is also an abundance of literature showing that the public school system operates within a code of loyalty, team spirit, and cooperation (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Historically, schools have operated under the notion that school spirit and community support create better learning outcomes for students (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Terzian, 2004). According to authors, school spirit consists of participation, loyalty, and pride (Terzian, 2004), and has been measured by the use of school apparel, car stickers, alumni donation rates, and ratings by major sport publications ("Measuring school spirit," 2004). Additionally, the importance of school spirit in the public school system can be seen in literature schools provide for educators to promote school spirit in the classrooms and school environment (Latchana, 2011).

The theme of teamwork is apparent in the governing system of Texas school boards. In reaction to perceived micromanagement by school board members, superintendents’ organizations lobbied their state legislatures to enact a “teamwork” concept of school governance, giving more power to the superintendents (Education Code Chapter 11 School Districts, 1995). The Texas Education Code Sec 11.1512 (1995) describes the relationship between the superintendent and the board as a “collaborative” affiliation. In its curriculum, the TASB (Texas Association of School Boards)—the organization responsible for providing training to local school boards—created the term “The Team of Eight” to refer to the local school board. In essence, this team concept includes a group of board members who work together in cooperation and collaboration to help make the best decisions for the district (Vaughn, 2010), along with the superintendent, who is, under this team concept, equal partner with the board members. Some educational advocates (www.peytonwolcott.com) argued that before the state created this “team” governance model, board members previously questioned their district’s
operations, and the superintendent previously would be obligated to answer those questions. Consequently, according to Wolcott, board members do not hold superintendents as accountable as they did in previous years. “Team members don't hold fellow team members accountable in the same way they would an employee” (www.peytonwolcott.com). When a board member goes against the grain and engages in difficult questioning of superintendents, the rest of the board considers this member a maverick; the members then circle the wagon and protect the superintendent from this out of control board member (P. Wolcott, personal communication, Spring, 2007), isolating the maverick of the group. Rothwell and Baldwin (2007) demonstrated a ‘code of silence’ can exist in organizations that similarly emphasize the benefits of loyalty and support. Therefore, the perception that this type of loyalty exists within the Texas school governing system is significant to this study. Similarly, because of high expectations for cooperation between students, teachers, and community, and because many employers view whistle-blowing as an act of disloyalty (Lamar, 1992), the pressure to remain a silent observer and the fear of retaliation, makes the public school system a beneficial context in which to study the impact of retaliation on the lives of the whistle-blower.

The concept of teamwork within the school and community highlights the roles that stakeholders play in the public educational system. The definition of whistle-blowing has been expanded to include external stakeholders who publicly report instances of wrongdoing (Johnson, Sellnow, Seeger, Barrett, & Hasbargen, 2004). Stakeholders in the public school system include parents, business leaders, community members, school support groups e.g., PTA organizations and booster clubs and a number of school vendors. The expectation that parents, business leaders, and community members share a function in the educational organization, places these stakeholders both within and outside the organization. In essence, the stakeholders
have such close ties to the organization, they could find themselves playing the role of whistle-
blower or, in some cases, a perpetrator of wrongdoing. The close ties between stakeholders and
the public school organization, specifically in the context of ‘team player,’ offers the opportunity
for new insights into how such a cultural setting can affect the whistle-blower’s identity.

Narrative Identity

As defined in Chapter 1, identity is the sense of self or a belief structure that makes life
predictable (Kriesberg et al., 1989). For narrative identity theorists, identity represents a
“particular way in which the self may be arranged, constructed, and eventually told (McAdams,
what follows, I provide a summary of the literature relating to the construct of narrative identity.
First, though many scholars and laypersons use the terms ‘self’ and ‘identity’ interchangeably
(McAdams, 1995), I distinguish between the meanings of the terms ‘identity’ and ‘self.’ Second,
I present a brief history of personal identity research. Third, I provide a summary of narrative
identity literature as it relates to the narrative structure of life. Finally, I offer an overview of the
various contexts in which scholars have utilized narrative identity theory in the study of personal
identity.

Many understand self and identity as synonymous terms (McAdams, 1995). However, in
the study of how individuals construct their identities, scholars distinguish between one’s self
and one’s identity. Based on James’ (1892) conception of self, George Herbert Mead
differentiated between the “I” and the “me” of human consciousness, describing the “I” as the
subject of the consciousness and the “me” as the object. More specifically, Mead classified the
“I” as a pre-reflective response of the human consciousness to the attitudes of others, and the
“me” as the “organized set of attitudes of others which one himself [sic] assumes” (as cited by Ezzy, 1998, p. 245). Similarly, Ricoeur (1991/1992) distinguished between the self and identity, positing that the self is the reflexive nature of the person as a whole, while identity is the stories that one tells about one’s self. As McAdams (1995) stated, the self is the object while “identity refers to a particular way in which the self may be arranged, constructed, and eventually told” (p. 385). Identity then, is not the same as self, but rather is a quality of self (McAdams, 1995).

Simply put, identity is the way in which individuals unify and give purpose to the self.

In exploring identity, scholars have organized its attributes into various frameworks (e.g. Allport, 1937; Cattell, 1957; Digman, 1990). One recent organizational scheme (McAdams, 1995) establish these attributes into three categories: traits, personalized motivations, and identity as life stories. The first category consists of broad constructs referred to as traits, which provide a “dispositional signature” (McAdams, 1995, p. 365) for personality, e.g., the Big Five trait model (John & Srivastava, 1997), and are stable over time. The second category focuses on motivational constructs of desire and personal interests, which change depending on time, place, and the individual’s role (McAdams, 1995). Scholars have traditionally studied the question of ‘who we are’ from the concepts rooted in these two categories. These traditional approaches to the study of identity followed the comprehensive theories of personality of Adler (1927), Freud (1916/1961), Jung (1933), and other theories of “human desire” (Singer, 2004, p. 3), such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954). In recent years, scholars have migrated from these traditional approaches, to a more social constructionist perspective, specifically a narrative identity approach—the third category of McAdam’s (1995) identity structure and the construct for this study.
Sarbin asserted that narrative form is a structure or pattern of events, related to “human predicaments and attempted resolutions” (as cited by Hanninen, 2004). Narrative identity can be defined in different ways, depending on the approach of the author. Hanninen (2004) proposed a schematic model of narrative form, in which the various approaches to the study of narrative identity can be classified. The first of these forms is the *told narrative*.

The told narrative form is the verbal symbolic representation of a series of human events (Hanninen, 2004). Scholars who approach the study of narrative from this view, argue that structure results from the *telling* of a story and not from the actual events themselves (Mink, 1986)—that life presents itself as mere sequence without beginning or end (White, 1986). These authors assert that life contains elements of narrative, but those elements have no form until they have been organized, or rewritten, into a narrative structure (Ricoeur, 1992/1992). These told stories are affected by the intended audience of the narrative, the *flattening* and *sharpening* of details (omissions and exaggerations), and the forgotten events that have shaped the narrator’s identity story (Polkinghorne, 1996). In narrative research, the told stories are the stories of one’s self that are told to others, or the autobiographies of an individual.

Individuals not only tell their life stories to others, but likewise to themselves. This is the second form of narrative identity (Hanninen, 2004), and refers to an individual’s organization of experience, or the story we tell to ourselves (Hanninen, 2004). The *inner narrative* is the focus for narrative psychologists (Crossley, 2000; McAdams, 1995), as these scholars explore the inner stories of an individual’s mind. Scholars (Hanninen, 2004, McAdams, 1995) have read this form of narrative as a mental process consisting of many ongoing and parallel stories, functioning to define an individual’s identity, make sense of the past, and predict the future.
The final form of narrative identity research is the concept of *lived narrative* (Hanninen, 2004). Carr (1986) asserted that the events of life are not merely sequential, but rather represent a complex structure of events related through time and meaning. Allison (1994) designated the term narratization to mean “an agent’s ongoing mediation of his/her own physical and/or verbal actions within a temporally configured field in order to achieve an envisioned but, as yet, unrealized end” (p. 109). In this study I use Allison’s (1994) term *narratization* when discussing the whistle-blowers’ construction of their lived narrative structure. Specifically, I utilize the construct offered by these latter theorists to examine the relationship between the whistle-blowing process and the personal identity of the one who chooses to disclose. In the following paragraphs, I provide a summary of the arguments found in the works of these narrative theorists. I begin by characterizing these authors’ views on the relationship of time and the human experience. Next, I detail the elements of narrative present within an individual’s life experience, including the points of view of character, narrator and audience. I then describe the notion of ‘narrative incoherence’ and what it means for the narrative life structure of an individual. Finally, I discuss the narrative setting of the whistle-blower’s narrative structure.

Central to the narrative identity approach is the view that life is not merely a sequence of events, but rather a “unique order of meaning” (Crossley, 2000, p. 531; Polkinghorne, 1988). Key to this ‘order of meaning’ is the human experience of time and temporality (Carr, 1986). Carr advanced the idea that humans do not encounter “basic units of experience” (Carr, 1986, p. 122), nor are we stuck in the present; rather we attribute significance to our experiences from our retentions and protentions—an awareness of the immediate past and an expectation for the immediate future (Carr, 1986). According to Carr “we quite explicitly consult past experience, envisage the future, and view the present as a passage between the two” (1986, p. 122). Carr
illustrates this human experience of time, using Hurssel’s analysis of time, by describing what happens when an individual hears the sound of melody (Carr, 1986): “We do not simply sit and wait for stimuli to hit us. We grasp a configuration extending into the future which gives to each of the sounding notes their sense” (Carr, 1986). Human beings do not hear the notes of a melody as an isolated event in the present, but through retention and protention, the melody becomes a cohesive unit. Similarly, in their active lives, the past and present experiences function as an expectation for the future (Carr, 1986) and individuals derive their sense from the future goals they serve—they consult their past and ‘expect’ the future. Simply put, the focus of their attention is not on the present but on the future—the “envisaged or projected future” (Carr, 1986, p. 125).

Through this temporality of human experience, individuals create an “order of meaning” of connections and relationships (Polkinghorne, 1988). Sarbin (1986) viewed narrative as an account of an individual’s actions that contains a beginning, middle and end, and is held together by patterns of events or plots. According to MacIntyre (1981), life’s beginnings and endings cannot only be viewed as an individual’s birth and death, but also can be viewed as other important forms of ‘endings’ and structure found along the path of one’s life (Carr, 1986). The beginning and endings that are relevant to the life structure are the starting and ending points of the various projects in human beings’ lives, both small and large—the cohesiveness of events that are related both by time and meaning. Thus, life will have numerous, and often parallel, plot structures that contain beginning and ending points (Carr, 1986).

In narratives, an agent develops and constructs the plots of a story. Some authors (Chatman, 1978; Mink, 1970; White, 1981) assert that while in art, agents do indeed construct the patterns of events of a story, selecting those events that are important to the outcome of the
story, this process does not occur in real life events. To the contrary, these scholars describe the life narrative as stories in which individuals ‘find themselves’ located (MacIntyre, 1981; Somers 1994). In other words, their narrative is rarely of their own making (Somers, 1994). Indeed, MacIntyre (1981) asserted that individuals are not the authors of their own narratives, but rather society constructs their stories. While there is consensus for the role that society plays in identity construction, Carr (1986) asserted that societal roles cannot always be the dictator of lived narrative, but instead, individuals *choose* the stories of their life narratives depending upon the identity they want to create. In other words, human beings do not simply sit back and wait for life to happen—they make choices based on their goals for the future (Bruner, 2002; Carr 1986). Simply put, individuals participate in the co-construction of their own autobiographies (Bruner, 2002)—they are the main characters *and* the narrators in their lived narratives.

According to some authors (Mink, 1970; White, 1981), individuals, as characters in their own lived narratives, do not have the authoritative point of view that a storyteller must have; in other words, human beings do not have the ability to view their life story from its end. Carr, however, argues that as storytellers, individuals are not “stuck in the present” as these structuralists assert (Carr, 1986, p. 124), but rather, as storytellers in their own lives, they view their life from a “quasi-retrospective” point of view—from a future perfect tense (Carr, 1986, p. 124). As Carr stated, “the elements of phases of an action, though they unfold in time, are viewed from the perspective of their having been completed” (Carr, 1986, p. 124).

According to Scholes and Kellogg (as cited by Carr, 1986), a story involves not just a sequence of temporally organized events, a character, and a storyteller; there must also be an audience. In art, the answer may seem obvious, but in real life, who holds the point of view of the audience? According to Carr (1986), the individual is the audience for the lived narrative he
or she is living. Carr further stated that individuals assume the point of view of the audience as they observe their own lived narrative and evaluate its outcomes. As character, human beings live their narrative; as storyteller and author, they choose the actions that will be a part of their narrative; as audience, they evaluate the particular courses of action and outcomes of their narrative. Additionally, as individuals assume the role of audience, they do so from not only their own perspectives, but from the perspectives of others (Carr, 1986). As human beings choose their actions and predict their future, they do so considering the views and expectations of society.

Human beings seek narrative coherence. However, sometimes, complex and unexpected events occur, causing the lived narrative structure to lose coherence and continuity (Carr, 1986). Carr explained that these moments of loss of coherence can occur in day-to-day activities, as in moments where individuals lose track of why they are doing a particular action. More importantly, when traumatic events occur, these moments may be generalized into a person’s life to the degree that nothing makes sense any longer (Carr, 1986). At such moments, the lived narrative structure loses its customary narrative coherence, and becomes mere sequence and fragmented, as the narrative structure or “their whole conception of themselves” changes (Crossley, 2000, p. 539). Such moments can be the result of a death in the family, a divorce, financial ruin, or a diagnosis of a terminal disease (Bruner, 2002; Crossley, 2000). It is subsequent to these traumatic events that the individual experiences the abyss—the “dark and looming outer limit of experience” (Carr, 1986, p.88), characterized by chaos instead of order, randomness in place of predictability. Bruner (2002), borrowing from Aristotle, referred to this moment of disruption as the moment of peripeteia—expectancy is knocked off course and the individual strives to restore normalcy. Narrative coherence is an individual’s life’s work,
according to Carr (1986), and when our customary coherence disappears, “we aim for it, try to produce it, and try to restore it when it goes missing for whatever reason” (Carr, 1986, p. 90). An individual attempts to restore coherence and continuity in one of two ways. According to Bruner (2002), individuals strive to regain legitimacy or continuity in their lives by forming a style that is true to them and by choosing actions that corresponds to what others expect of them. They in essence attempt to restore narrative structure and to regain the coherence their lives once possessed. However, according to Carr (1986), there are times that the narrative itself is called into question; the individual must seek an alternative narrative—a narrative that will allow the individual to find coherence and meaning in his or her experiences by creating a new narrative structure—a new identity (Carr, 1986).

Character, narrator, and plot, are elements that exist in the narrative structure of human life. Additionally, a narrative consists of a setting in which the story unfolds. In real life events, these settings are the social institutions in which an individual participates (McAdams, 2004). Families, communities, and places of employment, are all part of the social settings of our life stories. Researchers have studied identity as a life story in various contexts. A number of authors have explored the narrative identities of troubled youth and adolescents in various cultures (Atkins, 2011; Barber, 2010; McLean, 2008; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010), as well as the narrative identities in the elderly (McLean, 2008; Randall, 2010), and narrative identities of teachers in various levels of education (Avest, Bakker, & Miedema, n.d.; Estola, 2003; Soreide, 2006; Watson, 2009). Additionally, health researchers have examined the narrative identity of patients who have been diagnosed with a terminal disease (Charon & Montello, 2002), exploring the ways in which the moment of the abyss, in newly diagnosed patients, alters their narrative structure and thereby affects their identities (Bruner, 2002). Similarly, this study
explores the narrative identities in the lives of whistle-blowers in the context of the Texas Public School System.

Researchers view identity as a lived narrative. Individuals’ lives bear within them a narrative structure wherein they create their identities. When unexpected or traumatic events occur, narrative threads may disappear, leaving lives in chaotic, unpredictable, and random sequences of events. For the whistle-blower, retaliation is a likely traumatic event that has the potential to disrupt the narrative structure of the individual who discloses acts of misconduct. When whistle-blowers’ narrative structures are disrupted, little is known about how these individuals strive to regain coherence in their narrative identities. Consequently, researchers should study the long-term effects of the whistle-blowing retaliation on whistle-blowers’ lives, specifically the effect on their personal identities.

Research Questions

In order to assess the impact retaliation may have on a whistle-blower’s narrative identity, my research is guided by three central questions:

First, in what ways does the whistle-blower describe his or her identity prior to the act of disclosing wrongdoing? Second, in what ways, if any, does the whistle-blower experience a moment of the abyss subsequent to the whistle-blowing incident? Third, in what ways does the whistle-blower describe his or her identity subsequent to the whistle-blowing incident?

Summary

Near and Miceli (1985) defined whistle-blowing as “the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of
their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to affect action” (p. 4). Retaliation, a common outcome for the one who choose to disclose, affects the emotional and personal well-being of the whistle-blower. Some authors have observed themes of identity destruction among those who report instances of wrongdoing. Through the construct of narrative identity, specifically the concept of Carr’s *life as a lived narrative structure*, I explore the relationships between the whistle-blowing process and identity among individuals who choose to speak out against misconduct in the Texas public schools.

In chapter 3, I discuss the methods utilized for this study, specifically from a narrative analysis approach. I begin by distinguishing between narrative as a construct and narrative as a method of analysis. Next, I discuss the participants in relation to the criteria for selection, assurance of confidentiality, data collection and analysis, and the role of the researcher.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

In this study, I utilized a qualitative, narrative approach to explore the relationship between the whistle-blowing process and identity transformation, in the context of the Texas Public School System. Qualitative researchers use language and narratives to understand the experiences of individuals and depend on the engagement between a researcher and participants to generate data, primarily through observations, interviews, or focus groups (Creswell, 2009).

I utilized narrative analysis for this study. At this point, it is beneficial to distinguish between narrative identity as a construct and narrative analysis as a method. According to McAdams (1995), a narrative can be a “method or a construct, but the two are not the same” (p. 384). Narrative as a method involves the eliciting of stories that later will be used for analysis in order to achieve the goal of a particular study. Narrative as a construct is the lived narrative stories of an individual, similar to how a person possesses a trait or motive.

I utilized narrative inquiry as a methodology to understand whistle-blowers’ lives, with a particular focus on how participants constructed their identities. Indeed, according to May (2002), narrative inquiry “increases attention to issues of selfhood, subjectivity, and identity” (p. 245) and identities are “social products” (p. 242); together, these phenomenon provide insights into how individuals view themselves in relation to the world. Given that the objective of this study is to explore the effects that whistle-blowing may have on an individual’s identity, narrative inquiry is an appropriate method for accomplishing this purpose.

Participants

Nine Texas public school whistle-blowers (N = 9) participated in this study. The
geographical scope of this study was limited to the public schools in Texas in order to provide a consistent framework, both legally and culturally, in which to explore the personal identities of whistle-blowers. Participants were employees (e.g., teachers, staff, and administrators), school board members, volunteers, or parents in Texas public school. While some definitions conceptualize whistle-blowers as former or current members of the focal organization, a recent study broadened our view of whistle-blowers to include stakeholders of the organization (Johnson et al., 2004).

All participants encountered some form of retaliation for disclosing acts of wrongdoing. Alford (1999) distinguishes between an employee simply doing his or her job and a whistleblower. According to Alford (1999), whistle-blowers do not define themselves, but rather in practice, they are “defined by the organizations that retaliates” (p. 266) against them. Without experiencing retaliation, the whistle-blower is just an employee who has “done his [or her] duty” (p. 266). Because this study explored the effects that retaliation has on an individual’s identity, it was important that the participants be whistle-blowers who experienced retaliation during the whistle-blowing process.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by one of three methods. First, I utilized a convenience sample, contacting individuals I personally knew who had blown the whistle in a Texas Public School District. Second, I used internet search engines to locate news articles containing accounts of Texas school districts that had been involved in accusations of wrongdoing and then attempted to contact the whistle-blowers through their attorneys or through networking sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn. Third, I utilized the contacts of a Texas education reform advocate.
This individual was featured on many Texas and national news outlets, and has appeared before the Texas legislature, advocating for legislation that would encourage fiscal accountability among Texas schools. Additionally, this individual maintains an information based website that features various school districts involved in misconduct. Prospective participants were identified based on the above criteria and were contacted by e-mail, phone, social networking site, or through their legal representation.

Confidentiality

Before participants agreed to the study, they were provided a description of the study and a consent form stating they have the option of discontinuing their participation in the study at any time. All information that could possibly identity a participant was removed from the presentation of the data. Even though some participants gave permission to the interviewer for their names to be used, each participant was given a pseudonym so that none of the data could be linked to his or her school district.

Data Collection

Using the above recruitment strategies, 22 individuals were identified as whistle-blowers in the Texas Public School System who had encountered some form of retaliation subsequent to the reporting of wrongdoing. All were contacted and nine agreed to participate. Of the remaining 13 prospective participants, 10 did not return messages and three declined via their attorneys. None of the participants who declined, offered explanations as for their refusal.

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1 A graduate student conducted the interview with ‘Lane’ due to Lane’s personal relationship with the author.
In this study, I utilized unstructured, open-ended, interview methodology in order to understand the effect that whistle-blowing has on an individual’s identity. Narrative interviews should be conducted in a setting that “encourages and stimulates interviewees to tell a story about some significant event in the informant’s life” (Bauer, 1996, p. 1). The preferred interview approach for this study was face to face interview at a site convenient for the participant and suitable for maintaining confidentiality. If such meetings were not possible, interviews were conducted by Skype. Four individuals agreed to face-to-face interviews, while six requested interviews by Skype. Eight interviews were audiotaped and professionally transcribed. Due to recorder malfunction, one interview required the researcher to take notes. Interviews ranged in length from 45 to 110 minutes. The transcribed interviews resulted in 133 single-spaced pages of data and 4 pages of field notes. Interview questions addressed the following areas: 1) the personal identity construction of the individual prior to the whistle-blowing process; 2) the personal identity construction of the individual during and/or immediately following the occurrence(s) of retaliation; 3) the personal identity construction of the individual subsequent to the whistle-blowing process. The interview protocol served as a guide for the interview; however, it is important to lessen the influence of the researcher (Bauer, 1996) by asking open-ended questions and remaining flexible in the questioning process and open to exploring new issues as raised by the participant. Thus, probing questions were used where appropriate.

Data Analysis

A clear formulation of the study’s objectives guided the analysis. Because this study explored the narrative structure construct of the participant’s life, each individual narrative was first analyzed holistically. Rather than analyzing interview fragments, I first assessed
participants’ responses in relation to the interview as a whole. During this phase of the analysis, I developed broad themes as guided by the research questions: In support of RQ1, I identified themes of personal identity descriptions of the participant; in support of RQ2, I analyzed narrative descriptions of the moment(s) of retaliation for themes of narrative incoherence and loss of narrative structure; finally, in support of RQ3, I analyzed data for themes of participant’s personal identity descriptions subsequent to the whistle-blowing process.

Next, I utilized constant comparative analysis to assess the interview data. This strategy involves focusing on one piece of data (interview) and “comparing it with all others that may be similar or different in order to develop conceptualizations of the possible relations between various pieces of data” (Thorne, 2000, p. 69). To complete the analysis, I searched for evidence of relationships between the themes in order to assess the impact retaliation had on the whistle-blower’s narrative identity.

Verification

Inherent in narrative analysis is the recognition that through the narrative construction and subsequent analysis, the participant can never be “quite free of the researcher’s interpretation of their lives” (Bell, 2002, p. 210). Because I have family members who have been whistle-blowers in the public school system, my own personal experiences could produce pre-conceived notions that could interfere with the data analysis. In order to verify data analysis procedures, I conducted a member check to ensure accuracy, specifically member checking in regard to the dominant themes (Creswell, 2007, 2008). To conduct the member check, I selected three participants from the study and met with them for one hour to review major themes. After I presented the themes, I provided the participants the opportunity to provide feedback regarding
accuracy of themes. The participants confirmed that their experiences corresponded with the respective themes.

Summary

In this chapter, I argued that narrative analysis is an appropriate method for exploring the identities of whistle-blowers in relation to the whistle-blowing process. Furthermore, I addressed participant selection, ethical protection of participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study. First, I provide a whistle-blowing background of each participant. Next, I discuss each of the eight themes, explain relationships between the themes, and detail participant responses. Finally, I describe relationships between the various themes.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

After holistically analyzing the narratives of nine whistle-blowers in the context of the Texas public schools, I identified several themes addressing each research question. For RQ1, analysis revealed four categories of identity construction: character, crusader, family roles, and popularity. For RQ2, I identified two themes in relation to evidence of narrative abyss following retaliation: locus of identity construction and trauma response. For RQ3, two themes emerged in relation to the participant’s ability to reestablish narrative structure: reestablishment of previous identity and abandonment of previous identity.

After I identified the previous themes, I engaged in a constant comparative analysis of the data in order to identify possible relations between themes. I identified the following relationships: previous narrative identity and choice to disclose wrongdoing; severity of retaliation and evidence of narrative abyss; severity of retaliation and ability to reestablish narrative coherence; previous narrative identity and ability to reestablish narrative coherence.

In the following pages, I give a background of each participant’s whistle-blowing experience. Second, I define each theme, including a description of how the themes relate to the relevance of this study, and detail participants’ responses within the themes. Third, I identify the relationships between the themes and the relevance of those relationships to this study.

Participant’s Whistle-Blowing Experience

The details of the whistle-blowing experience for each of the nine participants were as distinct as were the individuals themselves. Some individuals’ involvement consisted of one instance of reporting on one wrongdoing event, while others engaged in a prolonged series of
reports and subsequent retaliation. A number of the participants experienced extreme forms of retaliation, while others faced relatively mild repercussions.

Tim

Tim was a lower level administrator in his school district when he received complaints that a male schoolteacher was having sexual relations with a female student. After insisting on an investigation into the matter, he was reassigned and was the target of rumors and false accusations. The administration conducted an investigation that “turned up nothing.” However, a few years later, the accused teacher was discovered to be having an affair with another young female student, which resulted in 10 years’ probation and the loss of his teaching certificate.

Laura

A highly educated PTA volunteer and mother of two, Laura witnessed what she described as financial misconduct, specifically, the “racketeering of school supplies,” and instances of child neglect concerning her autistic child. Laura reported her concern to the PTA president, PTA board members, and the assistant principal. At first, the retaliation was mild: alienation, isolation, removal from PTA volunteer list, and “lectures” from the school principal. However, after she complained about the treatment of her child, she received a letter from the school stating that the administrators were banning her from the school. What followed was a series of moments of retaliation: Laura’s arrest for trespassing on school property while walking her autistic son to the bus stop; harassment by school officials; being reported to Child Protective Services (CPS); and harassment by parents in the district, which included having fruit thrown at
her in the local grocery store. Laura contacted the media and eventually filed suit against the school. According to Laura, she was eventually “vindicated by the court system.”

**Nikki**

As a previous business owner and mother of three, Nikki reported irregularities in standardized testing procedures to her district’s Board of Trustees. Initially, retaliation only consisted of pressure from school officials in the form of “attitude adjusting sessions” in the principal’s office. However, as Nikki continued to pose questions to the school, the retaliation changed to what she described as false accusations, harassment by school officials, isolation, rumors and intimidation. Nikki filed a lawsuit against the school district for open records violation.

**Cari**

When Cari received a phone call from her children’s school informing her that one of her sons could not return to school the following Monday because his shot records were not up to date, Cari began to ask questions. After realizing the school was being dishonest regarding the shot records, Cari contacted the Texas State Health Department for clarification. Subsequently, the Health Department notified the school of its violation and Cari’s son was allowed back in school. However, the report angered the principal. Retaliation included refusal by school officials to respond to Cari’s attempted correspondence, removing her children from P.E. classes against her wishes, and finally reporting Cari to CPS. Eventually Cari moved her children out of the school district.
Bill

Bill was the athletic director for his school district when he found out that one of his school’s star football players was ineligible to play under University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. After consulting with his superintendent, Bill reported the issue to the UIL. The retaliation against Bill was immediate and included loss of job, death threats, harassment by school officials, and threats against his family.

Maci

Maci and her husband are parents to one biological child and four adopted children. After a teacher confidentially expressed to Maci that their special needs child was being neglected, the parents complained to school officials. After the school failed to address their concerns, the couple filed a grievance with the TEA (Texas Education Agency). Retaliation included limiting Maci’s access to her child at school and eventually being reported to CPS.

Melissa

As an administration employee in her school district, Melissa witnessed several financial improprieties within her district. She reported these issues to a member of the Board of Trustees, Lane (a participant in this study), who tried to keep her name confidential for fear of the retaliation she might receive. However, in spite of his efforts, the administration soon realized who had disclosed the acts of wrongdoing; Melissa was immediately ostracized and demoted. After threatening to sue the district, Melissa quit her job, moved, and enrolled her daughter in a private school.
Lane

Lane was a board member for his school district for several years when an employee of the school district, Melissa (a participant in this study), came to him with details of financial wrongdoing in the school district. After consulting with his personal attorney about the course of action to take, Lane turned the information over to the board president and school district attorney. The retaliation against Lane consisted of rumors about his performance as a board member and a united effort to ensure his defeat during the next board election.

Susan

When Susan became concerned about her special needs son’s progress in school, she learned that the school was failing to follow the guidelines outlined in the TEA’s Admission, Review, Dismissal (ARD) recommendations. After Susan complained, the school’s treatment of her son worsened and her son’s state of mind deteriorated. According to Susan, the school used her son as a tool for retaliation, eventually forcing her to move to another school district.

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked, “In what ways does the whistle-blower describe his or her identity prior to the act of disclosing wrongdoing?” While scholars generally agree that society plays a role in identity constructions, Carr (1986) asserted that societal roles do not dictate human beings’ lived narratives, but rather individuals choose the stories of their lived narratives depending on the identity they wish to create. Indeed, the whistle-blowers in this study described their identities, not only through the perception of others (societal roles), but also through their choices in narratization, specifically the decision to disclose acts of wrongdoing. In analyzing the
participants’ identity construction, I identified four themes: character, crusader, family roles, and popularity. While there was overlap among themes for each participant, I classify the participants into the themes that were highly salient throughout their narratives. In this section, I will identify and describe each theme of identity construction, including participants’ descriptions of narrative identity construction within the respective themes.

**Character**

I characterize the theme of character as those descriptions of identity centered on ethics (morals, honesty, and matters of conscience), trustworthiness (how reliable others view the participant) and respect (others’ high opinion of the participant). The theme of character was highly salient throughout the narratives of Bill, Lane, and Tim. Their narratives focused on the trust that others placed in them, their sense of right and wrong, and the respect they received from the surrounding community. For example, Bill, the athletic director who reported an ineligible player from his school’s play-off bound football team to the UIL (University Interscholastic League), described the trust others had in him as a reason why he received a promotion to the position of athletic director.

We didn’t have necessarily winning records—there was a lot of problems within the athletic department…a lot of mistrust. I developed a lot of good relationships…with the administration of the district for just how I handled situations and problems that arose and you know I think they saw that I could probably handle running the athletic department.

This participant was aware of his identity through the perceptions of others—those within the athletic department. However, he also revealed the importance of his narratization choices within his identity construction, i.e., his conduct when responding to problems at work. This same whistle-blower stressed the type of respect he had earned at his school district as he described his happiness with the district up to the moment of the whistle-blowing incident.
I was a rising star…I think my reputation in the district and in the community for six and a half years was top notch…I had respect across the school board—[with] the members of the school board I had high respect and high regards with those that were in top level administrative positions with the district. I had great respect from the building principal…and I had a lot of community members that I had great relationship with.

Notably, he attributed his being a “rising star” less to “popularity” and more to respect and trustworthiness. The respect he acquired in his school district and community extended to the local media, due in part because of his honesty. Bill explained, “…there was a time I had a great relationship with the news media…I think it’s because I told the truth…and they could see that what had happened to me should not have happened.” Again, Bill’s choice to “tell the truth” affected his identity construction. Perhaps most importantly to Bill’s identity was the fact that he had what he referred to as, “a great relationship with the Black community.” Bill’s narrative highlighted the significance of this fact, due to the racial divide of the community in which he lived and the fact that he, as a white man, enjoyed trust within the African American community.

It is truly a Black and White community…I had a …fantastic relationship with the Black community and took care of those kids. I’d go to their house, I took them to doctor’s appointments when their parents wouldn’t, take them to surgery…and took them home from surgery. I had an excellent relationship with them all, and I think that’s what helped me excel in my position there at [district] ISD.

The racial tensions within the community and his role in easing those tensions were significant to Bill’s identity construction.

Lane, another participant whose identity was salient within the theme of character was a school board member in the small community in which he was raised who reported instances of financial improprieties on the part of the school district’s superintendent of thirty years. Lane described how others viewed him in the community, specifically in the context of his role as a school board member:

I’m a highly inquisitive person and I was known as the one who asked a lot of questions. I took the position very seriously—I’m going to be there and I’m responsible for it. I
want to know what’s going on…I was probably a huge standout in the board in that there’s so many people there that take it—in my estimation—as ‘here this is prestigious—I’m here to rubber stamp—let’s get in let’s get out—it’s over.’

Lane contrasted his narratization choice to “ask a lot of questions,” with those on the board who chose to “rubber stamp” decisions. Additionally, Lane’s identity and sense of duty was intertwined with his and his family’s long ties with the community. Describing himself as a “home boy,” Lane described this community relationship:

[I] grew up in the same community, little town—parents were pillars in the community. It’s interesting that…when I went to school in [district] we were in an old school building that was built in 1909—it was so old back then that we had one teacher for two grades…Small school. On the corner stone of that building was my great-granddad’s [name]—being on the school board. And then his son or my granddad William was on the school board and then my dad was on the school board and so I came to be involved in the school district—I guess I kind of thought I should do my duty as well…If you grow up there you know everybody and everybody knows you and they know everything that you’ve ever done all your life—so you know you’re engrained.

While the importance of family was also important in Lane’s narrative, it was only mentioned in the context of how his family attributed to his character—his obligation, his sense of duty, and responsibility. In essence, Lane merged the character of his family with his own character.

According to scholars (Pratt, 2000), possessions (anything associated with an individual, including children and family members) can function as an extension of one’s identity. Lane’s identity as an ethical person was created by his role within his family, the way others perceived him, and his narratization choices.

Tim, the participant who reported the affair between a teacher and a student, described the importance of the respect he earned from the community and especially from the students within the school district. He explained, “I had a good positive reputation, because…I was always there for [the students]…and many of the administrators and teachers knew the same
thing—I was there for them.” Tim made choices in creating his lived narrative. Some of those choices centered on his willingness to help students and those with whom he worked.

These individuals created their lived narrative based on the perceptions of others and the choices made in order to achieve a desired future outcome, specifically the construction of their narrative identities. Allison (1994) asserted, “Narration (act of telling) is a basic act that is always embedded within an ongoing narratization” (p. 16). Each participant at one point made the choice, as part of his ongoing narratization, to disclose misconduct. The participants’ reasons for disclosing are constitutive of their desired narrative identity. In Bill’s case, his choice to disclose wrongdoing facilitated his identity construction of one who performed his job ethically. Bill described the moment he realized something was wrong:

I received a phone call from our police chief that we had a student athlete, a football player, that was under investigation for a felony...so I immediately went to his office and discussed the situation...I realized something much more horrible in my opinion than the felony...and that was the fact that he was an ineligible player and should not have been playing any games at all...because he did not meet the guidelines for eligibility with the University Interscholastic League, the UIL...and by UIL rules you forfeit that contest. So in reality, we had to forfeit 10 football games which then kept us from going to the playoffs...And I reported that violation...

Expounding on his motivation for reporting the wrongdoing, Bill said, “I wasn’t responsible for the UIL violation, it was the coaches responsibility...but it was my responsibility to insure compliance to the rules, which we had not done” (emphasis Bill’s). Bill further explained his motives for disclosing by stating, “I’m a good employee, I work hard, I try to work very ethically and I try to do things right and do them well”

Bill’s choice to disclose was an act of narration embedded within his ongoing narratization.

While Bill immediately made the decision to disclose, Lane engaged in a lengthy decision-making process, perhaps in part because of the consequences to the wrongdoers who he considered friends, but also because of his desire to assure “that whatever happens is right and
legal.” Carr asserted that as individuals construct their lived narratives, they view their lives from a quasi-retrospective point of view, viewing their constructed plots from the perspective of their having been completed (1986). Lane described the lengths he went to, to make certain his choice to disclose was the right choice.

Well you know, it was tough. And you sit there and...you know these people, and yeah, [they] could lose their 25-year career, but you keep coming back to the fact—well, either they did it or they didn’t. If they did it, it’s wrong—right is right and wrong is wrong...If they’re stealing...then they don’t need to be there, independent of anything that goes on. And it’s a tough decision...but at the end of the day...it’s easier to live with [that] than knowing they did it and you didn’t do anything about it.

Additionally, Tim’s choice to disclose highlighted his identity of someone who had a strong sense of right and wrong. Tim explained, “It wasn’t a hard decision because I knew that I was doing the right thing.”

Character was the most salient component of these participants’ identity construction demonstrated through the “perception of others” and their own choices in the midst of ongoing narratization. While they constructed identities of ethics, honesty and trustworthiness, other participants’ identities centered on popularity.

*Popularity*

I define popularity as an indicator of a high number of friends, approval from peers, and high status. This theme appeared prominently in Melissa’s narrative. Melissa, an employee in the administration office and the director of the scholarship foundation, described her identity construction through what she saw as the perception of others, saying, “I have to admit, I think people thought I was real [fun], I had good ideas about the fundraising and to make it fun I threw some great parties...I think I brought a new flavor to that little town.” Melissa’s narrative contained many references to her ability to “throw a good party,” and entertain those in the
community. These were deliberate actions taken by Melissa in order to create her identity as a popular person. Notably, Melissa attributed people’s admiration for her in part, to her circle of friends, specifically the wrongdoers she would later report.

Well, sounds kind of egotistical, but I kind of think I was pretty popular. I mean, I think because I was friends with Camille and Randy—which was the superintendent and his wife— I was afforded a certain status…with the school district…and because I gave away money, everybody loved me.

Interestingly, Melissa realized that her choice to become friends with the superintendent and his wife (the two individuals she would later report) helped to create her identity as someone of whom others approved. Melissa even attributed the school offering her a job, to her friendship with the two administrators, saying, “She [Camille] actually called me out of the blue one day and asked me to dinner… [We] became pretty good friends and she offered me a job on the spur of the moment.” Even when describing her success in her administrative job, Melissa focused on the perception that she was “fun” and well liked.

You know, I gave away money to the school district and I created fun things…I helped do the parties, I helped if they wanted something in the newsletter—they went through me…and you know, I think I was well-liked…I had the first margarita machine…and everyone had a good time with it…I just did a lot of things that people thought was fun.

Melissa’s choices in her ongoing narratization included her selection of friends, specifically the two administrators that she later reported. This desire to create a narrative identity of being “well-liked” could perhaps explain why Melissa chose to be a silent observer during the early stages of the whistle-blowing process. As she explained, “I didn’t like some of the way things were handled… but again I didn’t speak up too much—I did a little, but not too much—you know, I would try and maintain and get along.” Remaining silent was a way for Melissa to “get along.”

Carr explained that individuals choose their actions and live toward their future,
considering the views and expectations of others (1986). Therefore, when Melissa’s audience changed, so did her narratization choices. What had previously motivated her to remain silent (approval from others) now motivated her to disclose (approval from an individual she held in high regards). Melissa described the moment she decided to report what she knew.

So…we’re drinking…and Lane who was a school board member, who I admired, said “why were [Camille and Randy] so upset” and what was going on, and Lane leaned over and said ‘is anything going on illegally?’—and maybe due to the alcohol, maybe due to the fact that I have a big mouth, I just say ‘yes.’

Melissa’s narrative contained several references to her admiration of Lane. Her desire for approval by Lane evidently played a role in her decision to disclose. Popularity was a salient element of Melissa’s narrative identity construction, in the way she perceived her role in the community, her perceived reputation as someone “fun,” and through her choice to disclose.

**Crusaders**

While some participants worked to construct an identity of ethics or popularity, other participants saw themselves as “crusaders,” vigorously advocating for a cause or against wrongdoing, specifically in the education system. Two participants, Laura and Nikki, who both saw themselves as advocates for change in the public school system, underscored the importance of education, not only in their own lives, but in the lives of their children. For example, Nikki described why she felt it important to watch those who controlled the education of children.

[I believe] the education of our children is the most important thing that we give them next to a secure home…There was a need for me to know that the people who are elected or paid to guide the education of our children are interested in [their education]—that’s their only goal—that’s their only mission—that’s the reason they are at the school district.

Laura, who emphasized her education with three master degrees and a PhD in psychology, discussed her background in advocating for quality education for lower income children.
I received a placement in Atlanta, the High Museum of Arts from which I was recruited to the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum… I was placed into a mentor program where we discussed the educational ramifications of lower income children, which is where I really became interested in learning how education affects marginalized populations….I have taught college… [and] tend to do better at historically black colleges—I get that marginalized society.

For the crusader, the whistle-blowing process was not a one-time event, but rather involved the participants’ responses to a series of acts of wrongdoing and a process of “questioning” and “research.” Notably, their “questioning” was different than Lane’s “questioning” in that his was conducted in order to fulfill his ethical responsibilities, questioning to confirm and verify information he received within the capacity of his role as a board member. To the contrary, the crusaders’ questions consisted of investigative style inquiries, serving to fulfill their roles as those who seek and stamp out instances of wrongdoing. Nikki’s initial interaction with her school district occurred after she realized standardized testing protocols were not being followed. She explained, “that peaked my interest. If they were lying about their first grade class on tests, then what the hell else were they lying about?” After complaining to the school board to no avail, Nikki began “doing research” on her own. For Nikki, the decision to disclose acts of wrongdoing, or perhaps more accurately, seek out instances of wrongdoing, was the character of a crusader.

Similarly, Laura, who viewed her role as a PTA member to include “watching and observing,” witnessed what she called “racketeering of school supplies.” She explained, “So my eyes became wide opened and I started asking questions…and more and more questions. The more questions that I asked the nastier responses I would get.” The questioning and researching in which these participants engaged was a choice in their ongoing narratizations in order to construct their narrative identities as educational crusaders.
Once Nikki and Laura each saw instances of wrongdoing, they made the choice to “do research” and ask questions. For these individuals, friendships and popularity seemed only important in the context of their goals to advocate for change. For example, Nikki explained that the reason for her limited social life was the lack community members’ interest in reforming the educational system.

I didn’t have a lot of friends…My relationship with people here was OK, but…there was something wrong with the conversation—you couldn’t talk about the school district except that it was ‘the best school in Texas.’

Nikki, therefore, chose for her lived narrative an audience that would support her narratization choices, i.e., her choice to crusade for educational reform. Likewise, Laura discussed her relationships with others in the community in the context of her role as a promoter of change, explaining, “People would stop me at the grocery store, ask questions…from people who were feeling the same frustrations that I was…I was the savvy educated smart mom. All these mothers that were upset…and wanted me to attack.”

Perhaps most notably in these participants’ narratives is the technique of creating fictitious names for themselves and the wrongdoers, as if they were characters in a movie or piece of literature. Laura stated, “I was deep throat, big mouth, and I had no problem going and asking questions.” Nikki, when explaining her frustration at the school’s lack of response to her disclosures of wrongdoing said, “I called myself the flea on the gorilla’s ass, because it didn’t matter how much I bit, the big gorilla would just scratch me.” Interestingly, these crusaders chose labels that demonstrated the power struggles in which they were engaged. Laura, for example, referred to the district office as “the wooly mammoth,” and the principle of her child’s school as “the queen” who loved to “rally her troops.” Likewise, when Nikki described her battles with the administration, she continued with the gorilla metaphor, saying, “Every time you
find out something, they figure out a way to get you off their backs. So you become the flea on the gorilla’s ass and then you move to his armpit.”

**Family Role**

The role of family was salient in three of the participants’ narratives, all women: Maci, Cari, and Susan. Their stories clearly demonstrated the importance of family to these individuals’ identities. Maci and Cari both had families made up in part of adopted children who had been neglected or abused, which became an important part of their identity description. Maci adopted four children from the foster care program, one with severe disabilities. Maci described her devotion to these children as a “calling,” highlighting the role that her “Christian values” play in the importance of family. Cari, a mother of eight, described the importance of family in her life and the significance of family to her identity: “When you talk about reputation, everybody always thought highly of our [extended] family, and so it pretty much carried over…I was always very proud, and everybody always knew you came from a good family—the [maiden surname] were a good family.” She explained how her extended family’s reputation carried over to her own reputation as a mother.

I worked at a day care and when they gave awards, I received several and everybody always was telling me what a good mom I was. And they actually had an award for ‘most family oriented’ and I got that award, so it was kind of sweet. Yeah…they were always telling me what a wonderful mom I was.

Being a “wonderful mom” was a recurrent theme throughout these participants’ narratives.

When asked to describe her background, Susan, a mother of a young autistic boy, only included those elements of her life dedicated to her role as a mother, particularly her role as an advocate for her son’s education. For example, Susan detailed the lengths she was willing to go in order to enroll her son in a high performing school district.
Because I’ve never been to public schools… I didn’t think about the fact that you had to live within that school district to go to that school… Because the superintendent told me they wasn’t going to grant me the transfer… we moved overnight… and that gave us the ability to move him to [ISD ] Elementary… it was fast.

In fact, Susan was the only participant who, when asked identity questions, discussed her background only in the context of her son, or in the ways she advocated for her son, stressing the function of her family as an extension of her identity (Pratt, 2000). It was indeed difficult to separate Susan’s perception of her own identity from her descriptions of her son. Her role as mother seemed to be all encompassing, as she related story after story of her interactions with the school on his behalf.

For all three of these participants, their involvement in the whistle-blowing process began only as a last resort—the result of a need to protect their children, or as a need to protect their own reputations as a mother. Maci, for example, even after a teacher warned her that daughter was being neglected, chose to remain silent— at least temporarily. She related a story about the first time she realized something was wrong at the school, describing how her daughter’s teacher, who was resigning from the school district, approached Maci, saying, “Watch out for Becky— I mean it— watch out for her.” Maci admitted, “I didn’t think that much about it at the time,” deciding not to pursue the teacher’s counsel. It was only after the school failed to administer proper medical care to her daughter, which resulted in a medical emergency, that Maci took action and filed a complaint with the TEA (Texas Education Agency).

Similarly, Cari described her tentativeness about disclosing after realizing that the school was not fulfilling the P.E. (physical education) curriculum requirements, by withdrawing certain students from the class in order to receive tutoring.

They would pull him out of P.E. and recess and he never got a break. And so I brought that up to them, saying I didn’t want that being done with him, and that made [the principal] mad…And I was very reserved—I was trying hard to please the school,
because I wasn’t 100% sure in my own mind, because he was my first child. And I wanted to get along.

Cari made her decision to disclose out of a frustrated attempt to protect her reputation as a responsible mother. After being told that her son could not come back to school because Cari had failed to keep his shot records up to date, Cari was furious, explaining, “I called a couple of people and looked it up and realized they were wrong [about the shot records].” Even though the school rescinded their statement prohibiting Cari’s son from attending school, they persisted in their claim that Cari had not been responsible in keeping her son’s shot records up to date.

It [the shot records accusation] irritated me, so I got on the Internet and looked up the state [health department], and there was a lady…and I emailed her and told her the story, and I just said “I’ve got this question,” and I gave a short little summary…and how [the school] wasn’t going to let my child back in school, but they changed their mind when I began to question them…and instead of just telling me, she wrote me back and said “don’t worry about it. I will contact the school for you and take care of it.”

Cari’s desire to protect her reputation as a mother led her to disclose to the state authorities the wrongdoing she had witnessed.

These participants’ hesitancy in disclosing acts of wrongdoing was in part motivated by fear of retaliation directed at their children. In fact, Cari explained her reaction to the email she received from the state stating they would contact the school: “I knew right then I was going to be in trouble.” The choice to disclose was a difficult (if not unintended) decision to make for these participants. Susan explained her cautiousness at confronting the school head-on and decision to seek advice from the TEA.

In some ways they’re [the school] asking me to work with them and just be patient [about the enforcement of ARD requirements]…And it’s like I wanted to do that, but at the same time he’s [her son] falling apart. And so, I contacted the TEA to find out how I can go about this without causing a big rift. Cause you know, the worst thing for me would be to…make a big stink and then leave him there.

Susan’s narrative contained many references to her attempt not to make the school “feel
threatened.” Susan explained her cautiousness in dealing with the school to another time in her son’s life when others mistreated him due to her “creating issues.”

When he was in the hospital a lot, he was little, and if I made an issue with a nurse, I mean, I felt like he did get retaliated on, as far as [the nurses] coming to see what you needed, you know, stuff like that. Well I just didn’t want to make a big deal [with the school] and then he has to stay there.

Indeed, fear of retaliation against their children affected these participants’ decisions to disclose, more so than those whose identities did not center on their family roles. The choice to remain a silent observer served to protect their identities as a “good mom,” by protecting their children from harm. However, just as the other participants had done, eventually, Susan decided that her son’s education was being compromised and she, too, made the decision to disclose to the ARD committee the school’s failure to abide by the appropriate recommendations. It was only as a last resort that these participants made the choice to disclose. These participants’ narrative identity was affected by the perceptions of others, and by their own choices in a lived narrative structure, particularly in their decisions to disclose.’

Research Question 2

RQ2 asks, “In what ways, if any, does the whistle-blower experience a narrative abyss subsequent to the whistle-blowing process?” Carr (1986) argued that he narrative abyss occurs subsequent to a traumatic event in an individual’s life when he or she experiences chaos instead of order or randomness in place of predictability—i.e., they lose narrative coherence. Retaliation was a common outcome for the participants in this study. I identify two themes in relation to evidence of the narrative abyss following retaliation: locus of identity construction and trauma response.
Locus of Identity Construction

As previously mentioned, Carr (1986) asserted that societal roles are not the sole dictator of our life stories. Instead, Carr argues that individuals choose the stories of their life narratives depending upon the identity they want to create. In other words, one does not simply sit back and wait for life to happen, but rather makes choices based on future goals (Bruner, 2002; Carr 1986). Choices are a critical component of an individual’s narratization—it is the power to construct one’s own identity. I define the theme ‘Locus of identity’ as the moment when the locus of identity construction abruptly shifts from the participant’s jurisdiction, to the control of those who retaliate against the participant. The participants’ whose narratives included this abrupt shift commonly were the victims of vicious rumors and false accusations. When these rumors or false accusations spread throughout the participants’ social setting, incoherence in their lived narrative structure occurred. Lane, the school board member whose identity centered on his character, received retaliation from the administration during the time of his re-election campaign.

Oh I knew they were bad mouthing me and saying that I was bad for the school, and they were saying I didn’t need to be re-elected…And the superintendent’s wife, who was implicated in some of the wrongdoings, would actually go around telling blatant lies about me. And it would be a lie like “Lane wants to get…the athletic director fired because he doesn’t’ think he’s doing a good job.” And so that was another big family in town—so they could piss off 26 people doing that.

In a matter of days, Lane’s identity was transformed from ethical board member who was giving back to his community, to one who was “bad for the school” and would “betray” members of the district. In essence, there was a shift in Lane’s locus of identity construction occurring from the rumors and false accusations levied against him.

Similarly, Laura experienced incoherence in her narrative structure when the rumors started circling around the district, saying, “That was the beginning of what I called ‘Shundom,’
or the beginning of being marked as a district troublemaker—as a school troublemaker first and then a district troublemaker.” Laura told of how the district would use anonymous blogs, stating, “[they] will get people to post on anonymous blogs about how stupid you are…and how dare she tell us how to run our school district.” She continued to explain the ways in which her identity construction fell into the hands of others at the district as she described the way her daughter’s new teacher turned against her.

You know, teachers talk. And so…her being new, I think in order to get along so that she wasn’t marked, she joined in the fray, saying “Oh, that mother is so weird, Oh my God, she asks so many questions”—so that’s when the gossip portion started…. [And] they would flat out tell you “you’re crazy, you’re an idiot.”

Similarly, Melissa’s narrative contained references to the district’s labeling of her as someone who “just went crazy.” She discussed other rumors, saying, “…the rumor went out that I was jealous…because they were powerful and I was wanting to bring them down…” These rumors indeed had the effect of shifting the locus of identity construction control from the participant to that of the wrongdoers.

In addition to rumors, participants told of the false accusations levied against them, which were responsible for the loss of their control of narrative identity construction. In some of the participants’ narratives, authorities used CPS to facilitate the accusations of child abuse or neglect. Laura detailed the portion of a deposition that implicated the school principal in utilizing CPS in order to harass the participant.

Well, if that woman does not shut the fuck up, I’m going to be calling Children’s Protective Service on speed dial every time she so much as looks at me or comes on this campus. I’m going to take care of her.

Interestingly, this deposition statement highlights the power struggle to control the identity construction of the whistle-blower. This statement occurred, according to Laura, after CPS had been to her house several times. She described her history with CPS:
Any time that I would complain during my daughter’s educational experience at that school, or my son’s, I would get a visit from Children’s Protective Services...to the point that I was baking a cake, and putting on a pot of coffee when they would call and say “we’re coming.”

Laura added, “I was victimized by the district...have had false reports filed on me...I’m the most horrible mother you have ever seen in your life.” Similarly, after Maci described how after she filed a complaint with TEA, Child Protective Services “showed up at my door.” The school had accused her with the same accusations she had filed against the school: “physical and medical neglect.” Maci described the incident as “upsetting,” but explained that she knew that the school was trying to paint her as a “bad mom,” and was able to “deal with them [CPS],” since she had been a part of the foster system for years while she was going through the legalities of adopting.

For Cari, a participant who had constructed an identity salient with her family role as a mother, the use of CPS against her facilitated a dramatic shift in the locus of identity control, which Cari powerfully recounted in her narrative.

I felt like they were documenting everything [after I disclosed the wrongdoing]...that was my fear, and it’s real easy when there’s 8 kids and the last four were adopted. And they had all these horrible issues before they came to us...from their neglect...I felt like they were very much looking at us and just looking for stuff...And it was in January when I found out they had turned me in to CPS...They made out like my kids did not have enough to eat, which was not true, but it’s an easy thing to say because you really don’t have to prove anything—you just say it...

Even though they determined the accusations were unfounded and the report was removed from CPS records, Cari described the impact on her own identity as a mother.

You’re talking about a mind game—you felt like everybody’s looking at you...You thought some people who might hear will automatically believe it, and all of a sudden, we are bad, abusive parents...that’s the power that she [principal] has.

According to this participant, the principal had power over her identity construction using false accusations.
Other participants described instances of false accusations, such as the time Nikki was accused of “trying to break into the building and stealing.” She described the shock she experienced after the accusations occurred.

I don’t think I’ll ever be able to understand human nature in terms of what happened here. I didn’t go after this in a hostile way…because if I had gone into it in a hostile manner, I could maybe understand the backlash…I never would have thought that grown people would call me names and accuse me of things I didn’t do—and it scared me.

Nikki described the moment she decided to fight back against the false accusations.

I was very nervous…so I always had a tape recorder with me. And he [superintendent] took it out of my hands and threw it across the room, and it smashed into the wall. And I looked at the secretary and I said, ‘did you see what he just did?’ and she looked at me and said, ‘maam, I didn’t see anything.’ And so I picked up the pieces of my tape recorder and I left.

This type of power struggle to control identity construction was a common occurrence in these participants’ narratives. Perhaps there was no more vivid, even horrifying example of loss of identity control than Bill described in his narrative.

Early in December there was a board meeting and the public came out to speak out against me…The board policy states that if there’s 5 people there to talk on the same subject…they must elect a sole representative…Well, the superintendent decided to waive that rule…and allow whoever wanted to come and talk against me…and she demanded that I be there and I sit on the front row right next to the podium. You picturing this? So I’m in this board room, I’m on the front row right next to the podium, the principal’s next to me, and the coach…and all three of us are having to sit there…and I believe 26 people got up to speak against me. And they got as long as they wanted, to say whatever they wanted. And there was no holding back—it was all very inappropriate…direct comments towards me…and you know, I’m having to sit there and go through that…it was public persecution…They jam packed the room and they allowed the rules to be broken just so I could suffer through hearing anybody and everybody that wanted to say something against me say it—and then I could hear all the snickers and whooping and hollering…from the audience.

Bill’s experience becomes a metaphor for all whistle-blowers who have experienced loss of control of narrative identity: members of the community, peers, co-workers and wrongdoers
unite to create a new identity for the individual, while the whistle-blowers sits helplessly by and watches his or her own identity destroyed through “public persecution.”

_The Trauma Response_

After experiencing a traumatic event, people exhibit a wide range of responses (Levin, 1989) which include shock and disbelief, flashbacks, and fear of the future or expectations of doom. I define the trauma response for these individuals as the physical and emotional reactions to the retaliation episode, similar to those responses that occur subsequent to other types of traumatic events. Dworkin and Baucus (1998) demonstrated how the perceived threat of retaliation can have an effect on the whistle-blower. The trauma responses in the whistle-blowers’ narratives were apparent not only when retaliation transpired, but also when the participant perceived that retaliation might occur.

One common response that individuals experience subsequent to a traumatic event is the ‘expectation of doom’ (Levin, 1989). Individuals who experience a traumatic event in their lives have a fear of the future, especially due to a fear of loss of control (Levin, 1989). This expectation of doom was salient in many of the participants’ narratives. Most interesting were the participants’ responses to the question “When did you first realize that you were going to experience retaliation?” The participants’ emotional and physical reactions to the mere anticipation that retaliation might occur helps illustrate the emotional impact of the narrative abyss. For example, Cari said, “I pretty much knew it as soon as the lady said ‘I …called the school.’ I knew—I knew—I knew—I knew—I knew that it was going to be bad.” This expectation of doom was particularly salient in Melissa’s narrative, as she described her emotions the evening she had disclosed to Lane, the board member.
I remember that night talking about being scared. I remember Lane saying, “What are you so worried about?”…and I talked about power. Lane didn’t understand this. He didn’t understand [their] power…We had a child in elementary school, and she was fixing to be destroyed.

Melissa’s trauma response was prominent, especially when compared to Lane’s response when he realized that he would probably face retaliation for disclosing Melissa’s account to the School Board’s attorney. While Melissa discussed “power” and destruction, Lane simply said, “Did I know the crap was going to hit the fan? Yes.” Furthermore, Lane conveyed almost no fear for the future, no expectation of doom. On the contrary, he expressed his confidence in his and his family’s own well-being.

I didn’t rely on them for my livelihood. You kind of just hope you can say “hey, I did the right thing, if you don’t like it I’m sorry,” but I didn’t miss any meals out of it—they didn’t have any purse strings on me.

Furthermore, Lane expressed confidence that no one would use his children as a tool for retaliation, primarily because of the resources available to him.

My kids were in school—it didn’t affect them, because they couldn’t bully them because honestly we had means…They couldn’t do anything to our kids because we’d have a lawyer on them in 10 minutes…[Also], I think the administration…didn’t want it broadcast…to the media.

Interestingly, Melissa echoed Lane’s view regarding his safety.

I think Lane was treated with respect…They knew he would get a following…so I think they treated him with kid gloves…because Lane is financially independent…He can afford to send his kids to private school if they piss him off…He could afford to tell everybody to go to hell. And he also always felt like to do the moral thing was more important than having a negative thing thrown [at] you.

Melissa and Lane were involved in the same whistle-blowing incident, and while Lane experienced a shift in locus of identity construction, he suffered no trauma response. Melissa’s expectation of doom was significant subsequent to the news that Lane had disclosed the accusation of wrongdoing to the Board’s attorney.
I was in Austin…and I got a phone call from Lane out of the blue saying he had started the motion—I literally dropped to the floor and almost threw up because I didn’t know it was coming that quick and I didn’t know how it was going to play out. I was scared to death.

Bill’s trauma responses included both emotional and physical reactions. Bill had experienced the loss of his job, isolation, rumors and false accusation, and death threats. He recounted a story that occurred one night that illustrates his trauma response during the narrative abyss.

My kids didn’t suffer one beating from me during that whole time. You know, I didn’t abuse my kids, and I’m not saying that lightly or jokingly either. I mean, I can’t tell you the stress of things that went on. I remember one night… [there] was so much stress that…you can’t even think straight anymore. You don’t know which way to turn. You don’t know what’s happening. You’re just—you’re kind of going crazy—literally going crazy…I put the kids in the car and…they could tell I was really…on the edge…and I pulled up to my wife’s work and I said “hey you gotta come and get the kids.”

These physical and emotional responses are normal occurrences after one experiences some sort of trauma, such as retaliation, and become part of the narrative abyss. Still, other participants’ narrative abyss consisted of an abrupt shift in locus of identity construction, causing narrative incoherence. The following section will discuss the participants’ attempts to reestablish narrative coherence.

Research Question 3

Research Q3 asked, “In what ways does the whistle-blower describe his or her identity subsequent to the whistle-blowing process?” After experiencing the abyss, individuals strive to regain narrative coherence, or reestablish their narrative structures (Carr, 1986). Thus far, I have explored the identities constructed by our participants preceding the whistle-blowing incident and during the time of the narrative abyss, when the participants’ narratizations became incoherent. I now identify two themes relating to the participants’ narrative identities
subsequent to the whistle-blowing process: reestablishment of previous identity and abandonment of previous identity.

Bruner (2002) asserted that some individuals, subsequent to a traumatic event, attempt to reestablish narrative coherence in a style true to who they were. In other words, they reestablish their previous narrative identity. Five of the participants seemed to succeed in reestablishing their previous narrative identities. The following section will describe each participant’s attempt at reestablishing narrative identity in a style true to who he or she was before the experienced narrative abyss.

Nikki, who constructed an identity of crusader prior to the whistle-blowing incident, experienced a shift in locus of identity construction when she experienced the abyss and temporarily “gave up” on her educational reform efforts. However, Nikki revealed her desire to “write a book… and send it out to people in the education industry,” as well as her plans to “pursue [educational reform] from another angle.” Similarly, Laura continued to ‘crusade’ for educational reform, even after surviving extreme retaliation. Laura explained her choices in her ongoing narratization, saying, “I’ve continued to show up at school board meetings and work with the community to elect other school board members… [and] volunteer… If I can give a voice to a problem that is in the system, then maybe that’s my sole mission in life as a parent.”

The three participants, who constructed a narrative identity that centered on their character, successfully reestablished their previous narrative identities. Lane, when asked, “Were you able to maintain a strong sense of yourself?” gave the following reply:

You know, you kind of have to… We all pride ourselves on different things…and one of them is integrity and your honesty… [and] yeah I was smeared…[but] you know, I can say ‘you’re a liar,’ and you can duck your head and cower away or you can stand up and say, ‘I’m not a liar.’ You know, you’re retaliated against either way, but how do you handle it?
Bill described his present life, only a short time after the whistle-blowing incident. “I’m happy. I’m real happy…It is absolutely amazing how the people who spoke out against me, when they see me on the street…come up to me and give me a hug and ask me how I’m doing.” In a short time, the same people who had once participated in Bill’s “public execution,” became part of his efforts to reestablish his narrative coherence. Bill further described his success at reestablishing a sense of who he was in the context of a new school district, saying, “They let me prove myself and I did and ultimately got promoted into the assistant principal position.” Similarly, Tim stated, “I consider myself the same person…I knew what I needed to do and I knew that I was doing my job.”

According to Carr (1986), while some individuals are able to reestablish their previous narrative structure subsequent to the abyss, others must abandon their previous narrative and seek an alternative story. Indeed, for some of these whistle-blowers, the previous narrative structure either was abandoned, or was never, or only partially, reestablished. Most of these participants attempted to reestablish their previous narrative identities, but the meanings created by the act of retaliation still heavily influenced their identities. Cari, the participant who had received the “most family oriented” award at work confessed that even several years later she still must “worry about appearance on everything.” The fear she experienced—the trauma response—immediately after the retaliation continued to affect her narratization in that her power to choose became a “joint” endeavor with those who retaliated. Cari illustrated the existence of this “third party” in her decision-making by telling about one particular moment when she disciplined her daughter.

So it [became] not really what’s best for the child, but what would other people think. Like, one time my daughter had, for a long time she had, a problem with lying. So sometimes, we would have her write sentences. And it would be something silly, but instead of saying something like “I will not lie,”…I would…have her say things like “my
parents love me very much, they want me not to lie anymore.” …And the whole reasoning behind [writing that sentence] wasn’t just because I thought it was good for her—I also wanted to make sure if a teacher picked this up, they would think highly of us.

Cari explained that even after moving her children to a different school, her fear remained, saying, “I want them [new school] to think I’m a good mom—I’m afraid they don’t think I’m a good mom—I’m afraid someone from [old district] has talked to them and they already have it out for me.” Of the individuals who heavily identified with family roles, none was fully able to reestablish their previous narrative structure due to, in part, to what Maci described as “a change from our core values.” This change in core values was forced from the fear, as stated by Maci, that “people you care about can get hurt.”

