

African American Female Superintendents: Resilient School Leader

Bernadeia H. Johnson
Minnesota State University

Six African American female superintendents who had served as superintendents in at least 2 school districts were interviewed to understand ways in which they responded to barriers and adversity in their roles, with a particular emphasis on issues related to sexism and racism. Study participants shared that they work to engage the community and build relationships with stakeholders. They also reported being courageous and clear in defining where they would take a stand. This required knowing who they are and being true to personal values and ethics while striving to achieve work-life balance. These African American female superintendents reported having strong religious faith and benefitting from the love, support, and encouragement of parents, family, and friends.

Keywords: African American female superintendents, resilience, sexism, racism

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), a noticeable difference exists between the number of male and female superintendents in the United States. While the position of superintendent has been often studied, only recently have researchers started to include the experiences of women (Blount, 1998; Gewertz, 2006). Despite the lack of knowledge regarding the experiences of female superintendents, there is an even greater paucity of research specifically regarding the experiences of African American women in the superintendent role (Alston, 2005).

It is most common to find a White male in the role of superintendent, and their career is more likely to follow the normative path described in conventional studies (Glass, 1992). A growing body of literature showcases the “powerful (although largely invisible) influences within the educational system, the administrator profession, and society reflect and reinforce long-standing tradition of Caucasian male leadership of American Institutions” (Tallerico, 2000a, pp. 84). White, non-Hispanic workers will continue to remain the overwhelming majority in the Superintendent workforce, with White males holding almost 90% of positions in management, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Statistics such as these and the literature highlight the issues concerning intersectionality of race and gender in our culture (Bailey, 1998; Green, 1998).

According to Shakeshaft (1989), the fact that more women are reaching the top leadership position in school districts can be tied to a shift in the modern women’s movement. The feminist movement sparked conversations concerning the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. The evolution of women’s expansion into educational leadership positions was a byproduct of increased activism by women’s professional organizations. (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 646).

Superintendents across the state and the country are faced with multiple challenges, including improving student achievement, closing the achievement gap, collaborating with external partners, managing day-to-day crises, and maintaining strong financial and operations management. Wong and Jain (1999) found that these challenges lead to a continuous lack of resources and a loss of public confidence.

African Americans and members of other minority groups may experience aggrandized difficulties in their positions as superintendents in urban school districts due to: (a) competing with other districts in attracting and retaining qualified and experienced teachers, (b) experiencing teacher shortages, (c) and lacking access to instructional materials and tools for student success. Brunner (2000) stated that women have two battles: one for children and one for themselves. How these superintendents manage such additional complex challenges and how they develop the confidence to weather such storms is related to their ability to be resilient.

Resiliency

According to Saleebey (2002), resiliency refers to the practice of operating with a strength perspective, which stresses the capabilities, assets, and positive attributes of human beings rather than their weaknesses or pathologies. The study of resiliency dates back to the 1940s and 1950s during a period with a dominant focus on mental disorders. Most of the early research on resilience focused on children and adolescents and the various coping strategies they use to survive risk factors (e.g., poverty & family dysfunction).

Patterson and Kelleher's (2005) dimensions of resiliency serves as a comprehensive framework applied education with regards to understanding how school superintendents perceive their job experiences from a resiliency perspective. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) identify six dimensions of the resiliency cycle: (1) adversity strikes, (2) interpretation of adversity, (3) resilience capacity, (4) actions to achieve resilience, (5) successful outcomes, and (6) increased resilience capacity for future adversity. Other resiliency frameworks identified assist with distinguishing how resiliency affects one's life. Benard and Marshall (1997) developed the Framework for Tapping Natural Resilience based on their combined knowledge about the capacity of children and adults for healthy functioning. Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990), developed a resiliency model demonstrating that when stressors, adversity, and risks are present, individual and environmental protective factors can act as buffers.

Although most models define resilience and provide examples of "bouncing back" from difficult experiences, Patterson and Kelleher's (2005) model, aligns more closely to the study of Black female superintendents for several reasons. First, the model is based on the disciplines of various areas (psychology & sociology of organizations) and on their experience of serving in the same roles as the individuals in this study, from teacher to superintendent to university professor. Second, their interviews of educational leaders, including superintendents and school improvement leaders, provide the model with a practical application that is closely aligned to the role of the individuals who participated in this study.

Black Women in Educational Leadership

Much of the literature on educational leadership has neither recognized nor included women. Of note, (Glass, 2000). Women make up less than 50 percent of doctoral students, and only 10% of women also get their superintendent's license. Likewise, the bulk of the literature continues to overlook women of color. School administration and leadership literature continue to be "male dominated and male defined ... , conceptualized and seen through the eyes of males" (Mertz & McNeely, 1998, p. 196).

According to Brown (2005), the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision played a major role in increasing the underrepresentation of African Americans in school administration. According to Brown (2005), following the Brown decision, "within a 3-year period from 1967–1970 Black principals in North Carolina decreased from 670 to 170, in Alabama from 250–40, and in Louisiana in the period of 1966 to 1971, the number of Black principals decreased from 512 to 363" (p. 586). This was due to Black schools closing. These principals did not gain assignments in integrated schools.

America's schools have become increasingly diverse, with several schools in large urban districts having a majority enrollment of African American students. This diversity in student population has drawn greater attention to the number of African American school and district leaders (Brown, 2005). Foster

suggested that there is a lack of African American leaders that can be linked to a shortage of African American teachers in the leadership pipeline, the rate of recruitment and retention of African Americans into leadership preparation programs, and the eventual appointment of African Americans to leadership positions (2004). The majority of African American leaders are employed in large urban districts where challenges such as lack of resources, underfunding, teacher certification, and student achievement are constant challenges. These challenges ultimately affect performance evaluations and tenure of African American leaders. Therefore, it is critical that programs balance theory with practical experiences to prepare individuals for the realities of leadership positions (Brown, 2005).

Black women leaders have defined leadership not only as a service to a school or an institution, but also as involvement in social change. Historically, Black women took on roles as community activists, public speakers, and civil and women rights' advocates. Black women have been the stabilizing and consistent force in communities (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Porter reported that The Ohio Literary Ladies Society "probably did more toward the establishment of schools for Black children than any other group of the time" (Giddings, 1984, p. 49). During the latter part of the 18th century, schools were led and operated by African American leaders. These institutions—like Selma University, founded in 1878 and attended by this author's grandmother—created a mass movement in education leadership and reinforced the theme of freedom and the importance of education to sustaining freedom (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

The establishment of organizations like the National Council of Negro Women and the Black Women's Baptist Convention focused on education as the foundation to uplift the race. According to Bennett (1988), Nannie Helen Burroughs' commitment to altering the condition of women echoed that of many Black women educators of the period, illustrating the camaraderie and cooperation among Black women leaders, who were "working closely together on a national basis, diffusing their energies among the National Association for Colored Women, the International Council of Women for the Darker Races, the National Association of Wage Earners, and various Republican leagues and other organizations" (p. 103).

There continues to be a lack of research on women and people of color by scholars and researchers of leadership. Current theorists' treatment of Black women in research is inadequate and gives a mere nod to their existence, which leads to a "deficiency in understanding leadership from the perspective of diverse cultural groups who fight for an equity society" (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 606).

Black Women in the Superintendency

The opportunities for Black women to become superintendents prior to 1956 were limited (Revere, 1987). What representation did exist was "sparse and concentrated in predominantly southern states where districts served African American populations exclusively or primarily" (Kowalski, 2006, p. 321). Though clear documentation does not exist on Black women in the superintendency prior to 1956, Revere (1987) revealed that Velma Dolphin Ashley (1944–1956) was likely the first Black woman superintendent in the country. Barbara Sizemore is recognized as the first Black woman to be appointed a principal—Chicago Public Schools, 1963—and later the first Black woman to lead a large urban school district—Washington, D.C., schools, 1972. By 1970, the number of Black women superintendents had increased to three with further increases noted in subsequent years: 11 Black women school superintendents in 1982, 15 in 1983, 29 in 1984, and 29 in 1999. More recent data presented by Coleman (2004) at the National Alliance of Black School Educators demonstrated that the number of Black women superintendents has increased, but not in proportion to the growth in the superintendency. According to Coleman, Collins, and Harrison-Williams (2004), Black women represent 114 of the approximately 15,000 superintendents in the country with Mississippi having the largest number at 13 and Illinois the second largest number at 11. Table 1 presents the key questions and focused areas that, according to Patterson and Kelleher (2005, pp. 19–20), affect people's optimism.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Efforts of Black women to ascend to and remain in the top leadership position in school districts have been fraught with challenges. African American female superintendents lead a small fraction of the nation's

approximately 14,000 school districts. White males continue to hold 80% of the top leadership positions, women hold 15% of the positions, and only 5% of these positions are held by male or female minorities of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Gewertz, 2006). Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) reported that racial minorities made up 2.2% of all U.S. superintendents in 1981–1982. This percentage increased to 3.5% between 1992 and 1993 and to about 5% (2% African American, 2% Hispanic, 1% American Indian, and less than half of 1% Asian or Pacific Islander) in 1998. According to the American Association of School Administrators (2007), the racial distribution is 93.8% White and 6.2% other ethnicities.

African American female superintendents report having to constantly prove themselves capable while also grappling with negative assumptions, both of which make holding the top leadership role difficult. Barbara Byrd-Bennett, former superintendent of the Cleveland Ohio School District, describes the challenges: “I’ve always had to make sure that at every moment, I’m at the top of my game... at every meeting, I feel as if I’m going into the courtroom prosecuting or defending someone, and I’d better have an airtight case” (Gewertz, 2006, p. 1). The departure of top female superintendents in Minneapolis, Cleveland, and San Francisco in the last decade should serve as a forewarning to African American women who are interested in becoming superintendents along with institutions that prepare individuals who aspire to become superintendents. However, there will be challenges to prepare for. According to McCabe and Dobbertein (1998), knowledge of the role of superintendent as experienced by women, as well as the satisfaction and problems associated with serving as superintendent, can assist women in determining whether their aspirations should include becoming a superintendent of schools.

McCabe and Dobbertein (1998) investigated the perception of 270 female superintendents regarding the role of superintendents of schools by asking them survey questions concerning possible career constraints. Respondents identified the following constraints: (a) the superintendent’s role is still considered masculine, (b) career expectations are affected by societal gender roles, (c) career expectations are affected by family routines and practices, and (d) stereotypical gender-related attitudes and behaviors are still expected (p. 2). Alston’s (2005) research identified constraints that Black female administrators encounter en route to the superintendency. She identified the following constraints: (a) absence of networking and support systems, and (b) absence of knowledge of internal organizational structure and few role models from whom to gain such knowledge.

Until recently, little attention has been given to the perspective of females and people of color in research on educational leadership (Banks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Disagreement among educators and scholars continues regarding the impact that race and gender have on the superintendency. In a survey of school administrators, Glass (2000a) found that most female superintendents believe that gender is a barrier to attaining the superintendency; however, the same survey reported that nearly 93% of the females in the study were rated either “good” or “excellent” by their school boards. In Alston’s (1999) study of Black female superintendents, participants did not perceive race and gender as major obstacles to the superintendency. This supports Talerico’s (2000b) assertion that the historically disenfranchised see things differently than the historically privileged.

Though barriers exist, “the tenacity and resilience of those Black women who meet the challenges of the superintendency and are successful has not been studied extensively” (Alston, 2005, p. 676). Alston (2005) further suggested that research should answer the following questions: (a) What is it about these women that motivate them to remain in these leadership positions; and (b) What strategies do they draw on to develop the work with and against institutional sexism, racism, and apathy? (p. 677).

The Present Study

While “there is a small but growing knowledge base on women in educational administration, there is a paucity of research available on Blacks in the superintendency and even less on Black women in the superintendency” (Alston, 2005, p. 675). This lack of available research also extends to statistical information and demographic data. Tillman and Cochran (2000) called for the collection and maintenance of better demographic data to “accurately document the numbers of Black women and other underrepresented populations in the superintendency and other administrative roles” to conduct deeper analyses on progress in recruitment and retention in relation to other superintendents. Bell and Chase (1993)

were the first researchers in this area to provide disaggregated data to make short-term comparisons by both race/ethnicity and sex. Studies by Shakeshaft as well as Tyack and Hasot refer to the absence of gender and race as an intentional “conspiracy of silence” (1982).

According to Barritt (1986), the strongest rationale for a qualitative study is “heightening the awareness for experience that has been forgotten or overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice” (Creswell, 1998, p. 94). A review of the literature reveals that the few studies to date that have focused on the study of Black female superintendents have used qualitative inquiry and phenomenological theory.

The present study asked African American female superintendents to identify components of their leadership that make them resilient and to provide examples of how they sustain themselves in their work and directives on how to succeed. The study also should serve as a research-based resource for higher education institutions that are interested in developing and supporting African American female superintendents, as well as for school boards and leadership organizations committed to supporting success for African American women.

This study examined what it takes for African American female superintendents in K–12 public school systems to be resilient and grow stronger in the face of adversity. Specific research questions were:

1. In what ways do African American females respond to barriers and adversity in their role as superintendents?
2. What specific processes or strategies do African American female superintendents employ to overcome adversity? Racism and sexism?
3. How do African American female superintendents develop the confidence and resiliency to manage the complex challenges of their districts? And,
4. What motivates African American females to remain in the position of superintendent.

Significance of the Study

A recent historical event, the 2008 presidential election, which resulted in the appointment of the first African–American president of the United States, offered an illustration of the role that race and gender have had on individuals aspiring for top leadership positions. Female presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton’s primary election concession speech summarized the gender challenge:

It is now unremarkable for a woman to win primary state victories, unremarkable to have a woman in a close race to be our (presidential) nominee, unremarkable to think that a woman can be the President of the United States. And that is truly remarkable. (Clinton, 2008)

It is no longer remarkable that an African American woman can lead a school district. What is remarkable, however, is that numbers continue to be low despite a surge in the number of doctorates in education being awarded within that population (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2006). According to the Fall 2007 survey conducted by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 56% of doctorate degrees were awarded to Whites, 17% to internationals, 11% to Blacks, 7% to Asians, 5% to Hispanics, 1% to American Indian, 1% to other, and 2% unknown.

Concomitantly, gaps exist in the study of the superintendency. Immegart (1988) notes that little research involving real-life people and events has been conducted on this position of responsibility and importance (i.e., superintendent). Moreover, the existing research is likely to follow the normative careers of White males (Glass, 1992) rather than the unique experiences of Black women. These need to be studied independently (Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

METHODS

The present study utilized a qualitative research design that employed the use of interviews to explore the experiences and perspectives of African American female school superintendents regarding resiliency in the face of adversity. Qualitative methods allow for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena being studied and are not intended to result in the generalization of information to a population (Gall et al., 2003).

Research Questions

The methods employed were intentionally crafted to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do African American females respond to barriers and adversity in their role as superintendents?
2. What specific processes or strategies do African American female superintendents employ to overcome adversity? Racism and sexism?
3. How do African American female superintendents develop the confidence and resiliency to manage the complex challenges of their districts?
4. What motivates African American females to remain in the position of superintendent?

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

Creswell (1998) further posited qualitative inquiry as a legitimate mode of human and social science exploration that is unique to study design. Creswell (1998, p. 17) offers the following considerations to guide decisions about whether qualitative methods are an appropriate choice for particular study topics and questions:

1. *The nature of the research question.* Research questions often start with how or what, which also assist with describing occurrences over the course of the research.
2. *The topic needs to be explored.* Variables cannot be easily identified, theories are not available to explain the behavior of participants or their population of study, and theories need to be developed.
3. *The need to present a detailed view of the topic.* The wide-angle lens or the distant panoramic shot will not suffice to present answers to the problem, or the close-up view does not exist.
4. *The need to study individuals in their natural setting.* This involves going out into the field of study to gain access and gather materials.
5. *The interest in writing in a literary style.* The pronoun “I” is used as the writer engages in a storytelling form of narration.
6. *The amount of sufficient time and resources* to be spent on data collection and analysis.
7. *The audiences are receptive to qualitative research.* This includes graduate advisors to publication outlets and editors.
8. *The researcher’s role as an active learner* who can tell the story from the participants’ view rather than that as an “expert” who passes judgment on participants (pp. 17–18).

Several considerations hold particular relevance to the present study: (a) the nature of the research question—all of the research questions begins with *how* and *what*; (b) the amount of sufficient time and resources—all of the superintendents who participated in this study are busy school leaders and several of the interviews had to be rescheduled due to unexpected events; (c) the audiences are receptive to qualitative research—the experience of Black female superintendents is not a story that is being told, therefore, the

interest is widespread; (d) the researcher's role as an active learner—the ability to interview a group of individuals with experiences that are not often told becomes a learning experience for the researcher.

Sample

Sample sizes in qualitative studies are typically smaller than those in quantitative research. Purposeful sampling is often employed as it involves the intentional selection of participants who are likely to share rich information with respect to the study purpose (Patton, 2002). Creswell (1998) defines a target population as a “group of individuals with some common defining characteristics that the researcher can identify and study” (p. 145). The target population for this study was African American female school superintendents. The participants were selected to participate in this study based on their experience profile and relevance to the research problems and questions.

To identify qualifying participants, the Directory of African American Superintendents was obtained from the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), an organization known to have the most comprehensive list of African American superintendents. According to a presentation at the 2009 NABSE conference, African American female superintendents nationwide represent less than 1% of the total number of superintendents (Coleman et al., 2009). Specifically sought were African American female superintendents nationally who met the following qualifying characteristics considered for this study: African American women superintendents currently practicing in pre-K–12 school districts; and experience as superintendent in at least two separate school districts.

The study of African American female superintendents has the potential to provide an in-depth understanding of ways to respond to and rebound from adversity. It was expected that the population and sample for the study would be small due to the limited number of African American female superintendents, especially given the additional criterion of having served in two school districts as superintendents.

The researcher reviewed the directory and identified names of female origin as well as names that could be female or male (e.g., names with initials only or names that were gender-neutral). The district website for each of the potential study participants was accessed to determine whether the superintendent was female and was still in active employment. In the case of superintendents who were no longer at the district but were listed in the directory, a web search was conducted to determine the gender and active employment status of the superintendent. Of the 114 women on the NABSE list, 12 were identified as meeting the selection criteria and subsequently were invited to participate in the study.

The 12 African American female pre-K–12 superintendents who were identified as meeting the selection criteria for participation in the study were sent, by means of the U.S. Postal Service and email, a cover letter that described the purpose and significance of the study. A letter of informed consent also was sent. Eight of the 12 superintendents confirmed their desire to participate in the study. Interviews could be scheduled, however, with only 6 of the 8 consenting superintendents. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each study participant. Letters of informed consent were signed and returned to the researcher.

Participants

Twelve African American female superintendents of K–12 school districts in the United States met the criteria for this study—that is, they had served as superintendent in two school districts. Six of them completed interviews. