Meaning through suffering: a black woman's narrative on resiliency to survive res...

Sociology, Women

Chapter I

The stereotypes and micro-aggressions suffered by a Black woman in a toxic workplace leads to deleterious effects. The effects reported here include oppression, shame, and isolation. Internalizing these feelings of isolation systematically caused the body, mind, and spirit to suffer physiologically and psychologically. The overall strategy is termed disconnection; this concept is reinforced by the “ power over” (Jordan, 2010) by a dominant group who wantonly exercise shame and isolation to discourage mutually empowerment relationships (Jordan, 2010, p. 105).

This Black woman is me. The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably. It is my preference to identify with the Black experience to proclaim accountability. Encountering authority from the standpoint of not being flexible to their constraints is distressing because one becomes misunderstood as being difficult. For example, my role in the workplace depended on someone in authority to command my movement to-and-from my work station. At times, I self-imposed silence out of feeling guilt and refrained from asking for a break to relieve myself after several hours from an active distress code while sitting in a locked, enclosed environment. My reaction is due to previous response by authority persons failing to understand my authenticity being affected by their maltreatment (Jordan, 2010, p. 101).

The perceptions of stereotypes, micro-aggressions, or being in isolation during my daily work-shift fit the social image of a situational attribution which influences the attitude of women and their psychological distress who seek to diminish the overwhelming emotions of stress. Through introspection

and reflection and motivated by feelings of guilt, I self-imposed my silence and adapted because of the phenomenon posttraumatic growth. Posttraumatic growth is defined as “ a positive psychological change resulting from one’s struggle with a traumatic or challenging life event” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004). The common domains of posttraumatic growth postulated by researchers Schultz, Tallman, and Altmaier (2010) are: “ changes in perception of self, enhanced interpersonal relationships [and] new life directions” (p. 105) lead to pathways of meaning making. Posttraumatic growth is a process of coping to understand one’s purpose and meaning for the experience (Park & Folkman, 1998). Self-silence is my control mechanism to diminish the impact of psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints that I began to experience. As I sought support and asked questions about the discordance, a process Weiner (1984) terms, personal attribution, attempting to seek understanding for why do I feel this way and what did I do to cause it? My tone changed from learned helplessness to assertiveness, and the meaning of resiliency was actualized to promote balance and harmony in how I felt and reacted to the workplace and authority.

In 2008, over 9. 4 million African American women were estimated to be part of the labor force. The Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the U. S. Census Bureau for the U. S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics projected an increase to 10. 7 million African American women in the work force by 2016 (p. 367). Hughes and Dodge (1997) discovered during their study of African American women in the workplace that “ empirical knowledge about how conditions at work influence job experiences among African American

women is limited, or is not distinguished from African American men and other female workers" (p. 582). Cox and Nkomo (1990) are convinced that " despite evidence that work constitutes a major life domain among African American women, researchers know relatively little about the work experiences of this group" (as cited in Hughes & Dodge, 1997, p. 582) because historically, research studies are based on white males.

Autobiographical Overview

The framework for sharing a Black woman's story is through an autobiographical narrative. In this overview, the researcher recalls that her childhood experiences were influenced by double-bind communications, " a behavioral norm that creates a no-win situation no matter what is attempted" (Oakley, 2000, p. 324) by trusted adults. The double-bind communications caused her to develop tendencies or patterns that manifested a dual sense of spirituality and fierceness to overcome and to survive her environment when severed from positive connections. The driving force in this discovery is acknowledged through the Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) model. Spencer (2000) and Hartling and Ly (2000) acknowledge that RCT offers a new view of development, proposing that people grow through participation in mutually empathic, mutually empowering relationships. This view is supported by a substantive body of research that shows that engagement in supportive relationships throughout one's life enhances development and strengthens resilience (as cited in Hartling & Sparks, 2008).

My childhood experience, during the 1960's through 1980, was seen through

the eyes and the presence of a tall, disciplinarian male, my father. Both my parents worked; there were rules and curfews before they left for their jobs. I was careful to follow the rules to avoid consequences. My father's philosophy during the early sixties was that life doesn't owe you anything; you work for everything. His expectations consisted of respecting authority, family chores, and attending school and completing your homework. Outside of my responsibilities of our home, I always found the means to earn money starting at the age of nine; I was babysitting, cleaning homes, or selling candy. Later, I was employed by the Job-Training-Partnership Act (JTPA), a federally funded program for inner-city youth to earn money learning unskilled jobs in the community.

I was bored with the constant demands and lack of effort by my peers, and furthered my life experiences through team sports and employment. Upon graduating from high school at 17, I applied to a private nursing school in Clay County Missouri and was accepted. I completed a half-semester of college, and I decided to leave behind struggle, discontent, and ridicule at the age of eighteen to get married. My future husband was enlisted in the United States Army, in the Republic of Panama. I flew to Panama by way of TWA, compliments to my mother who remained employed by TWA for thirty-two years. During my time in Panama, I obtained my international driver's license and drove around the Isthmus of Panama without incident. I involved myself with different social clubs. I remained abroad for two years before returning home because we were expecting our first child.

My husband remained in Panama for an additional six months before transferring to a Colorado base. I left Kansas City, Missouri to follow him to

Colorado. I was immediately employed in the health care field for four years before I became interested in criminal justice. Upon transferring to the criminal justice field, I was twenty-six years old. At this time, we had two daughters, who were six and three at the time. My introduction into criminal justice was welcoming and pleasant until I violated their trust by reporting their abuses toward me.

The condition of my work environment began to change caused by the manifestation of physical assaults, micro-aggressions and isolation of which was difficult to understand. Hartling and Sparks (2008) found that there are workplace cultures that maintain oppression by the use of “ rigid systems of dominant-subordinate, power over relationships sustained by covert or overt efforts to shame, blame, silence, or isolate subordinates who question the power-holders or the power structure” (p. 170). For example, my duty station consisted of being secluded in an enclosed, glass room for an eight-hour shift. I was responsible for the operations of all movement of persons throughout the facility. I was located in this room that was approximately 25-feet in length for eight hours with the exception of a 30-minute break and one fifteen-minute break. At times, I was forgotten by the relief staff when I inquired about taking a break. Other times, I was relocated to process visitors and man a phone system during peak business hours; whereas, other female employees were allowed additional support. My perceptions became self-absorbed when I began to experience the dramatic effects of psychological and physiological pain due to my isolation. Hoge, Austin, and Pollack (2006) conceptualized the characteristic of a manifestation of resilience, “ as representing the presence or absence of an individual’s

ability to garner a critical resource to buffer the impact of traumatic stress" (p. 142).

The pain throughout my body and mind was so incessant each time I arrived to the work place, and upon leaving, causing me great distress. I sought conventional ways to ameliorate my pain. It is through the discourse of many classes and therapy that I sought to understand the meaning of my resilience to survive a workplace that silenced me from myself and others. An autobiographical narrative will allow my voice to be heard in an effort to encourage research on work experiences encountered by professional Black women. Whaley (2009) argues that " Without such professional gate keeping, the scientific literature will continue to promote racial stereotypes instead of sound scientific analyses that accurately reflect people's strengths, struggles and needs" (p. 493). Merriam (2009) acknowledges through the connection of narratives, " stories are becoming the source of understanding and the meaning of human experience" (p. 32). Moreover, Merriam (2009) cites Jonassen and Hernandez-Serrano (2002) in her study that narratives and stories are " the oldest and most natural form of sense making" (p. 32).

Stories have traditionally been a sacred means of communicating within Black peoples' culture. However, in contrast, today, traditional stories of professional black women have been shoved to the side. Black women are rarely cited in research journals perhaps because for so long they have been pathologized as being ' very angry or defensive' according to society's stereotype. In some respects, labeling a Black woman in the workplace is predicated by society's emerging stereotypical images of a Black woman.

Harris-Lacewell (2001) cites Trudier Harris (1996), a literary critic, who arguably admits black writers define the lived experiences of black women through the epitome of her virtuous strength “. . . the one unassailable characteristic they could apply to black women” (p. 5). Her strength is vilified as being the stereotype of the black woman being more superhuman than human (Harris, 1996) to usurp formidable obstacles that face her (Harris-Lacewell, 2001, p. 6). This stereotype is replete with guilt and shame (Harris-Lacewell) because Boyd’s (1995) premise is that “ Being strong all the time is a burden that doesn’t leave us much room to be human” (as cited in Harris-Lacewell, p. 9). Yet, this “ unique vigor” is recognized by some powerful leaders, both black and white, who perpetuate what Michelle Wallace (1990) terms in her book as a tone of “ emasculating and overbearing” (as cited in Harris-Lacewell, 2001, p. 7) attitudes. The stereotypes listed below in Table 1 are consolidated into a table based upon some typical assertions about stereotypes of black women in today’s workplace.

Stereotypes of Black Women’s Images in the Workplace

Source: Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison, 2008, Pp. 135-144.

Whaley (2009) warns that stereotypes are a significant threat to scientific advancements in the study of African Americans. Stereotypes significantly impair relationships of the Black woman to her work environment, her home, the community, or while in the care of her doctor. I observe myself in the workplace as a superwoman. A particular response from Others’ perceptions is reflected in the attitude or belief that

. . . Black professional women are viewed as Superwomen (emphasis added) who can do it all, coworkers and supervisors expect just that—that they can do it all. Quite frequently, Black women are placed in unchartered territories when it comes to corporate America, being the first or one of the few Black women in a certain position or department could be a very lonely experience (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008, p. 143).

A Black woman may become frustrated and distressed by micro-aggressive behaviors, thus shaping the maltreatment towards her. Russell (1998) describes micro-aggression as being “ publicly corrected or [noticeable] that a white person never makes proper eye contact when speaking to them, feels deliberately ignored or excluded from normal pleasantries” (as cited in Alleyne, 2004, p. 31). The Black woman draws upon Black American Women’s cultural variations: “ Survival, Coping, Arts/Creativity, Emotionally Expressive, Social Economics, Somatic Symptoms, and Aesthetics” (Jackson, 2009) from her internal reserves of knowledge, strength, and courage in a response to the challenges that are an affront to her character. The cultural variations reinforce her resilience to micro-aggressive behaviors.

Jordan (2001) founded Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) in response to “ the evidence that women were being misunderstood and misrepresented by traditional psychodynamic models” (p. 94). Hartling (2008) defines Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) as the “ ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in response to hardships, adversities, trauma, and alienating social/cultural practices” (p. 56). As evidenced by the research of Chin, De Cancela, and Jenkins (1993)

. . . Chronic disconnection is destructive, more especially at a societal level,

people are forced by judgments, prejudice, and bias from more powerful others into inauthentic connection or are allowed to bring only certain parts of themselves into connection or often they are silenced. (p. 96)

RCT focuses on supporting an individual through building and rebuilding one's capacity for growth-fostering relationships that affect capacity, especially imposed by oppressive social systems . . . and how profoundly racial/ethnic identity issues affect relational possibilities (Jordan, 2010, p. 30).

The RCT model acknowledges that " Isolation is seen as the primary source of human suffering" (Jordan, 2008, p. 241). Miller and Stiver (1997) note that chronic disconnection is accompanied by a drop in energy, lack of clarity, withdrawal from social engagement, feelings of depression, and lower levels of creativity. Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) is a conceptual model that supports narrative inquiry by respecting the story and its connections and patterns in my character that manifested tendencies or patterns of relationships into my adulthood. At the same time, RCT allowed me to synthesize parts of my childhood and professional life to understand what relational expectations I held that compromised my value in my relationships in several professional settings.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the need and the intention to understand the Black woman, there is a dearth of research available on understanding her from a workplace perspective. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) also support this observation, citing that

. . . The existing research on Black women's experiences of racial or gender bias tends to be characterized by a small number of research participants, often a few dozen women; a research sample that represents a particular segment of the Black female population, for example, Black female college students or Black female managers; and samples that are geographically limited, often restricted to one or two colleges, a handful of workplaces, or one metropolitan area (p. 5).

Utilizing an autobiographical narrative to tell a Black woman's story is a way to explore the meaning of the will to survive in a psychologically toxic work environment. Hughes and Dodge (1997) assert that because " researchers have rarely examined comprehensively how the occupational conditions that African American women encounter affect them" (p. 584). From stories, an interest may pique for researchers and clinicians to study Black women's resiliency in the workplace. In addition, I want to provide resources on the different ways people make sense of their experience in the hope that " it is our stories that will save our lives" (Williams, 2008, p. 33).

My intent is to inform and educate Black women and all women about my painful work experience conditions and how I transcended the challenges. I became hypersensitive to the environment's cues that I did not belong there. I was intentionally isolated and became defensive as accusations echoed in the air that I had " successfully isolated myself and no one wanted to work with me." To hear that I had been rejected by my peers was emotionally overwhelming as the hostility spread in my work environment. I took on a stalwart worldview no less of what Harris (1996) prescribes to black women, ". . . swallow our pain, gird their loins against trouble, and persist in spite of

adversity" (as cited in Harris-Lacewell, 2001, p. 7). But, I began to lose control of my sense of self. Feeling vulnerable from rejection, my frustration grew because I believed I had a lack of skills to change my feelings of persecution. I reflect on the statement, " It is your fault for their reactions to you." In response, I initiated my campaign to find out what and who I was. In 1835, Charles Darwin, stated that " it is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change" (as cited in Williams, 2008, p. 266). Miller argued that " we undergo our most profound change and grow most deeply when we encounter difference and work on conflict or differences in connection" (as cited in Jordan, 2010, p. 4). Making meaning of and understanding what emerging themes are revealing about the change and growth from my relationships that were caused by my resiliency from my lived experience is necessary for me to sustain connections.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this autobiographical narrative as a Black woman is to offer my voice and to share my experience of being silenced within the workplace. Jordan (2010) presents that RCT acknowledges the many voices of women and men as they are shaped not only by early caretakers, but also by sociopolitical, racial, cultural, sexual, and economic contexts. This delineation typifies the acceptance of the many voices of women which " brought a phenomenological focus to the experience of women whose voices had been historically marginalized from the mainstream" (Jordan, p. 12). The literature is responsive to workplace issues; however, there continues to be a

lack of research to understand the individual Black woman in her work environment. Jordan developed Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) as a means to re-establish “ human connection and relationships” (p. 1) that were damaged by “ chronic disconnections” (p. 5). Chronic disconnections are the source of what most people call pathology. Furthermore, chronic disconnections result from repeatedly encountering non-empathic responses which include: humiliations, violations, abuse, and emotional neglect created by stratified social organization and marginalization (Jordan, 2010, p. 5). Jordan (2010) cites that “ Few clinical theories have paid attention to the suffering caused by existing societal power arrangements” (p. 6). The affect of women suffering is leading to a manifestation of physiological problems. For example, Doyal (1995) also found that medical researchers are reporting that there is an increase in the incidence of black-related health issues that continue to outnumber other racial groups and women. In Mate’s (2003) book, When the Body Says No: Understanding the Stress-disease connection, he cites Joann Peterson, director of education at Personal Development Seminars, a holistic healing and psychological growth centre, from her observation that “ We experience life through our bodies. If we are not able to articulate our life experience, our bodies speak what our minds and mouths cannot” (p. 277).

Consequently, the current research fails to recognize the correlation between a Black woman’s silence and the medical crisis of insidious hypertension, diabetes, and breast cancer. Cheryl D. Fryar, a health statistician for the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated, “ The CDC survey doesn’t attempt to learn the reason why the

incidence of these major risk factors is so high." In addition, this autobiographical narrative aspires to reveal a hidden reality of the manifestations that a psychologically toxic workplace has on a Black woman's physiological, psychological and spiritual nature.

An interesting precept to the overall importance of connections and relationships is how the brain responds to isolation. According to Jordan (2008) " Isolation is seen as the primary source of human suffering" (p. 241). Consequently, isolation changes the brain, " while hurtful and abusive relationships shape the brain in such a way that the orbito-frontal cortex fails to function effectively to create adaptive social functioning" (Jordan, 2010, p. 21). Eisenberger and Lieberman (2003) conclude from their study on the brain that " social pain, exclusion, and the anticipation of exclusion register in the same area of the brain as physical pain, the anterior cingulate (ACC)" (as cited in Jordan, 2010, p. 74). Jordan (2010) asserts that " The anterior cingulate is concentrated with Opioid receptors in the entire central nervous system; the receptors release Opioids upon social contact, decreasing both physical and social pain" (p. 74). The assumption can be made that the body and its neural networks are the connections to human relationships.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it contributes to the knowledge of an unspoken class of women who remain silent and emotionally hurting from oppression, disconnections, and isolation from homo-racial prejudice, stereotypes and micro-aggression in the workplace. Hearing my story, women may begin to reclaim their voice and speak to help heal themselves

and other women who suffer in the workplace in silence. This study is important where there are relationships between women and women, and men and women who participate in dominant systems where social injustice plays a role in the workplace to silence and isolate the culture through disconnections. This study can assist women from the Black women to other Women of Color to White women, thereby adding new information points to one avenue of viewing Black women and women in a more positive and empowering light.

Research Questions

Research questions were formulated based on the problem, purpose, and significance of my study. The purpose of my study was for meaning making and understanding through an autobiographical narrative inquiry of my phases of life during childhood into adulthood as they were related to (a) understanding the meaning of resiliency that shaped me to overcome a physiologically and psychologically toxic workplace and (b) resiliency's alignment with Relational-Cultural Theory caused by posttraumatic growth.

The two research questions are listed below.

- What disconnections supported me when I experienced condemned isolation in the workplace?
- How did isolation play a role in my survival from the physiological, psychological and spiritual pain, thus affecting my connections in relationships?

Assumptions

The lived experiences of Black women's resiliency to survive is an assumption that few Black women have a problem, because they have always adapted to the realities of stress, oppression, and miraculously found a way out of their difficulties. But, does she truly shake off her adversity and move on without looking back? In the case of Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou they did not. The assumption that they are strong, Black women and have made it does not resonate with them. For example, Oprah Winfrey is a woman who overcame poverty, abuse, and feelings of worthlessness to become one of this country's most influential, powerful, woman executive. Maya Angelou overcame childhood sexual abuse and muteness to become a commanding author and lecturer. They gave back to all women through their voices by telling their story.

What about the other assumptions of famous Black women singers whose expressions through their words in soulful, sultry tunes is reminiscent of lived experiences as a mother or daughter releasing their mental torment and sadness from abuse, rejection, infidelities, and betrayal so they are able to heal. Yet, some do not heal and they suffer in silence. Phyllis Hyman, a notable Rhythm and Blues singer, suffered and committed suicide in 1995; she left a suicide note stating, " I'm tired, I'm tired." I have been emotionally tired and was encouraged to survive despite the emotional turmoil in the workplace.

My autobiographical narrative is based on three assumptions. The first assumption was that at least three themes of resiliency would emerge from my story. A second assumption is I would be able to give an oral interview

about my story without bias. The final assumption was that I could remain focused on my oral interview and give accounts of resiliency without digressing to distracters.

Delimitations and Limitations

My study was delimited to a sample of one Black female who is the researcher and the participant. Another delimitation of my study is that I knew that I would initially write my story; however, later, I provided a taped, semi-structured oral interview in the presence of a white male who is a colleague. The counter-transference of my emotional intensity increased while in the presence of this white male, which caused me to protect my vulnerability to preclude being a stereotype.

A limitation of my autobiographical narrative was my bias because I knew my story. I did not prepare my thoughts for the oral interview to ensure the enriching context and my soulful delivery. I left some areas out of my oral interview, not for censuring, but because of the overwhelming intense emotions that I encountered re-telling my story.

Definition of Terms

- Microaggression is defined by Sue, Copodupulo, Torino, Bucceri, Holden, Nadal, & Esquilin (2007) as: “ brief and commonplace daily, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group” (as cited in Hernandez, Almeida, and Carranza, 2010, p. 203).

- The term Black represents my experience in the social class, economics, and education for black people during my childhood. The word Black connotes an enigma to her beauty, empowerment, soulfulness and vibrancy.
- Disconnections: “ usually involves disappointment, a sense of being misunderstood, and sometimes a sense of danger, violation, and/or impasse. Disconnections may be acute, chronic, or traumatic” (Jordan, 2010, p. 103).
- Resiliency: the ability to overcome adversity; Grothberg (2003) resiliency is transformative—once changes his or her personality to better persevere through future encounters with hardship (cited in Christman & McClellan, 2008).
- Authenticity: The capacity to bring one’s real experience, feelings, and thoughts into relationship, with sensitivity and awareness to the possible impact on others of one’s actions (Jordon, 2010, p. 101).

Review of Literature

Chapter II

A review of the literature and related research is provided to substantiate the purpose of my study. My study is related to (a) understanding the meaning of resiliency that shaped me to overcome a physiologically and psychologically toxic workplace and (b) resiliency’s alignment with Relational-Cultural Theory caused by posttraumatic growth. My review of the literature is divided into four sections. The first section, subtitled the phenomenon of resiliency, is the theoretical framework and the purpose of my study. The phenomenon of resiliency was constructed by definitions. The second section consists of cultivating resiliency. Thirdly, this section presents

themes of resiliency. Lastly, related research of the phenomenon of resiliency is presented in Table 1, The Black Woman's Matrix of Resiliency (Jackson, 2009). A summary concludes the review of literature.

Phenomenon of Resiliency

Resiliency is a derivative of resilience. Resilience is from the Latin word resiliens meaning " to rebound, recoil" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2010). Moreover, resilience is defined in concepts that are characteristics of strength, flexibility, a capacity for mastery, and resumption of normal functioning after excessive stress that challenges individual coping skills (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Richardson, 2002, as cited in Agaibi & Wilson, 2005, p. 197). On the other hand, Richardson (2002) discovered resiliency as a dynamic, paradigm shift based on the conceptualization of resiliency theory. Richardson (2002) described resiliency theory as the " motivational force within everyone that drives them to pursue wisdom, self-actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength" (p. 309).

Lightsey (2006) proposes an argument that the resilience literature by definition is " very general" " varied and problematic" (p. 98); descriptive and tautologous and seems to lack both a unifying theoretical framework and consistent or operational definition of resilience (Kaplan, 2005, Friedman, 2005; Naglieri & LeBuffe, 2005; Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005; as cited in Lightsey, 2006 pg. 99). For example, Lightsey (2006) cites researchers Masten, Best, and Garmezy's definition of resilience as " the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or

threatening circumstances" (p. 99); authors " construed resilience as a personal trait or attribute; or ongoing developmental process . . ."; or Brooks (2005) defined resilience as " the capacity of a child to deal effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to rebound . . . " (Lightsey, 2006, p. 99). The thrust of Lightsey's argument is that psychological resilience be operationally defined as " strength awareness" (Smith, 2006) itself—" the belief that one can persevere or accomplish goal-relevant tasks across varied challenges and adverse situations" (as cited in Lightsey, 2006, p. 99).

Lightsey (2006) maintains that his operational definition of psychological resilience is " internally consistent (valid and reliable), reasonably consistent over time, and separable from other important constructs" such as problem-solving and coping skills, environmental supports, and stress; uniquely predict positive outcomes . . . and clear clinical relevance" (p. 100). Moreover, Lightsey adds that his definition of psychological resilience is empirically based and aligns with Beck's (1967) theory with respect to " negative schemata may exacerbate stressors, positive schemata or beliefs may attenuate the effects of stressors; Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) " stress-coping theory regarding environmental stress and their coping stratagems; and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy that predicts outcomes of coping with stress" (p. 100).

Cultivating Resiliency

Martin Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association (APA), stated, " Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage; it

is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best within ourselves" (Seligman, 1999, p. 1; as cited in Smith, 2006, p. 13). Richardson postulates that bio-psycho-spiritual homeostasis cultivates the posttraumatic growth. Grotberg (2003) expands this definition and argues that resiliency is transformative—that more than enduring adversity, one changes his or her personality to better persevere through future encounters with hardship.

Richardson (2002) discovered bio-psycho-spiritual homeostasis in his research when a resilient person has adopted an " adapted state" (cited in Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 8) that is endorsing psychological resiliency (Lightsey, 2006). Richardson seems to gain a perspective on effects of self-efficacy as the resilient person establishes pathways to " self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength" (p. 309). Despite the person's natural ability to seek understanding and meaning through the salient suffering to build their resiliency, they may encounter biological and physiological damage. The physiological impairment impacts the foundation for maintaining psychological resiliency. The exposure to violence and trauma, one may experience acute and chronic physiological responses. Bell (2001) acknowledges that traumatized children are noted to have: increased muscle tone, frequently a low-grade increase in temperature; increased startle response, profound sleep disturbances, affect regulations problems, and generalized, or specific anxiety and abnormalities in cardiovascular regulation. Moreover, Bell (2001) argues that prolonged, acute stress increases levels of glucocorticoid-hormones that mediates stress, have a significant effect on memory and under conditions of

prolonged stress eventually leads to cell death in the hippocampus. These are severe pathologies that compromise the homeostasis in the brain and overall health and well-being. Thus, it is imperative to cultivate psychological resiliency to sustain the variations and domains of resiliency. A domain relevant to Black women's psychological resiliency is shifting. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) use the principle shifting as opposed to resiliency. Shifting is a " subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival" (p. 6) in the workplace.

Shifting is inclusive to all of the ways African American women respond to and cope with racial and gender stereotypes, bias, and mistreatment . . . subconsciously, . . . And yet what may be virtually effortless can be costly physically, emotionally, and spiritually, severly [sic] compromising her health and well-being (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 62).

Survival is categorically synonymous with resiliency. In the context, " to fit in," the Black woman shifts her role or identity in the work culture by building disconnections because she has been shamed (Jordan, 2010, p. 26). The disconnections are associated with risks that exacerbate the physiological condition of a Black woman. Jordan (2008) said, " We need to connect to survive and thrive" (p. 240). Macklem (2005) symbolized " toxic workplaces by relentless demands, extreme pressure, and brutal ruthlessness" (Colligan & Higgins, 2006, p. 93). On the contrary, Narcisse's (2006) research implied that a Black woman's role was an " ideological construct of a superwoman as a coping mechanism and form of empowerment" (p. xv). A superwoman has " developed unique and creative coping strategies that demonstrate their active involvement in promoting

and maintaining health" (Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2004, p. 12).

In the workforce, Black women have demonstrated psychological resiliency in a hostile working environment. Research using non-traditional methods have had an oversight into what resiliency characteristics Black women utilize that has meaning and understanding to overcome adversity, traumas and disconnects in her workplace.

The psychology of Black women has gotten short shrift in the national discourse, mostly due to indifference and the same racial and gender prejudice that shadows Black women's lives. . . The rates of hypertension, depression . . . among African American women have reached crisis proportions. Understanding the pressures Black women live with, and the compromises that they make mentally, emotionally, and physically, is of utmost importance (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 5).

Doyal's (1995) research asserts that " illness is feared not just for its physical consequences but also because of the distress—the pain, fear, anxiety and depression—it can engender" (p. 8). Burrell (2010) points out his disappointment with our steadfastness because

. . . much of our reluctance to face up to our health issues is based on fear—historical race based medical atrocities, fear of discovering a disease we can't afford to treat, or fear of what others might think if we reveal that we suffer from certain diseaseswon't see the doctor" (p. 123).

Arguably, Dr. Henry McCurtis, Practitioner of Addiction Psychiatry and Psychiatry in New York City has been perplexed by the use of medications and its symbolism for the Black patient's medicine cabinet.

African Americans . . . [are] less likely to report symptoms of sadness, fear,

or worry . . . talk about bodily complaints . . . The medicine cabinet becomes the secret indicator of pain, and trips to the doctor take the place of an appointment with a sympathetic therapist who might help relieve the stress that's causing all of these symptoms in the first place! (as cited in Williams, 2008, p. 269).

Doyal (1995) posits that the first and most immediate human need is to survive and be physically healthy. " Being resilient to a toxic workplace took its toll on my overall being, of which obstructed my professional life and impacted my connections with others in the workplace" (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008, p. 130).

Themes of Resiliency

Baranczyk (2007) constructed a compilation of themes of resiliency the " process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress . . . It means " bouncing back" from difficult experiences" (American Psychological Association (APA), 2002, p. 2); " a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma" (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858); " a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten, 2001, p. 228); the " human capacity to deal with, overcome, learn from, or even be transformed by the inevitable adversities of life" (Grotberg, 2003, p. 1); the human capacity to persevere " despite exposure to significant risk factors, show(ing) few or no signs of developmental impairment" (Hauser & Bowlds, 1990). Resiliency originated from a longitudinal study of children's autonomy and

self-esteem (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Werner &Smith, 1982, 1992). Masten (1990) posits that resiliency can be altered when circumstances change. For example, “ In the mother-child relationship . . . how we respond to acute disconnections determines either resilience or movement into chronic disconnection which literally alters brain structure, which in turn leads to more disconnection” (Jordan, 2008, p. 244). Taylor (2009) presented that development is based on the premise that adults develop resiliency over a lifetime through their relationships with their environment and social customs. An ecology perspective is based on adult development from psychological resiliency and their adaption to accept the challenges to cope with external processes.

The resiliency factors are significant, especially during childhood development. However, there remains a consistent under-current in the psychology discipline that expresses concern that “ few empirical studies have investigated the process of resilience among urban youth” (Luther, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993). Similarly, Garmezy (1991) expresses concern that researchers have ignored investigations of resilience in ethnic minority groups. Barbarin, (1993) and, Myers and Taylor (1998) concur that research is limited; little is understood about the nature of conditions and competencies that enable youths of color to resist palpably adverse circumstances. Myers and Taylor, also proclaim that something is phenomenally maintaining a balance for those youth who escaped the chasms of deprivation. Maxwell (2000) noted that living through experiences “ in life breeds resilience like adversity and failure” (p. 115).

Fundamental questions were asked by the following researchers to

understand what protective factors make certain individuals resilient: Carver (1998) asks, “ What enables people to overcome adversity?”; and, Van Breda (2001) asks, “ How is it, when several people are exposed to the same stressor that some of them break down while others remain healthy or even thrive?” Carver (1998) argues that the following constructs - “ self-mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), hopelessness (Beck, Weisman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974), hardiness (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982), hope (Snyder, 1994; Snyder et al., 1991), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) - relate to continuing efforts versus giving up, . . . There is evidence that each of these predicts resilience” (p. 261).

The relationships discovered from this study proved to be a useful tool for interpreting the themes in childhood through the professional adulthood. Being resilient necessitates survival from disadvantages and challenges, as well as adaptation for opportunities. The concept of survival through suffering is a phenomenon of resiliency. Jordan (2008) developed the construct of “ re-conceptualization of resilience” that is beyond the “ internal value of hope” and what has been called “ being blessed” (p. 52). Jordan developed this new paradigm to describe the phenomena of resilience among women.

Jordan’s research led to a renewed understanding of the function of resilience as promoted in the “ Relational-Cultural Theory” (RCT) (Hartling, 2008, p. 54). RCT provides a foundation for the strength of being resilient through positive relationships. I respect the legendary Black women who “ are able to stay centered and keep their shifting within bounds, navigating the waters of adversity resourcefully” (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 63).

The risk of succumbing to pills or anger is realistic if the perception signifies the need of relief from the chronic fear and shame. However, the fight by a Black woman is met by a principle to fight to survive. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) identified when a Black woman says she has to fight; termed, “ Blackspeak”, used by so many Black women to express themselves. Blackspeak “ is closely tied to both their personal and their cultural identity” (p. 99). To explore the ways “ Blackspeak” is observed by other Black women, Marsha Houston, professor and chair of the Communications Department at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, conducted a study that asked 134 Black, middle-class, professional women and college students to write what Black women’s talk was to them. Houston’s findings identified three emergent themes in Black women’s speech.

First, wisdom; Second, Black women’s speech is tough, direct, and candid. Third, warmth, sensitivity, and caring that imbue Black women’s talk (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 101).

Notwithstanding the needs of Black women to connect to their work environment, they may operate consistently in fear, in paranoia, and in increased anxiety, in response to racial and gender bias, or they may fight back. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) underscore their concept “ For many African Americans, fighting back is a deeply meaningful coping strategy-a proactive form of shifting” (p. 87). Karasek & Theorell (1990), and Mausner-Dorsch & Eaton (2000) revealed that the appraisal of the threat or harm that arises from both high work demands and over-controlling/harassing environments have been found to be most often stress producing (as cited in

Colligan & Higgins, 2006, p. 93). Ann Masten (2001), a positive psychologist, has studied resiliency and its qualities that emit the balance of " everyday skills and psychological strengths" and denoted resiliency as being " from everyday magic of ordinary, normative resources and has profound implications for promoting competence and human capital in individuals and society" (as cited in Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007, p. 112).

The Black Woman's Matrix of Resiliency

Making meaning through suffering is a qualitative, epistemological phenomenon. The matrix conceptualizes the oak tree that is symbolic to the resiliency of withstanding all elements of hostility. The ability to see the eyes as the archetype within the spiritual core of the black woman's strength is symbolic to transforming through silence. Sometimes the eyes are seen and unseen to unsuspecting persons in authority who abuse her because of silence. The eyes also represent an emotional energy of momentum to reverberate vibrancy from the Black woman's pain to renew her strength and see her pathways spiritually clear. Black women shared experiences in the workplace manifest her strength to survive where subtle and unexpected attacks occur because of micro-aggressions and stereotypes. The deleterious effects on her mental and physical health are meaningful as decay to her overall system to survive the posttraumatic growth from her trauma. It is through her discovery of herself in sickness that she conceptualizes Frankl's existential meaning making. Often overlooked is a Black woman's resiliency characterized as a phenomenological sublimination of her identity in a meaningful workplace. The multiple processes in the matrix symbolize her

strengths through resiliency and suffering for her ultimate sacrifice. Searching for bio-psycho-spiritual homeostasis through Buddhist scriptures, she may encounter other forms of experiences because of the need to discover her life's purpose through being resilient.

Ref. Jackson, 2009.