While these individuals were continuing to struggle to reestablish their identities as a “good mom,” Melissa totally abandoned her previous narrative identity. This participant who described herself as “popular,” “well-liked,” and “fun to be around,” before the whistle-blowing incident, described herself subsequent to narrative abyss in the following way: “I have [only] two friends…and I just stay home most of the time, and I’m much more reserved.” She further explained, “I’m not doing a rebuilding. I’m fine the way I am…I’m just going through the motions and I realized I’m kind of doing it to get back to my old life, and [then] I realize, it’s not ever coming back.”

All of the participants experienced some degree of the abyss. Some were able to reestablish their previous narrative identity, while others either were continuing to struggle to reestablish their narrative identities, or had completely abandoned their previous narrative identities. In the previous section, I identified the various themes within the three research questions. In the following section, I provide a comparative analysis of the various themes, identifying the existence, or nonexistence, of relationships between the themes.
Relationships between Themes

A comparative analysis involves comparing a piece of data (in this case, the interview of each participant), with all others in order to develop conceptualizations of possible relations between various pieces of data (Thorne, 2000). To complete the analysis, I searched for evidence of relationships between themes (or data within a theme), in order to assess the impact retaliation had on the whistle-blower’s narrative identity. I searched for relationships in the following data: previous identity construction and choice to disclose; type of retaliation and evidence of narrative abyss; type of retaliation and ability to reestablish narrative coherence; and previous identity construction and ability to reestablish narrative coherence. The following is an explanation of the relationships between themes, while the significance of these findings will be later discussed in the Discussion section of this paper.

Previous Identity Construction and Choice to Disclose

Previously, I identified four themes of narrative identity construction: character, crusader, popularity, family roles. In searching for relationships between themes or data within themes, I first recognized a relationship between those participants whose narrative identity was salient within the character theme, and their willingness to disclose. These relationships were exhibited in three different ways. First, all of these participants disclosed in a deliberative, purposeful, and willing manner, even though they were aware, to varying degrees, of the possible consequences of disclosing. There was little hesitancy in their decision to disclose, even in the case of Lane, who spent many months making certain everything was done legally and correctly, and who feared for wrongdoer’s future. Lane stated, “Maybe [at first] it was me not wanting to know, but once I knew, I had to do it.”
Second, these participants’ narratives included the idea that they had “no choice” but to disclose. When asked if he would disclose again, Bill said, “oh yeah, I mean…a violation is a violation—you can’t hide that.” Lane echoed that sentiment, saying, “They know me and they knew that was the only choice I had.”

Finally, all of these participants described the role that their power position played in the decision to disclose. For example, Lane was confident that disclosing would not severely affect his life due to his income level and the fact that he had access to attorneys. However, power also played a role in their decisions to disclose in that their positions of authority within the school district were seen by the participants as requiring action in order to stop a wrongdoing, or as Bill stated, “…me being the athletic director…it was my responsibility to insure compliance to the rules.”

Likewise, I observed a relationship between those who identified themselves as a crusader and their choices to disclose. Similar to the participants whose narrative identities centered on character, these crusaders were willing, even eager, to disclose the acts of wrongdoing, describing it as a part of their responsibility. For example, Laura stated, in describing the school’s push back when she asked questions, “No. Sorry. My responsibility! It’s my responsibility to check on you people.” The crusaders’ decision to disclose became an ongoing process, almost a way of life. Nikki explained this ongoing need to locate wrongdoing and disclose by stating, “I never thought about [dropping it] because the more you invest, the more you need to invest.” Nikki identified the crusader’s need to engage continually in the whistle-blowing process.

Third, I recognized a relationship between those who identified with a family role and the choice to disclose. First, instead of disclosing willingly, these individuals were either hesitant in
their disclosing, or unintentionally disclosed. For example, Susan was cautious when attempting to pressure the school into abiding by the ARD requirements set forth for her son, by handling it in “an informal manner,” hoping to gain cooperation. In referring to her timidity in disclosing wrongdoing, she said, “I had a…relationship with these people, so I was trying to, I think, be a little too nice.” Similarly, and finally, Melissa, whose narrative identity centered on her popularity, not only was hesitant to reveal what she knew, but also later blamed her disclosure on the fact that she was drinking the night she revealed what she knew, or the fact that she believed that Lane “already… knew that something was going on.” This hesitancy to disclose was salient in these participants’ narratives.

It appears that a relationship exists between a person’s narrative identity and their decision to disclose acts of wrongdoing. While all of these individuals disclosed, their approaches, timing, and most importantly, their motivation varied depending on their narrative identities.

Severity of Retaliation and Evidence of Narrative Abyss

Whistle-blowers experience various types of retaliation, varying in degrees of severity from social isolation, to death threats (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). As previously discussed, the whistle-blowers in this study experienced various forms of retaliation, including social isolation, rumors and false accusation, being reported to CPS, job loss, and death threats. I expected, while searching for relationships between these two themes, to observe a relationship between severity of retaliation and evidence of the narrative abyss. However, I was not able to identify any such relationship. While indeed some participants’ narratives demonstrated this pattern (Lane experienced mild retaliation and low evidence of narrative abyss, while Bill
experienced severe retaliation and high evidence of narrative abyss), others did not. For example, Laura and Nikki, the two crusaders, both experienced acts of violence, but expressed no signs of a trauma response to the incidents. However, following rumors and false accusation (what would be considered less severe retaliation), these two participants’ narratives both revealed moments of the narrative abyss.

While these two participants’ experience of severe retaliation was associated with moderate evidence of the narrative abyss, Melissa’s experience is an example of relatively moderate retaliation associated with high levels of trauma response and change in locus of identity. While the narrative abyss was present in all the participants’ narrative, there was no relationship found between the severity of retaliation and degree of evidence of the narrative abyss. The importance of the lack of relationship between these themes is discussed in Chapter 5.

**Severity of Retaliation and Ability to Reestablish Previous Narrative Structure**

In searching for relationships between the participants’ experience of retaliation and their ability to reestablish their previous narrative structures, I expected to find that the more severe the retaliation, the more difficult it would be for the participant to reestablish narrative structure. However, I found no relationships indicating this to be the case. While there were indeed those who experienced mild retaliation and easily reestablished their narrative structures e.g., Lane, as well as those who experienced high levels of retaliation and failed to reestablish narrative structure e.g., Cari, these were isolated cases. For example, Melissa experienced moderate retaliation but totally abandoned her previous narrative structure. Furthermore, all of the participants who experienced severe retaliation through the school’s use of CPS were able, at
least to some degree, to reestablish their previous narrative identity structure. I could find no link between severity of retaliation and ability to reestablish previous narrative structure.

Previous Narrative Identity and Ability to Reestablish Previous Narrative Identity

I identified two clear relationships between the participants’ previous narrative identity and their ability to reestablish previous narrative identity. First, those who were able to reestablish their previous narrative identity structure were those individuals whose previous identity centered on character or crusader. Just as they had done before the whistle-blowing incident, these participants illustrated identity construction subsequent to the whistle-blowing process through how others perceived them and their consistent choices within their ongoing narratization. For example, Lane and Bill both believed that others in the community still perceived them to be ethical and honest individuals. Furthermore, both of these participants included stories in their interviews about how they had reestablished friendships, even with those who previously “spoke out against” them. The crusaders illustrated their ability to reestablish their narrative coherence through their stated objectives for the future, specifically the goal to pursue reform in the public schools continually. In other words, these individuals reestablished their previous narrative identities, true to the style that others expected from them.

Second, those who were not able to reestablish their previous narrative identities were those individuals whose previous identity centered on ‘family roles’ or popularity. Those who valued their family roles struggled to reestablish their previous narrative structures—more specifically, they continually fought to reestablish their reputation as a “good mom.” While they did not ‘abandon’ their previous narrative structure, the fear of being stigmatized as a “bad mom” affected the actions they performed and the choices they made. For example, Susan
described the caution she now exercises in allowing others to care for her child, explaining, “I’m very skeptical now, even when [hiring] babysitters.” Maci echoed this same caution in hiring help for her child, saying, “Now I don’t trust people anymore…Now we assume the worst.” Additionally, as mentioned previously, Cari felt the presence of the “third party,” watching her every move, and made choices within her ongoing narratization based on the anticipated perceptions of that “third party,” which had become a significant audience of her ongoing narratization.

While these individuals struggled to reestablish their narrative identity of a “good mom,” Melissa, who saw herself as popular, now abandoned that narrative identity, and described herself as being “reserved,” stating, “I can’t be ignored by any more people.” She added that it she was now “finding a new happiness in being home alone.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I gave a background of each participant’s whistle-blowing experience followed by a definition of themes for each RQ, including detailed participants’ responses within the themes. For RQ1, the themes of identity construction were character, crusader, family roles, and popularity. For RQ2, the themes were locus of identity construction and trauma response. For RQ3, the themes were reestablishment of previous narrative identity, and abandonment of previous narrative identity. Finally, I identified the relationships between the themes, specifically between an individual’s previous narrative identity and his or her choice to disclose, and between an individual’s previous narrative identity and his or her ability to reestablish a previous narrative identity structure.
In Chapter 5, I discuss the significance of these findings and the implications for further research, followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

My purpose in conducting this study was to explore the relationship between the whistle-blowing process, specifically retaliation, and the identity transformation of the whistle-blower through the construct of narrative identity theory. Researchers (Alford, 1999; Henik, 2008; Jackson et al., 2010; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) have found that individuals face many harsh personal consequences following acts of whistle-blowing. Alford (2007) showed that one of the greatest consequences to whistle-blowers is their perception that their identities have been destroyed, marginalized, or metaphorically “murdered” (p. 232). Utilizing narrative identity theory to explore the relationship between retaliation and the whistle-blower’s personal identity transformation, I posited three research questions in relation to the participants’ narrative identity construction prior to the whistle-blowing incident, the narrative abyss, and the participants’ abilities to reestablish their narrative coherence. Nine whistle-blowers within the Texas Public School System, shared their personal whistle-blowing experiences, including their lives prior to the whistle-blowing incident, the moment of disclosure and the subsequent retaliation, and the effects of the retaliation on their lives.

Following a qualitative analysis of the transcripts guided by the three research questions, I identified four themes relating to the participants’ previous narrative identity construction (character, crusader, family roles, and popularity), two themes relating to the narrative abyss (locus of identity and trauma response), and two themes relating to the participants’ abilities to reestablish their previous narrative identities (reestablishment of previous narrative identities and abandonment of previous narrative identities). After identifying the previous themes, I conducted a comparative analysis of the data, searching for relationships between the themes.
The comparative analysis revealed the following: First, I identified a relationship between the participants’ previous narrative identities and the decision to disclose instances of wrongdoing, namely, that the participants’ whose narrative identities were salient with character and crusader disclosed in a purposeful, deliberative manner, while the other participants either disclosed unintentionally or were hesitant in their disclosures. Second, I identified no relationship between severity of retaliation and evidence of narrative abyss. Third, I identified no relationship between the severity of retaliation and the participants’ abilities to reestablish their previous narrative identities. Finally, I identified a relationship between the participants’ previous narrative identity and their abilities to reestablish their previous narrative structure, explicitly, that those participants’ whose previous narrative identities were consistent with character or crusader, were able to reestablish their previous narrative identities, while the other participants either abandoned their previous narrative identities or struggled to reestablish them.

Theoretical Implications Whistle-Blowing

The results of this study present several implications for the study of whistle-blowing. First, the major findings in this study suggests whistle-blowing can and should be understood through a narrative analysis framework, especially the effects on the whistle-blowers’ lives (Alford, 1999). Researchers have demonstrated narrative analysis to be an effective method in exploring the traumatic events in the lives of individuals (Bruner, 2002). Scholars have studied terminal illnesses (Charon & Montello, 2002), divorce and even infertility (Riessman, 2000) by use of narrative inquiry. In relation to whistle-blowing, only a few scholars (Alford, 1999; Alford, 2001; Alford, 2007; Jackson et al., 2010; Richardson & McGlynn, 2011) have used narrative inquiry as a method to explore the experiences of those who disclose. Jackson et al.
(2010) indicated the need for further studies into the long term effects of reprisal on the life of the whistle-blower. The results of this study underscore the benefits of such an approach. Riessman (2000), stressed the importance of narrative analysis, particularly in the study of an individual’s “personal troubles” (p. 5), in that it provides insight into not only the biographical content of the narrative, but also into the historical and societal developments surrounding the context of study. In the present study, narrative analysis provided an understanding of contemporary beliefs about wrongdoing and ethical conduct in the public schools. Furthermore, Weick (1995) determined that to help create an understanding of organizational life, the stories told by these participants give insight to the public school organization, significantly the organization as it includes school employees, administrators, parents, and stakeholders. The use of narrative analysis illuminated the negative effects of whistle-blowing in complex organizations, such as the public school systems in a way survey style methods could not achieve. The results of this study verify the usefulness of narrative analysis as a method to explore the effects of retaliation on the life of the whistle-blower.

Second, this study is significant in that it is the first time whistle-blowing has been explored from the perspective of the lived narrative structure (Carr, 1986). Researchers have utilized various organizational theories to explain the whistle-blowing process, such as theories related to power relations (Near, Dworkin, & Miceli, 1993), ethical climate (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007), organizational and employee resistance (Blackburn, 1988; Near & Miceli, 1985), and the effects of values and emotions on the whistle-blowing process (Henik, 2008). However, by focusing on the lived narrative structure of the whistle-blower, this study provides new insight into the whistle-blower’s motivation to disclose, the silent observer, and the effects of retaliation on the whistle-blowing process. Additionally, the present study utilized the
Participants’ stories, rather than a researcher-developed survey, in order to understand the participants’ choices in their ongoing lived narrative structure prior to, during, and after a whistle-blowing incident. Because narrative inquiry uses a reflective approach, utilizing a before-after continuum (Polkinghorne, 1995), this method helped to elicit the participants' narratization choices, including during the time leading up to the whistle-blowing event, during the event, and subsequent to the whistle-blowing incident.

Third, this study is the first to focus on the whistle-blower’s capacity to endure the whistle-blowing process with few long-term consequences. Previous whistle-blowing literature has focused on the various types of retaliation an individual may experience (Alford, 2007; Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) and the effects of retaliation on the organization (Elliston, 1982; Dworkin & Baucus, 1998; Miceli et al., 1988). Furthermore, previous researchers (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) assumed that retaliation faced by whistle-blowers causes them severe, long-term consequences. However, the present study provides a noteworthy development in the understanding of whistle-blowing in that it offers a method to understand why some whistle-blowers might suffer little, in terms of their emotional and physical well-being.

In addition to the previous reasons, this study is significant in that it provides implications for the study of whistle-blowing concerning whistle-blowers’ motivation to disclose, and the effects of the potential threat of retaliation on disclosure. The whistle-blower’s motivation to disclose is a common theme in whistle-blowing literature. Rothschild and Miethe (1999) estimated that approximately one-third of all U.S. employees observe unethical or illegal activities in their workplace, with less than half making the decision to disclose. Researchers have utilized various approaches in the attempt to distinguish between the silent observer and the
whistle-blower. Indeed, while some researchers proposed a demographic profile of the classic whistle-blower, such as Miceli and Near (1990), larger sample studies have failed to show any empirical support for the assertion that there is a way to distinguish the whistle-blower from the silent observer (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). However, my results suggest that whistle-blower cannot be distinguished from the silent observer by way of demographic calculations or degrees of retaliation. Rather, the results of this study demonstrated that the whistle-blower’s desired narrative identity affects when and how the whistle-blower will disclose.

For example, the participants whose narrative identities were salient with character and crusader made the decision to disclose in a deliberate, purposeful, and even fervent manner. Allison (1994) asserted that individuals’ narratives (the act of telling), are embedded in their narratization. In other words, the stories individuals tell serve to achieve a future oriented goal in order to construct a desired identity. When viewed from this perspective, these whistle-blowers made the decision to disclose (to narrate) based on their desires to construct outcomes that were consistent with their desired identities. Lane, Tim, and Bill made their decision to disclose because it was “the right thing to do,” and individuals of character choose their actions based on “what’s right.” The act of whistle-blowing served as a way to strengthen their identities. In other words, disclosing (the act of telling) facilitated their future narratization goals. This finding is important to future whistle-blowing research because it creates the expectation that some whistle-blowers will perceive a personal benefit in the act of disclosing wrongdoing. Researchers (Keil, Tiwana, Sainsbury, & Sneha, 2010) have concluded that when witnessing wrongdoing, individuals “take a number of factors into account and…holistically aggregate the perceived costs and benefits in deciding whether or not to report” (p. 804). This study expands this research in that it provides an additional factor that whistle-blowers consider when
accounting for perceived costs and benefits of disclosing—the benefit of identity construction, or the cost of identity destruction.

Researchers (Blackburn, 1988; Miceli & Near, 1992; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) have shown the negative effects that retaliation, indeed, even the mere threat of retaliation can have on the whistle-blowing process, specifically on the individual’s decision to disclose. However, the present study does not indicate that retaliation is a consistent factor in the choice to disclose. Indeed, the threat of retaliation did not seem to affect the decision to disclose for those whose narrative identities centered on ‘character.’ Interestingly, even though these individuals were aware of the possibility of backlash, the participants did not mention retaliation as a consideration in the decision to disclose. Furthermore, for the ‘crusaders,’ experiencing retaliation seemed to strengthen their resolve, rather than discouraging acts of disclosing.

Consider, for example, the response of Laura when her school reported her to CPS, compared to the response of Cari. While Cari (whose identity was salient with her family role) and her children spent their days in fear following the CPS visit, Laura was making the CPS officers’ cake and coffee, demonstrating the crusader’s tenacity in the face of retaliation. The school’s use of CPS as a tool for retaliation was effective in discouraging further acts of disclosing on the part of the participants identifying as “moms,” while it was ineffective at discouraging future disclosures by the ‘crusaders.’ Indeed, while these crusaders experienced multiple forms of retaliation none discouraged the act of disclosing. To the contrary, the experience of retaliation “perked the interest” of the crusaders causing them to seek out wrongdoing, asking, “what the hell else are they lying about”? This finding is important to future whistle-blowing research because it indicates that retaliation might actually increase incidents of whistle-blowing, rather
than discourage it. Future studies exploring this possibility would be beneficial to whistle-blowing scholarship.

In contrast to the character and crusader whistle-blowers, the participants whose identities centered on family roles and popularity were hesitant to disclose and only disclosed as a last resort. Additionally, their narratives contained many references to their fear of retaliation, stressing their desire to “get along.” The fear of retaliation caused these individuals to use whistle-blowing only as a last resort, particularly when the need arose to protect their narrative identities. For example, the participants who identified with their family roles only reported wrongdoing when their reputation as a mother was at stake and their narratizations required them to disclose. Notably, Melissa remained a silent observer, for months, even years, in order to construct her identity as a popular person or in her words, to “maintain and get along.” Her fear of retaliation and fear of what the retaliation could do to her popularity in the community caused her to remain a silent observer. However, when someone she “admired,” Lane, asked her if anything illegal was going on, she immediately made the decision to disclose. Her desire to be well-liked and respected overcame her fear of retaliation, if only for a moment. Melissa’s choices in regard to disclosing, whether being the silent observer or the whistle-blower, consistently served to achieve her narratization goals. For these participants, the decision to remain a silent observer was motivated by needs to protect their children (construct a narrative identity centered on being a “good mom,”) or to simply “get along” (construct a narrative identity centered on being popular). Likewise, the choice to disclose was made in order to protect their children when all else had failed and, for Melissa to impress someone she “admired.” In other words, the silent observer will turn whistle-blower when remaining silent no longer benefits their narrative identities.
Jackson et al. (2010) argued that whistle-blowing is used only as a last resort, after other strategies fail. The present study only partially supports this assertion. Indeed, while some of the participants used whistle-blowing only as a last resort, others made the decision to disclose immediately and deliberatively. The present study suggests that a whistle-blower’s decision to remain a silent observer or to disclose is not motivated by failed strategies, but rather is motivated by the goal to create a desired narrative identity. The participants in this study remained silent observers when it served to create their desired identity and, similarly, made the choice to disclose when it served their narratization outcomes. Researchers have explored the motivation to disclose from various perspectives, including the role of power and justice (Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2003), the seriousness of the wrongdoing (Miceli & Near, 1992), costs and benefits (Keil et al., 2010), and the role of emotions (Gundlach et al., 2003; Henik, 2008). Rather than addressing these psychological variables, whistle-blowing might be explained through the individual’s lived narrative.

Thus, the present study’s findings in relation to the motivation to disclose, offers important factors for researchers attempting to understand what motivates observers to blow the whistle: First, the act of disclosing is an act in an ongoing narratization for the whistle-blower. Second, the act of whistle-blowing benefits some whistle-blowers in that it helps to maintain their narrative identities. Third, the threat of retaliation does not consistently affect the whistle-blowing process—for some individuals it only strengthens their resolve, depending on their desired identities. Fourth, the threat of retaliation might actually increase the incidents of whistle-blowing. Finally, the belief that most whistle-blowers only disclose as a last resort is not supported by this research. Instead, the silent observer only remains silent to the extent that it benefits his or her narrative identity.
Researchers (Alford, 1999; Alford, 2000; Alford, 2007; Dworkin & Baucus, 1998; Jackson et al., 2010 Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) have shown that once the threat of retaliation becomes reality, the act of retaliation can result in severe personal and emotional consequences for the whistle-blower. In addition to the previous implications of research with regard to perceived threat of retaliation and its effects on the decision to disclose, this study also provides insight into the effects of retaliation on the lives of whistle-blowers. While an abundance of literature exists on the effects of retaliation on the whistle-blowing process, few researchers have examined the personal and emotional effects that retaliation can have on the whistle-blower’s life. In order to explore the effects retaliation can have on the life of the whistle-blower, I searched for relationships between the severity of retaliation and the participants’ narrative abyss and abilities to reestablish their previous narrative identities. Based on findings from Alford (2007) and Rothschild and Miethe (1999), I expected to find relationships between the severity of the retaliation and the effect on the individuals’ lives, both in depths of their narrative abysses and their abilities to reestablish narrative coherence. Instead, I found no relationships between these factors. This finding does not mean that the severe forms of retaliation did not affect the participants’ lives. For example, Bill, who endured extreme retaliation, did experience high levels of traumatic response during the narrative abyss. However, Melissa, who experienced relatively moderate retaliation, experienced not only high levels of trauma response, but also a profound inability to reestablish her previous narrative identity. Laura, who was forced to deal with CPS, experienced little trauma response from the ordeal, while Cari and Maci, subsequent to their encounter with CPS, expressed fear and expectations of doom. This lack of relationship suggests a need to redefine how scholars typically define “severe” retaliation. Researchers (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2008) typically
viewed severity of retaliation as the harshness of act, or the extent of the retaliation, i.e., one act versus several acts. This study suggests that severity is a matter of perception on the part of the whistle-blower—what may seem severe for one whistle-blower, may seem less consequential to another.

Of particular significance in the present study is the fact that the retaliation that seemed to produce the greatest effects on the participants’ lives was the retaliation that targeted or threatened the participants’ narrative identity structure. While much research exists on the types of retaliation whistle-blowers may experience (Alford, 2007; Bok, 1980; Near & Miceli, 1986; Richardson & McGlynn, 2011; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999), and the consequences for the whistle-blower (Alford, 1999; Henik, 2008; Jackson et al., 2010), researchers have not examined the relationship between which particular forms of retaliation and the degree of emotional and physical consequences to the whistle-blower. The present study presents a possible way for researchers to determine the form of retaliation that has the greatest negative effect on the whistle-blower, that is, the form that directly attacked the participants’ identity.

To illustrate, consider those who identified with a family role, and the effects that CPS had on their lives compared with the crusaders who experienced this same retaliation, but expressed few emotional consequences. Furthermore, consider Nikki, the crusader, who seemed more upset by the lack of support from friends for her crusading attempts than she did when the superintendent threw her recorder across the room. Finally, Lane seemed only minimally affected by the rumors, but experienced the moment of the abyss when he was defeated in his reelection campaign, saying, “Now, that’s retaliation.” These findings fail to support the traditional view of retaliation. In essence, what seemed to be a lack of relationship between the severity of retaliation and the participants’ narrative abyss and their abilities to reestablish
narrative structure, might instead be an incorrect view of retaliation severity. This study suggests that instead of viewing the extreme or harsh acts as severe in and of themselves, researchers should consider severe retaliation as those acts that have the greatest impact on an individual’s identity. This strategic redefinition might help scholars understand the effects of retaliation on the whistle-blower. Additionally, this study highlights the possible use of children as a form of retaliation, specifically in the public school system. Further study would be beneficial in determining, first, how often this type of retaliation is utilized; second the effects that this type of retaliation has on the educational system and the associated costs; and third, the effects on the children who may be used for such retaliation. Moreover, considering that retaliation utilizing children was only experienced by the female participants in this present study, future research into the role that gender plays in the organization’s use of particular forms of retaliation would be beneficial in whistle-blowing scholarship.

In determining which individuals may have the capacity to endure the whistle-blowing process, this study suggests that the greatest predictor of survival is not level of retaliation or the channel used to disclose. Instead, the greatest predictor of who can survive the whistle-blowing incident may be the individual’s narrative identity. Carr (1986) asserted that after experiencing the narrative abyss, individuals strive to regain narrative coherence either by reestablishing their previous narrative structure, or by abandoning the previous narrative structure and adopting a new narrative structure. In the present study, I searched for relationships between the participants’ previous narrative identity and their ability or willingness to reestablish their previous narrative identities. I found that those whose characters centered on character and crusader were successful in maintaining a sense of who they were; in other words, they were able to reestablish themselves within their previous narrative structures. Furthermore, I found that
those whose identities centered on family roles and popularity either abandoned their previous narrative structure or struggled to reestablish it.

These findings suggest that the whistle-blowing process weakens or “destroys” some individuals’ identities, while strengthening others. Researchers (Alford, 2000; Dworkin & Baucus, 1998; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) have typically suggested that retaliation is harmful to whistle-blowers in general. However, according to the findings of this study, the capacity for whistle-blowing to affect ones identity negatively depends strongly on the individual’s identity prior to witnessing and reporting the wrongdoing. The participants whose identity centered on character engaged in the whistle-blowing process in order to protect or strengthen their identities as honest, ethical, and trustworthy individuals. The retaliation they received simply assisted in bolstering that identity. While they indeed suffered during the process (retaliation did indeed create the narrative abyss), they were able to reestablish their previous narrative identities. Therefore, this study suggests that there are certain individuals who have the capacity to endure the whistle-blowing process, dependent upon “who they are” before the process begins. Their previous identities affect their motivation to disclose, their experience of the narrative abyss, and their abilities to reestablish narrative coherence. In the present study, those whose narrative identities prior to the whistle-blowing event, centered on ethics or crusading for organizational reform, were able to endure the whistle-blowing process, while maintaining a sense of their narrative identities. Furthermore, those whose identities centered on popularity or family role suffered more long-term emotional effects from the whistle-blowing process. This study suggests that by focusing on an individual’s narrative identity, one can possibly predict not only an individual’s willingness to disclose, but also his or her capacity to endure any subsequent retaliation.
Theoretical Implications Narrative Identity

One theme of the present study was the participant’s locus of identity construction. Carr (1986) argued that in lived narrative configurations, the agent develops and constructs the plots of a story. For narrative identity theorists, identity represents a “particular way in which the self may be arranged, constructed, and eventually told” (McAdams, 2001, p. 101). In other words, individuals’ identities are constructed through a lived narrative, a series of patterned events (Carr, 1986) in which the author makes choices for future actions based on the identity he or she desires to create (Bruner, 1987; Somers, 1994). In the lived narrative, individuals select events that are important to the outcome of the story. However, as agents in their lived narratives, individuals do not have total control in the construction of their narrative identities (MacIntyre, 1981). While scholars generally agree that society plays a role in identity construction, there is disagreement about how large a role society plays. For example, MacIntyre (1981) asserted that individuals are not authors of their own narratives, but rather their narratives are constructed by society and their prescribed roles in society. In other words, the individual has little or no power over his or her lived narrative structure. However, Carr (1986) argued that societal roles are not the sole dictator of human beings’ lived narratives, as individuals choose the stories of their lived narratives. In other words, the individual has shared power in the construction of his or her lived narrative.

The present study presented findings relevant to this debate over who controls the construction of an individual’s lived narrative. Near et al. (1993) used theories of power to explore the whistle-blowing process, specifically how the wrongdoers exert power over the whistle-blowers in order to discourage reporting of wrongdoing. However, this study revealed a
distinctive display of power, specifically in the context of the participants’ struggle to control their lived narrative constructions.

The participants in the present study revealed their battle to control their narrative identity construction after witnessing wrongdoing. First, the participants were aware of what Rothwell and Baldwin (2007) referred to as the “code of silence” prevalent in organizations that stress loyalty. Scholars (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988) noted the code of loyalty, team spirit, and model of cooperation present in the public school system. The mere presence of this code of loyalty constituted a power position for those who constructed a narrative identity of character or ‘crusader.’ Embedded within the organization was an obstacle to these participants’ narrative identity construction, specifically an organizational code that required their silence. The participants’ narratives contained many references to their choices within their ongoing narratizations, specifically those that subverted the code of silence control over their identity construction. Interestingly, Rothwell and Baldwin (2007) concluded in their study of police and the code of silence, that the code failed to discourage whistle-blowing in the police organization. This present study suggests that whistle-blowers disclose in order to act in a manner consistent with their narrative identities, and that they utilize available resources to obtain power to make their narratization choices. Indeed, some of the participants detailed their available resources in order to protect themselves from retaliation, i.e., money, status in the community, access to attorneys, and relationship with high-ranking government officials.

The participants’ struggle to maintain control of their narrative identities became even more apparent after they experienced retaliation. At this phase of the whistle-blowing incident the locus of identity shifted and the participants lost a degree of control and experienced the moment of the abyss, the moment when individuals lose narrative coherence (Allison, 1994;
Carr, 1986). Carr (1986) described the abyss as the moment when an individual’s life fails to ‘make sense’ any longer. The moment of the abyss occurred when those in their audience seized control of the narrative, shifting the locus of identity away from the participant to the wrongdoers. All of the participants seemed to experience this shift to some degree, but the most obvious loss of power occurred after retaliation involving rumors and false accusations. The participants all seemed to lose agency, at least to some degree, when others in the community, including the wrongdoers, constructed a narrative that threatened the participants’ identity. Bill’s narrative perfectly illustrated the loss of agency, as he described the “public persecution” he endured during the board meeting. As a whistle-blower, Bill was forced to listen to an alternative narrative of his identity, watch as his previous narrative identity was threatened, with no voice to end the “persecution.” Metaphorically, this is the scene of all whistle-blowers who endure retaliation that directly attacks their identities.

Importantly, following the retaliation, the whistle-blowers attempted to regain power over their lived narrative structures utilizing various strategies. Some continued to disclose acts of wrongdoing, some chose to take legal action, and some reached out to powerful individuals for support, including high ranking government officials. This study suggests that human beings’ ability to “choose” the stories that become part of their lived narrative (Carr, 1986), becomes a power struggle between that ability to choose, and society’s prescribed roles. The shift in locus of identity indicates that individuals’ abilities to construct their narrative structure varies depending on the resources available to the individuals or depending on the individual’s determination to find *alternative* resources of power, such as taking legal action. These findings can be applied to other areas of narrative identity research, such as health communication.
scholarship and other studies that explore human beings’ “personal troubles” (Riessman, 2000), to identify ways individuals utilize power to control their own narrative identity construction.

**Practical Implications**

In addition to the previous theoretical implications, this study also provides practical implications. Most significantly, this study illustrates that retaliation benefits no one. Researchers (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007) demonstrated that because organizations may have limited means to facilitate exposure of wrongdoing, retaliation can be detrimental to the organization. Additionally, Blackburn (1988) identified the negative consequences the silent observer may have on an organization, including decrease in quality of work and lack of warning for potential problems in the workplace. This study suggests that in addition to these harms to the organization, retaliation may have unintended consequences, specifically the possibility that the threat of retaliation could harden the potential whistle-blowers’ resolve to disclose the act of wrongdoing, depending on the whistle-blower’s identity and objective in his or her ongoing narratization. If a potential whistle-blower identifies him or herself as someone who is ethical, honest, and trustworthy, or who views him or herself as a crusader, the threat of retaliation may cause the whistle-blower to feel he or she has no choice but to disclose. If disclosed externally, this act can have detrimental effects on the organization (Dworkin & Baucus, 1998).

A second practical implication of this study is that it offers guidance to attorneys and other groups that advise those who have observed wrongdoing. Specifically, by analyzing the observers’ stories, advisors can get a sense of the whistle-blowers’ identities and determine how well they can endure the retaliation that is sure to follow. Advisors can assess the potential whistle-blowers’ personal identity, considering what vulnerabilities exist because of their
narrative identities, and make recommendations as to whether the individuals should proceed or remain a silent observer. Furthermore, consultants can suggest strategies to deal with specific types of retaliation, including appropriate resources to help the individuals through the whistle-blowing process, while being able to maintain a sense of who they are.

Additionally, there are practical implications for administrators in the public school system, specifically in dealing with those who express concerns about wrongdoing with regard to their children. This study revealed that responding with retaliation might force these individuals to engage in the whistle-blowing process in order to preserve their identities as a “good” parent. Administrators would benefit by seeking alternative ways of dealing with parents who feel they have witnessed misconduct in relation to their children, by perhaps being responsive to accusations of wrongdoing, rather than attempting to protect the district at the cost of the individual.

Limitations

The present study contains three primary limitations. First, this study utilized a relatively small sample size ($N = 9$). Researchers (Hoepfl, 1997; Sandelowski, 1995) have claimed that 10 to 50 participant interviews provide substantial data for qualitative studies. This study could be further expanded to include a larger number of participants and a more diverse group of individuals. Second, only one participant’s narrative identity was salient with the theme of popularity. Because this one participant provided a large amount of data regarding her willingness to disclose, a larger sample size would have been beneficial in improving the reliability of the present study’s finding.
A third limitation or concern raised by this study is the fact that gender differences existed in relation to the identity construction themes; the theme of character was comprised solely of men, while the family role and popularity themes were comprised solely of women. This finding raises questions regarding the role that gender may have played in the whistle-blowing process, which this study did not address. Again, a larger sample size might have yielded a more diverse group of participants within the respective themes.

Conclusion

Researchers (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) estimated one-third of U.S employees have observed unethical or illegal activities in their workplace. Approximately half of these individuals make the decision to report the misconduct to someone who “may be able to affect action” (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 4). For individuals who decide to disclose acts of wrongdoing, retaliation will be a likely outcome (Alford, 2007; Henik, 2008; Jackson et al., 2010; Near & Miceli, 1986; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999), including change in job duties (Bok, 1980), job termination (Near & Miceli, 1986), social isolation (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999), and even death threats (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999).

While an abundance of literature has addressed the impact that retaliation on the whistle-blowing process (Dworkin & Baucus, 1998; Elliston, 1982; Miceli et al., 1988; Miceli & Near, 1992), only a few researchers (Alford, 2007; Richardson & McGlynn, 2011; Miceli et al., 1988) have focused on the personal and emotional effects that retaliation can have on the whistle-blower’s life. However, using survey methods, Rothschild and Miethe (1999) identified the magnitude of suffering these whistle-blowers endure.
One area where limited whistle-blowing research exists is in the setting of the public school system. This study identifies the effects of retaliation on the lives of those who disclose wrongdoing in the Texas Public School System. Through their told narratives, whistle-blowers in the Texas Public School System revealed the effects that retaliation had on their lives, especially their views of who they became as a person. Through the framework of narrative identity, this study revealed that the act of disclosing was motivated by a desire to maintain the participants’ narrative identities. The act of telling (narrating) is done in order to achieve a future desired outcome (Allison, 1996). Accordingly, the decision to remain silent, which is also an act in an ongoing narratization, was motivated by the desire to maintain their narrative identities. In other words, this study suggests that individuals choose manner and time of disclosing based on their desired narrative identities, which are intimately related to the goals of their ongoing narratization.

Severe retaliation has been classified by way of the intensity of the act, or the extent of the act (Miceli et al., 2008). This study presents a need for scholars to rethink the way they define severe retaliation. Rather than focus on the features of the act itself, this study demonstrates the need to focus on the relationship between the act of retaliation and the identity of the whistle-blower, and the whistle-blower’s perception of the retaliation. According to the findings of the present study, the most severe forms of retaliation were those that directly attacked the identity of the individual.

The ability for a whistle-blower to endure retaliation depended on their previous narrative identities. Those whose identities centered on character or crusading against wrongdoing, fared well in the face of retaliation, even the most extreme forms of retaliation. The ability to predict
who will be able to withstand the whistle-blowing process is a valuable tool in future whistle-
blowing research.
APPENDIX

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Introduction: Each interview will begin with a statement of confidentiality: Thanks for agreeing to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to talk about your experiences as a member of your school district.

This discussion should take around 2 hours to complete. Your participation in this project is voluntary, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and you can stop the interview at any time if you decide you do not want to participate. Is it okay with you if I audiotape this interview?

I want to assure you that we will not use your name or the school district’s name in our study unless you give us permission to do so. By signing the written consent form, you are providing your consent to participate in this study. Let’s begin.

1. Tell me about your background.
   a. Where were you raised? Tell me about your family. Religious background?
   b. How did you come to be at ________ school district?
      i. (Employee) What made you apply at this school district?
      ii. (Parent) Did the school have an influence on your decision to move/remain in your community/town?
      iii. (Board Member) Why did you decide to run?
   c. What was your relationship with others in this district (e.g. teachers, board members, other parents)? Please discuss.
   d. Were you happy in this district?
   e. What kind of reputation do you perceive you had in this district?

2. When did you first realize something might be wrong? Please discuss

3. As you decided what to do about the situation, what factors were important in that process? Did you speak to anyone or seek advice?

4. Tell me about the actual reporting.
   a. Whom did you tell?
   b. What was his/her response?
   c. Why did you choose this person?

5. Why did you make the choice to speak out?

6. Did the media play a role in the process?

7. How, if at all, did things change at work/board meetings etc. after you spoke out?

8. Tell me about the retaliation you encountered.
   a. When did you first realized that you experience retaliation?
   b. How did you react?
   c. From whom did you experience the retaliation?
   d. What do you think motivated it?
   e. How did this affect you?
9. Where there those who supported you?
   a. Who?
   b. What effect did this have on your experience?
10. How did you respond to the retaliation?
11. What was the outcome of the process? Were you satisfied?
12. How did this process affect you?
    a. How did it affect your family?
    b. How did it affect your relationships?
13. What has changed in your life as a result of the incident?
14. Do you consider yourself the “same person” as you were before these events? If not, how are you different? If so, were you able to maintain a strong sense of yourself throughout the process or did you have to go through a rebuilding process? Can you describe it?
15. Would you speak out against misconduct again?
16. We will protect your identity in all reports. We will not use your name or your school’s name in any reports.

17. Before we go, I would like to know if there are any topics that we missed which you think are important.

    Thank you for your time!
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