

Resilient Women Leaders: A Qualitative Investigation

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Introduction

Over the years, many authors have written about attributes that enable one to be a successful leader. The list of attributes is long; however, the one that appears to offer hope for emerging leaders is resiliency. Determination, an aspect of resiliency, is a foundation for transformational leadership (Bolman & Deal 1995; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Northouse, 2004; Tichy & DeVanna, 1990). Resiliency gives the leader an ability to create a vision, challenge the process, and allow potential to unfold. For Bass (1995), resiliency is an essential component of leadership. What appears to be missing from the leadership research and literature is the idea of how resiliency works.

Some suggest resiliency is a human quality rooted in a person's entire existence. For others, resiliency is essential to self-affirmation, and the resilient person acts in accordance with a desire to reach higher levels of identity and actualization. Therefore, one might make the assumption that resilience stems from a person's sense of purpose and personal mission. Bass (1995) suggests resiliency is a virtue upon which all virtues and values are established. It is a process toward becoming. This idea, together with Tillich's (1952) concepts, suggests a highly personal nature to resiliency.

Within this personal, philosophical outlook lies the nature of resiliency, the critical balance of motivational certainties, which are formulated by the person's commitments. The purpose of this study was to understand the essence and meaning of the phenomenon of resiliency in lived experience as perceived by resilient successful women leaders.

Literature Review

Theory F: Women and transformational leadership

When Forbes (1993) presented Theory F, this was the first scholarly work to give credit to a woman's style of leading. It identifies the need for the managerial and political aspects of leadership while simultaneously encouraging women to lead with care and compassion.

Forbes (1993) believes that effective leaders in the 21st century need to embrace values consistent with service and a demonstrated ethic of care towards others. Further, effective leaders can recognize the interdependence among all people, and they foster personal empowerment. Forbes states:

A feminine perspective--when synthesized with values, holistic thinking, leadership research, wisdom, and the social sciences, the needs of individuals, organizations and society--results in a transformational leadership model which offers one viable solution for enhancing people's lives, increasing productivity and saving the planet. (pp. 26-27)

Forbes' thinking from this feminine perspective acknowledges the feminine attributes of leaders.

Resilience Theory

In general terms, psychological resilience is the capacity to advance after adversity. A more precise definition of resilience emerges from the work of Garmezy (1993), Rutter (1990), and Elder (1985). They define resilience as the ability to survive a stressor (or risk factor) and to avoid two or more adverse life outcomes to which the majority of others who experience this stressor would succumb.

Most definitions of resilience are framed within the context of adolescence. For example, Kandel et al. (1998) describe resilient outcomes as the absence of criminal involvement for sons of criminal fathers. Rutter (1979) defines resilient, high-stressed youth as those who fail to develop behavioral and psychological problems (Moran & Eckenrode, 1992; Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993).

In addition to these differences of opinion, the argument persists that it is too early in the development of resiliency research to come to one specific conclusion about the definition (Gamerzy, 1993). Furthermore, resiliency is seen by some as a relative phenomenon that can only be defined within a particular context, which is both situational and time-driven (Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987).

According to a study by Blechman, Prinz, and Dumas (1995), the resiliency phenomenon applies across the lifespan to survivors of acute and chronic stressors and risk factors. These lifespan examples include children who avoid disruptions in adult work and family roles despite mentally ill parents; people who have experienced concentration camps, war zones, or impoverished households; and those who have observed community violence or endured sexual abuse.

Block (1991), reports that resilient survivors avoid adverse outcomes through ego resilience. She also states that high ego resiliency ratings are associated with future avoidance of adverse outcomes such as substance abuse, but such correlational evidence cannot make a causal link between ego resilience and resilient survival. Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies reported by Blechman, Prinz, and Dumas (1995) found high ego resiliency ratings predict empathy, delay of gratification, reasoning, problem solving, IQ,

and personality traits such as agreeableness, extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.

Block (1991), Garmezy (1993), and Werner and Smith (1992) report that resilient survival of excessive stress is attributed to three factors: (1) personal characteristics (e.g., coping strategy, intelligence, physiological reactivity, temperament); (2) nuclear family characteristics (e.g., cohesiveness and structure, parents), and (3) extra-familial characteristics (e.g., community organization, mentoring, supportive school environment).

Werner (1984) defined resiliency as “the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or sustained life stress” (p. 68). The focus of resiliency in these instances seems to reflect one’s ability to adjust or cope. Resiliency has been also been described as the ability to thrive despite harmful or risky circumstances or experiences. Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990) define resiliency as “a process, capacity, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenges or threatening circumstances...good outcome despite high risk status, sustained competence under threat and recovery from trauma” (p. 426).

Coutu (2002) states there are many theories about what makes resilience. According to her research, Coutu observed that almost all the theories overlap in three ways. Resilient people possess three characteristics, “A staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise” (p. 48).

Women, Leadership, and Resiliency

Powell (1998) interviewed 12 senior executive women to explore how they cope with difficult situations, perceive challenges, and overcome barriers, identifying some of

the factors that facilitated their advancement to senior executive positions. The study describes internal barriers, including self-confidence or personality traits, and external barriers, including gender biases or the “old boys” network. The participants of this study were action-oriented, they gathered required resources, and they acquired an education to achieve their positions.

Ramsey and Blieszner (1999) explored the voices of women over the age of 65 during the mid 1990’s. Participants shared their perspectives on life and spirituality. These women developed strength to rebound from life’s adversities, oppositions, or difficulties. They exhibited resilience and strong spiritual faith “in spite of” and/or “because of” the challenges, struggles and problems they encountered. Challenges they faced included war; the deaths of children, parents, siblings, and spouses; failing health; loneliness; fear; and poverty. The researchers suggest participants exhibited resiliency because of their abilities to interconnect thoughts about the past, present and future; their abilities to relate to others and God; and their abilities to look to an afterlife.

Methods

Context

This phenomenological study used semi-structured, open-ended audio taped interviews to investigate perceptions of resilient, transformational, successful women leaders regarding their own resiliency and leadership. We believe the phenomenological approach is best suited for the purposes of this study - to gain an understanding of the perceptions of participants who have a shared experience. Although participants are from unique circumstances, they share the experience of facing many difficulties and persevering. (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998; Merriam and Associates, 2002). Schwandt

(2001) states that phenomenology “aims to identify and describe the subjective experiences of respondents...studying everyday experience from the point of view of the subject...” (p. 192). Colaizzi (1978) notes that as phenomenologists, we infuse the research with our perspectives of the study and in doing so create the descriptions we present.

Constructivism closely parallels the philosophical underpinnings of this study. This approach values participants’ perceptions of reality as constructions of their minds, and these constructions can often have multiple meanings and can provide understandings regarding circumstances of life (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 2001).

Role of the Researchers

According to Maxwell (1996), as researchers, we should not separate our research from other aspects of our lives because this could result in the loss of major insights, hypotheses, and validity checks. Strauss and Corbin (1994) concur; we believe that researchers carry into their research the sensitizing possibilities of their trainings, readings, and research experiences, as well as explicit theories used in their disciplines that might be useful. However, as Strauss and Corbin suggest, we understand that as researchers we must accept responsibility for the interpretative roles of what we have observed, heard, and read. Colaizzi (1978) in a discussion about researcher experience remarks:

Experience is there for all of us, and it cannot be objectively eliminated.

...experience is: (a) objectively real for myself and others, (b) not an internal state but a mode of presence to the world, (c) a mode of world presence that is

existentially significant, and (d) as existentially significant, it is a legitimate and necessary content for understanding human psychology. (p. 52)

We all have an interest in resiliency because we have encountered various stressful events in our lives. We have managed to persevere and survive in spite of these life events. These individual and collective personal experiences as well as our interest in the topic of resiliency led to this study topic.

Data Generation, Collection, and Processing

Participants. Based on personal knowledge and experience, we selected a purposeful sample of 20 women that met the study criteria (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998). We selected some of the potential participants because we had read about them and/or met them personally. Later, through the process of snowballing, participants gave us additional names. All participants fit the definition of resiliency in transformational, successful women leaders established for this study. Each of these women had the capacity to triumph after adversity and rise above disadvantage, and they lead others in relationships that move beyond self-interest and transform their followers into fully committed, mission-dedicated team members (Burns, 1978; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993).

We sent recruitment letters to the 20 potential participants and then followed up with telephone calls to confirm participation and arrange interview times. We only called those who accepted the invitation to participate. We included in the recruitment letter all of the federally-required Institutional Review Board (IRB) information for human subjects. Additionally, participants were asked for their consent to audiotape and transcribe the interviews which would include the use of their names.

We included 10 women in our study. Eight responded to the initial request for participation. As we conducted individual interviews, we asked participants to suggest others who met the criteria for the study. This process of snowballing was our way to identify and locate additional potential participants with similar characteristics (Berg, 2001; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Profiles of participants are presented in Appendix A.

Instrument. We conducted an examination of the literature regarding resiliency and transformational leadership. We discussed the characteristics and qualities that emerged from our individual readings and agreed upon a framework that resulted in the development of a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol (Bass, 1995; Bennis, 1994; Burns, 1978; Coutu, 2002; Elder, 1985; Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt, & Target, 1994; Lord & Maher, 2000; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Van Maurik, 2001). (See Appendix B)

For the purposes of this paper, we decided to include the analyses of the following questions: How does/has resiliency worked for you? Do you have a belief regarding how resilient women survive stressors to which many succumb? Please explain. We included these questions because all focus specifically on resiliency.

Data collection. There were two steps in the data collection procedures: the semi-structured, open-ended interviews with the selected participants and member checks using email correspondence.

We scheduled interviews at a location and time convenient for the participants. Some interviews were face-to-face, and some were by phone. After each interview, we reviewed the audiotapes which were then transcribed verbatim. We checked the

transcripts for accuracy while listening to the audio tapes. Our second step in data collection was member checks using follow-up email correspondence with participants to clarify any missing information (Colaizzi, 1978; Johnson, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning the study, we submitted appropriate forms to the IRB and received approval to conduct the research. Before commencing the interviews, we explained the study to participants and invited them to ask questions or to ask for explanations. Nine participants agreed to have their names used; one participant is identified by a pseudonym.

Data Analysis

Our steps used in data analysis were similar to Colaizzi's (1978) suggested steps. Colaizzi notes that the steps should be "viewed flexibly and freely" (p. 59) since the research procedures may overlap. These steps included: read all the interview protocols; extract "significant statements" from the protocols; try to determine the meaning of each significant statement—"formulating meanings"; repeat the prior step and organize "formulating meanings" into "clusters of themes"; integrate results into an "exhaustive description"; and return to participants to ask them about the accuracy of the findings (pp. 59-62). As an example, it became clear to us that certain resiliency sustainers seemed to be internal, and others appeared to be external. This helped us to clarify meaning.

We used the QSR N6 software for additional textual analysis of the transcripts. As part of this process, we catalogued ideas that had emerged from reading into "nodes." We then associated the collective data files. Next, we read and selected text passages that

were of further interest, then using a “text search” assigned passages of text to nodes. Finally, we conducted a “node search” in order to find relationships between the passages coded by different nodes. This led to semantic networks, which we identified as the cornerstones of the emerging theories and themes.

The software analysis helped us identify and organize relevant ideas and quotations from the participants to support the appropriate categories (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2000). Although Colaizzi’s (1978) work predated qualitative data analysis software, we were able to see a correspondence between the analysis outcomes of the software and Colaizzi’s significant statements, formulating meanings, clusters of themes, and exhaustive description.

Mishler (1979) notes that contexts drive the way people understand the meaning of events, saying, “meaning is always within context and contexts incorporate meaning” (p. 102). Therefore, the narrative research or story-telling approach was a central part of the contextualizing strategies of this study. Seidman (1991) suggests profiles are one effective way to share what is learned, and the narrative profile allowed the researchers to transform this type of learning into retelling a story. Therefore, we included profiles of the participants to contextualize the events of their lives more clearly.

Working under the auspices of narrative research, we analyzed and reported a chronology of the participants’ experiences. We then focused on understanding these experiences by internalizing their comments in order to compose a narrative to convey their stories. Cortazzi (1993) suggests that it is the chronology of narrative research with an emphasis on sequence that sets narrative apart from other genres of research.

Trustworthiness

Dependability indicates that the inquiry process is logical and dependable over time and across researchers and methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To enhance dependability, we used the interviews and member checks. Furthermore, the verbatim transcriptions served as another determinant of dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Transferability addresses the determination of whether the findings of a particular study can be transferred to other similar contexts or situations, or case-to-case transfer. We used dense descriptions to provide extensive information about the participants in order to allow others to accurately assess the transferability of the findings (Krefting, 1999).

Confirmability indicates that interpretations of the data are accurate (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Throughout the data analysis, we were mindful of the need to continually reflect on our personal biases. We used this reflexivity in an attempt not to affect understanding of the process or the outcomes (Krefting, 1999; Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Credibility assures a correspondence between views of participants and the researchers' representation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Maxwell (1996) describes credibility as the correctness of a description or interpretation. We used member checks to enhance credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, to further enhance credibility, we used verbatim comments (Johnson, 1999).

Findings

All participants discussed numerous adversities, difficulties, and oppositions they faced in their lives or careers. They described various life issues as well as discrimination issues. Participants often found that these adversities impacted them greatly.

Personal Life Issues

Family difficulties. Several participants discussed life issues related to family difficulties. For example, Claire Mignon related that her marriage was one of physical abuse, saying,

My husband was a very successful man, and he was a well-known man; he had a lot of fans and a lot of women after him.... He started beating me up all the time. Every Friday I would get beaten for no reason at all.

Anna Escobedo Cabral talked of several family-related difficulties. She discussed living part of her life in extreme poverty noting

We'd turn to every possible government source. We lived off of welfare, butter and cheese lines, bought our clothes from a second-hand store with a voucher given to us by the church. I was the oldest of five children, so I worked after school. I cleaned people's houses.

Additionally, she related the difficulties involved because of her mother's suicide attempt, saying

She decided to attempt suicide...today I can understand it, and I can even talk about it, but for many, many years I couldn't, and to live through all of that, and then to have your parents say that...but to basically decide that you as a child

were not important enough to hang in there, to be there for. You know, losing the house didn't matter. Not having anything to eat didn't matter, but when my mother made a decision to leave this earth, I took it personally. I was affronted by that, and for a long time though I tried really hard to understand her. I had a hard time doing so, and what had been an absolutely fabulous mother/daughter relationship ended almost within minutes.

Maria San Juan discussed a similar family issue, her grandmother's suicide attempt and her mother's death.

I remember being like five and a half, the day she came over to live with us; I remember distinctly she tried to commit suicide and take some pills, and you know, you're saying, "What in the world is going on? You know, what I have done, you know, to -- what have I done to this lady? What is going to be so bad going forward that, you know, she wanted to commit suicide?"

Commenting on the difficulties revolving around the death of her mother, she shared, "It was very trying, her death. She was a woman who was always afraid of dying...and it was hard...because at the end they get like little kids...it was very hard for her to leave."

Maria San Juan related another difficulty related to family circumstances -- growing up without a father and having to help raise her siblings, saying

I think that the most difficult thing in my life very early on was to not have grown up with a father by my side. My grandmother and my mother raised me and my two siblings, a brother and a sister, and I'm

the oldest of the three, and I guess that -- I guess that I took on being the protector of my other--of my younger siblings, protector in many ways.

Kristen Hughes discussed a different type of family difficulty that many young people encounter. She felt deprived of a sense of roots because her family moved so often:

Our family moved quite a bit; by the time I came to ninth grade we had moved 14 different times; I had been in 13 different elementary schools. I think it was, at the time....It was a wonderful thing in some ways to always be the new kid, the new girl at school. But, also that sort of longing to have roots that were real permanent. But again, that's the way I grew up.

Medical problems. Lori St. Thomas recounted the difficulties she faced regarding her husband's cancer.

My husband was diagnosed with a level two melanoma, and they told us that it looks good, that it hadn't spread, and about a month later they said that it did spread, and then he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer....Well they did surgery, and then they said don't worry, that more than likely it didn't spread, 97% of a chance it didn't spread, and about two weeks later, they said they were wrong and that it did spread, and he had throat cancer. Then the doctors said that there's a possibility that the lymphatic system was involved since it had already spread to the throat, so he underwent radiation.... And while he was going through all of that, I still had the five kids, and the school, and the work.

Job oppositions. Janet Reno discussed her time as State Attorney of Florida and later as Attorney General:

For 15 years as State Attorney, I had to handle large caseloads under very difficult circumstances, and there were crises relating to the McDuffy riots and other situations that I dealt with. As Attorney General, I dealt with the issue of Waco and the independent council, and the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Elian Gonzalez case, amongst others.

Discrimination Issues

Minority problems. Several participants discussed discrimination related to their status as minorities. For example, Diane Wasserman Rubin talked of not being accepted because of language problems. She said

When I came here from Cuba at the age of 14, I was fluent in three languages; none of them was English, however. I was fluent in Spanish, French, and Latin ... I wound up in Miami Beach at Nautilus Junior High School--and at that time, there were no bilingual programs. There were no transitional programs...if you can remember when you were 14 years old how important it was that you had your friends and your social life. You were beginning to form your social connections and relationships. I left that entire behind, and I came to a country where there was not a lot of acceptance for me or any other people that perhaps did not converse in the native language, so it became--my social life was non-existent. My grades began to suffer, and I was an honor roll student in Havana in Cuba, and so I felt pretty little, pretty small, pretty inconsequential, and I lost all my self-esteem.

Maria San Juan experienced similar difficulties regarding language. She stated

I came over here, and you know, the next big episode is not having anybody, not having anything, and being in a different county, and I always spoke English and all that, but you know, the funny thing is Americans spoke very fast, so I couldn't understand a word that they were saying...

Rose Tydus discussed another type of discrimination related to her status as a minority. She recounted the opposition she faced because of her religion as well as her race:

I was appointed as the city first Black City Clerk of Opa Locka. That was during a time when racism was still very prevalent in that community, along with crime and a lot of public corruption, and I was also not really highly favored by many of my colleagues because of my Christian principles and ethics. And I experienced a tremendous amount of opposition and a lack of cooperation, even to the point of my termination after almost ten years of dedication of service...

Gender. Two participants discussed oppositions they experienced because they are women. As an example, Janet Reno said

The first opposition I experienced was when my mother told me I couldn't go to law school. The second is when I tried to get a summer job between my second and third year of law school; a major Miami law firm would not give me a job because I was a women; 14 years later they made me a partner.

Connie Mark had a similar experience while attending graduate school and later in her professional life:

Well, you know, like most women, I had people say to me in graduate school, "We don't want to give you any help because women don't finish their Ph.D.," so

all I did was go to the--complain to the appropriate people so the people couldn't continue to say those things like that to women. When I got my first job, the chairman of the department said, "We don't tenure women," and I just went and got myself another job.

Defining Resiliency

After discussing the difficulties they had faced in life, participants then shared their personal definitions of resiliency. In discussing these definitions, they talked about having the ability to bounce back or snap back, being able to accept adversity or hardship, looking to the future, and refusing to be a victim.

Ability to bounce back/snap back. A number of the participants emphasized that resiliency is being able to bounce back. Janet Reno, Rose Tydus, Connie Mark, and Diane Wasserman Rubin all defined resiliency as bouncing or snapping back. Lori St. Thomas elaborated on bouncing back, "In the literal sense it is the ability to bounce back, but I would say it is the ability to overcome any challenges the Lord puts in front of you." Kristen Hughes used imagery to describe the "bouncing" process. She said

Okay, you know I think, I keep thinking about those commercials where they step on the grass or the carpet and it bounces back up, you know just that, even when you're getting squished, even when you've got the heavy load on top of you, that you just bounce back up somehow, that you, you know, the wool fibers or whatever, whatever twitchy things there are in you spring back up. That's how I look as resiliency.

Being able to accept adversity or hardship. Two participants remarked that resiliency is about accepting and learning from adversity. Marcy Roban stated that

resiliency is “the ability to accept adversity as part of life, and to step through it and beyond it with courage and determination and trust.” Similarly, Claire Mignon said resiliency is “the ability somebody has to resist the hardship of life and a way to go around it and not let it crush you.”

Refusing to be a victim/looking to the future. Maria San Juan defined resiliency as not being a victim. She recalled Eleanor Roosevelt’s words "In order to be a victim you have to give permission to somebody to victimize you." She added, “I think that's how you summarize what resiliency is.” Anna Escobedo Cabral explained that she believes resiliency is about looking toward tomorrow:

I would say it is the ability to keep ever present the knowledge that the sun will rise tomorrow. I honestly believe...that unless you learn and can live by that philosophy, I think that the world will pull you down and suck you in. There are very, very difficult times, and I have recalled when I've gotten up and could not, as bright as the sun was shining, could not see it. You know, it was staring me in the face, and I was so sad and so beat, but in my mind, I told myself that it was still out there, and that if I could just get through the day, tomorrow would be better, and eventually there was a tomorrow that was better.

Perceptions of Internal and External Resilience Sustainers

After discussing personal difficulties and defining resiliency, participants recounted how they believed they kept focused during difficulties. In other words, participants shared how personal internal and external resilience sustainers have worked for them and helped them to persevere. In the context of internal and external resilience

sustainers, participants discussed God and spirituality, family, education, work, and responsibility, purpose, and humor.

Internal resilience sustainer-- God and spirituality. Several participants pointed out that God and/or their spirituality helped to keep them focused and to persevere. Lori St. Thomas remarked that she believes her faith sustains her:

There's a really interesting expression that says let go and let God. And it's a wonderful expression except it's much harder to do than to say. But when you learn to do it, and you just really learn that you are not walking your path, you're walking somebody else's....I think, and this is a personal belief, that some of the women who succumb are very much caught up in the I and me, and not in what the bigger picture is. I think it would be very easy especially for a woman in today's society to succumb.

Claire Mignon gave a similar response adding that hope together with trust in God helps her to keep focused:

It was my trust in God, and the second thing was hope. Hope because throughout those moments, God gave me some little sign; by word, by dream, by things that I saw, that there was a tomorrow. What kept me going was knowing that there was a tomorrow, whatever was going on, there was a better tomorrow.

Rose Tydus also noted that she depends on God to keep her focused. She explained that after a particularly difficult situation

I had to depend on the word of God to strengthen me and guide me to really look with expectation, great expectation that He was going to make something good out of this situation...His purpose. That is what kept me focused...

Marcy Roban observed that she receives divine guidance to help her through times of adversity. She explained

I have experienced such blessings in terms of knowing that I am always supported--always, no matter what happens. I read the signs...in terms of my work, the handrails that we are given by divine guidance in terms of where to go and what to do, and how to act, and so forth and so on. That has helped me tremendously to move through adversity, and I have also come to the realization that all adversity is there to teach us something, and to make us stronger and wiser.

Diane Wasserman Rubin noted that she is not in control of everything and this is a good concept to understand. She discussed what she calls the "three C's":

I didn't cause it, I can't cure it, and I can't control it. That has guided me through years of difficult times so that I can still face the music every morning, do my job, and advocate for the community...Once you identify those three, say it to yourself in your head, you say, "Okay." Then next, because you're not going to spend your good, positive energy on trying to fix something that has no cure, that you can't feel guilty about because you didn't cause it, and you can't control it.

You get on.

Internal resilience sustainer-- education. Lori St. Thomas mentioned that she continues to pursue her education as an example for her children, "I want my kids to see

that that's an important thing, that that's an important part of life that no matter what else is going on, you have to move forward.”

Anna Escobedo Cabral also observed that education is a guiding force in her ability to remain focused:

I started to dream about other things that were possible, and I started to get angry about the fact that so many of the kids in the neighborhoods where I had grown up didn't have that kind of opportunity, and decided that that was what my life would be about. Finding ways to make sure that it wasn't an accident that would guarantee that you had access, but rather that those opportunities would open up. So that's what I decided to do with my education.

Internal resilience sustainers—responsibility, purpose, determination. Several participants pointed out that their work and/or a sense of responsibility helped to keep them focused and helped them to persevere. For example, Anna Escobedo Cabral said, “I felt like everything was my responsibility. I had to make sure everything was kept together...”

Janet Reno noted that in order to remain focused

I just pursued what I thought was right. I tried to be as prepared as I could. I tried to make the right decisions based on what was the right thing to do. And then I tried to learn from my experience.

Maria San Juan discussed the value of her work. She noted, “My mother always taught me to be competitive, and I had a great work ethic. I love to work”....adding,

You call it resiliency, but I call it competitiveness. I call it commitment. I call it being positive, looking at the bright side, and I am never thinking that I am better

than anybody, that I am entitled to anything that is different from what life is all about.

Connie Mark also talked of her work: "So my way of getting around difficulty either is to work harder or to find another job, so I don't have to keep worrying about those people." She continued the discussion by saying, "I think resilient women have had some successes in their life, and they believe in themselves. They have strong self-images. They want to survive."

Diane Wasserman Rubin mentioned that having a purpose keeps her focused and added that a sense of humor has also helped her to stay focused.

I used to tell my friends all the time, "The minute I don't laugh at a joke or I don't tell a joke, take me out back and shoot me," because levity can get you by. I have gotten out of some really serious corners with a little bit of levity. So don't forget to smile, and don't forget to laugh, and don't forget to smell the roses.

Several participants discussed their resiliency in light of personal strength and determination. For example, Claire Mignon told a story of the importance of never giving up. She said

One day at a time, like if you survive today, that means you can survive tomorrow. All it takes is don't let your hand give up on whatever you are hanging on to. I always have the following as a picture on my mind. There was at one time in my country when there was a hurricane that came with a lot of water and the water was so high, the water was as high as the top of a palm tree....all the houses, everything was covered by water....the people, when they came near a tree, they would hang on to that tree...people would come in boats to pick up

those people who were hanging on to those trees....But the water was coming with strength, and it was hard to hang on for long, and your arms would get tired, and you would want to give up. There was one person...at one point he could not hang any more...and he just slipped away....And that picture never left my mind, and the boat just came a minute after, and it was too late. So don't give up.

Anna Escobedo Cabral indicated that her determination is through her conversations with herself, self-counseling. She explained

What works for me, is when I am having a very, very, very difficult or I'm being challenged, I begin to literally be my best counselor. I talk to myself. I talk to myself constantly, and whenever something bad pops in my head, and I say it sometimes out loud, mostly out loud...I figure Anna, you can do this. You have to hang on.

Diane Wasserman Rubin discussed her belief that determination is related to self-esteem, saying: "People give up easily because they don't have a sufficient amount of self-esteem. Self-esteem is something that's really difficult to learn, but I think self-esteem is more taught than anything else..." Connie Mark indicated that her determination is related to being competitive. She noted: "Oh, I think that I'm just competitive. I--you know--my strategy has always been that if I hit a brick wall, to turn around and go in another direction. There's always enough to do."

Kristen Hughes noted that those who survive make no excuses for themselves:

I think that society makes it very easy for people to fail and very easy to make excuses...I think that a lot of excuses are made for people, and I think we make

excuses for ourselves. And, my feeling is that somehow the women that I've watched who survive adversity, who go through problems, whether it's a relative, whether it's other women that I've watched or learned from, somehow they just cut to the chase... and it's just, you just keep going. You keep your nose focused north, or whichever direction you're going, and you keep walking. And I guess that's as close to a belief system as I have.

External resilience sustainer--family. Another way that participants noted they keep focused is because of their families. For example, Anna Escobedo Cabral said the reason she is so strong is because of her parents, particularly her mother:

My mother is probably the reason I am so strong even though she may not want to-- she may not really realize that--and I thought about this, that interesting sort of development, you know, that by doing what she did, she gave me a strength that she will not understand.... my mother I think is probably responsible for my being able to survive every single one of the things that God has decided I should experience and learn from, so it's been kind of interesting.

She reiterated the value of external support is important:

I think a lot of it has to do with what's happening internally and what kind of external support you have. I think it would make a world of difference to a woman who's in a place where she's facing a very difficult situation if she has no help, whether she's her own best friend, or she has somebody else she can turn to. I think women who can find support from someone else can make it back, and what we need is to find ways in which they can reach out.

Kristen Hughes also discussed her family, noting the importance of her son,

parents, sisters, and brother. She said

I think, my son being older now, he's still a focus in my life....[I was] pretty much alone with that child most of his life. So that focus was a good focus to have initially, to make sure that he was clothed, fed, schooled, happy, whatever that might have been. And of course, I have a very supportive family.

Diane Wasserman Rubin added, "If you have children you have to leave them a legacy that they need to stand strong, and they need to be independent..."

Lori St. Thomas discussed her faith in the context of her family, saying
That is totally my faith, and very strong family. I have a wonderful husband; he is supportive and helpful, and my father and I have a very close relationship. You know I have my moments, everybody has their moments that they get down...for example, my husband's cancer is a very overwhelming thing to try to deal with...So, first I would say my faith keeps me going, and my family would be my second better factor.

Other participants indicated that they have been resilient because they needed to help others or meet the expectations of others. As an example, Kristen Hughes discussed how she wanted her family to be proud of her, and she did not want them to be disappointed.

I think just the expectation. Whether it was said or not from my parents, from my maternal grandmother as well, who was a very, very strong women, who had overcome so many problems in her lifetime. I think just seeing her, knowing her, and knowing that I wanted her to be proud of me; I wanted my family to be proud of me....whether it was example, whether it was expectation, or some

combination in there that really did force me, or I forced myself to think that someone would be disappointed, someone would be upset if I didn't become resilient and didn't fight back.

Marcy Roban commented that her courage comes from a desire to help others, saying

I do humbly consider myself a courageous person, and there is something within me that drives me, and that drive has always been to uplift, to heal, or to better myself, society, and those whose lives I touch in my work, and that propels me. It's something innate that always motivates me to move forward because I know that we're all here to help one another and to teach one another, and as I have learned from others, I also help others to learn.

Janet Reno noted that she meets the expectations of others by trying to do the right thing. She added, "I tried to ask all the questions, tried to make the best decisions I could, and then I accepted responsibility for them."

Discussion

The participants discussed numerous adversities, difficulties, and oppositions they experienced in their lives or careers, describing life issues and discrimination issues. Several experienced discrimination because of gender. This finding is similar to Powell's (1998) study, which indicated that gender biases or the "old boy's networks" are problems women continue to face. Participants noted that they kept focused through God and spirituality, family, education, work and responsibility, a sense of purpose, and a sense of humor. They also maintained educational and professional support systems. The

findings of the current study show that the participants were action-oriented, gathered required resources, and acquired an education to achieve their positions.

The concept of purpose and responsibility is consistent with Coutu's (2002) belief that resilient people have "strongly held values, [and believe] that life is meaningful" (p. 48). Several participants discussed their work as a way for focusing. Similarly, Maddux (1995) noted that individuals with high self-efficacy (resiliency) concentrate on their work rather than themselves. Participants also explained the importance of family in keeping focused and remaining resilient. McCubbin, McCubbin, and Thompson (1992), likewise, related family relationships to resiliency.

The participants defined resiliency as the ability to bounce or snap back, to accept adversity, to look to the future, and not be a victim. The participants' perceptions of resiliency are supported by a large body of previous research in the area of resiliency, particularly the model observed in the study by Coutu (2002), which states that almost all theories overlap in three ways. This resiliency model indicated that resilient people possess three characteristics: an acceptance of reality, a purpose, and an ability to think creatively. The author emphasized that a person might bounce back from adversity with just one or two of these qualities, but will only be actually resilient with all three.

The participants' definitions of resiliency and their beliefs about attributes and qualities of resiliency validate the importance of the concepts advocated in the resiliency models. Furthermore, the findings help to provide answers to questions such as those posed by Coutu (2002): How do people who face difficulty, adversity or opposition, experience resiliency and become successful? What exactly is that quality of resiliency that carries them through life? And how does resiliency work?

The findings of the current study are relevant because the perceptions are from the vantage point of identified resilient, transformational, successful women leaders. The participants' beliefs add to the body of knowledge about resiliency attributes. The questions posed by Coutu (2002), attempting to describe the quality of resilience that carries people through life and the mechanisms by which resilience functions, have been clarified by the participants in their responses such as "the reality of taking one day at a time," "living a life of purpose for God," and resilience through "competitiveness."

Furthermore, the findings of the current study indicate that the participants perceived that certain behaviors and/or qualities constitute a resilient person including: having the drive to succeed, wanting to surface again and not give up, maintaining an innate competitiveness, and continuing the perseverance that was instilled by their families.

Congruent with the participants' definitions, the resiliency models indicated that resilient survivors avoid adverse outcomes through ego resilience (Block, 1991). Additionally, consistent with the findings of the current study, Werner (1984) defined resiliency as "the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or sustained life stress" (p. 68). Masten et al. (1990) defined resiliency as "a process, capacity, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenges or threatening circumstances...good outcome despite high risk status, sustained competence under threat and recovery from trauma" (p. 426).

It is interesting to note that the definitions of resiliency and the qualities attributed to resilience provided by the participants indicated that it is important to accept adversity as part of life and to step through it and beyond it with courage. They noted that

determination and trust were important factors in not becoming a victim. The concept of accepting adversity as a part of life is consistent with Coutu's (2002) "acceptance of reality" (p. 48) and Maddux's (1995) belief that resilient individuals approach difficulties as challenges to be overcome rather than threats to be avoided.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, Blechman, Prinz, and Dumans (1995) asserted that coping, competence, and aggression prevention, the resiliency phenomenon, so defined, applies across the lifespan to survivors of acute and chronic stressors and risk factors. Therefore, the participants of the current study may well serve as examples of resilient leaders.

Next, the participants' definitions of resiliency and their beliefs about attributes and qualities of resilient, transformational successful women validate the importance of the concepts advocated in the discussed resiliency and leadership models.

Finally, the findings help to provide answers to such questions as those posed by Coutu (2002): what exactly is that quality of resilience that carries people through life, and how does resiliency work?

Limitations

Due to the highly personal nature of resiliency, one limitation may be that findings are due to some other interpretation, such as changing political and societal barriers, instead of personal factors. Also, findings may be due to a developmental process associated with age and professional status.

The researchers have identified study participants by selecting a purposeful sample who were chosen based on their transformational leadership styles and their

having displayed resiliency. Inasmuch as this research study attempted to describe the experience of resiliency in transformational, successful women leaders, it is by design a limited view of this experience of a few.

Implications

This study contributes to the literature in the area of personal formation. It identified resilient, transformational, successful women leaders and explained the factors, which contributed to their own resilience formations. This study also contributes to the literature by providing a new set of real-life examples of resilient, transformational, successful women leaders. Is resiliency something that is learnable or trainable? Is there a critical period for the development of resilience? This study provides additional insights to the aforementioned questions.

Appendix A

Anna Escobedo Cabral serves as President and CEO of the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility (HACR). HACR's mission is to ensure the inclusion of Hispanics in corporate America at a level commensurate with the Hispanic community's economic contributions. Prior to joining HACR, Cabral served as Deputy Staff Director for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. In addition, she simultaneously served as Executive Staff Director of the U.S. Senate Republican Conference Task Force on Hispanic Affairs. Cabral majored in Political Science at the University of California, Davis, and earned a Masters Degree in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Connie Mark formerly served as the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary. She also served as President of Hunter College; and Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A leading political scientist, she has held professorships at Columbia, CUNY, and the University of Wisconsin.

Kristen Hughes serves as the Associate Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Miami since 1997. Hughes was an elementary school principal for the Archdiocese, and a teacher, department chairperson and curriculum writer for public and private elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools. Hughes has a Master of Science Degree and has also completed her graduate studies in law.

Claire Mignon was born in Haiti; she now lives in Miami, Florida where she is a pharmacist. Mignon is also the president and executive Director of Hand of God Ministries, Inc., Miami-based non-profit organization, which is responsive to the health needs of the low-income communities. Mignon is a member of the American Pharmaceutical Association, the Dade County Pharmacy Association, the National Community Pharmacy Association, and the Florida Association of Pharmacy. Mignon received her Bachelor's Degree in Pharmacy from the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Haiti and an equivalency in the United States.

Janet Reno was born in Miami, Florida. She was the first woman to serve as a state attorney of Florida. Reno was appointed State Attorney General for Miami-Dade County, Florida. The voters returned her to office four more times. Reno became the nation's 78th Attorney General in 1993. She served until 2001, making her the first appointed female, and longest serving attorney general, in the 20th century. Reno majored in chemistry at Cornell University. She received her LL.B. from Harvard.

Marcy Roban was born in Havana, Cuba and came to the United States at the age of four. Roban is an ordained minister. In her recent *Your Electric Self – A Self-Healing Manual*, she presents the layman with an easy-to-read explanation of the inter-relationship between the soul, the function of the mind, the feeling of emotion, and the creation of disease. She is founder of "One World Movement" – an international effort bringing together organizations whose focus is healing and uplifting people and the planet.

Maria T. Sanjuán is Vice President for AXA Advisors. She has been associated with AXA Advisors, LLC formerly (the Equitable Life) since 1975. She is a founding member of the Boys and Girls Club of Hollywood, the Latin Chamber of Commerce,

Hispanic Unity of Florida, the Coalition of Hispanic American Women-Broward Chapter, and the South Florida Chapter of the Women in Insurance and Financial Services.

Connie Mark formerly served as the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary. She also served as President of Hunter College; and Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A leading political scientist, she has held professorships at Columbia, CUNY, and the University of Wisconsin.

Lori St. Thomas served as the principal of an inner city Pre-K through 8th Grade Catholic School in the Archdiocese of Miami. St. Thomas earned a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida. After practicing as a registered nurse, she returned to school to earn a Master's Degree in Elementary Education. She has taught at the pre-school, elementary, and middle school level. St. Thomas also holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership.

Rose Tydus serves as Vice Mayor of the City of Opa-Locka and is Minister of Youth and Administrator at Stanton Memorial Baptist Church in North Miami, Florida. She was raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Tydus was the first Black City Clerk of the City of Opa-Locka, Florida. She also served fulltime as CEO of the Opa-Locka Rescue Mission from 1987 until November of 2002.

Diana Wasserman-Rubin was born in Havana, Cuba and came to the United States in 1960. Wasserman-Rubin is Broward County's first Hispanic woman mayor. She was the first Hispanic American elected to the Broward County Board of Commissioners in 2000 and the first Hispanic American to serve as Vice-Chair in 2001. In 1998, she was the first Hispanic female elected countywide to the Broward County School Board. She was also the first Hispanic American to serve on the South Broward Hospital District Board of Commissioners and the first female to serve as Chair of the Board. In addition, she is the first Hispanic American to be inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame.

Appendix B

The interview included the following introduction:

If people are able to identify resiliency and then examine its impact and ultimate contribution to character building, perhaps this may serve to enhance the ability of professionals to motivate, encourage, challenge, and facilitate the development of others who encounter situations of great difficulty. Your experiences and perceptions about this topic are very important. They may provide insight, illumination, and answers about your own development of resiliency. They may also shed light on how other people who suffer genuine hardships can be challenged, encouraged, and assisted not to falter, but rather to persevere and become successful.

Questions

- 1). Please discuss some of the adversities, difficulties, or oppositions you have experienced in your life/career. What kept you focused?

- 2). How would you define resiliency?
- 3). How does/how has resiliency work(ed) for you? In other words, what made you persevere and not give up?
- 4). Do you have a belief regarding how resilient women survive stressors to which many succumb? Please explain.
- 5). How is personal growth related to your leadership success?
- 6). How is spiritual growth related to your leadership success?
- 7). Discuss your own personal motivations and influence on your ability to transform your followers.
- 8). Did you have a mentor throughout the difficult times in your life/career? If so, please discuss the benefits you received by having this mentor.
- 9). Do you know other resilient, successful, transformational woman who might contribute to and participate in this study? Please describe this individual or individuals.

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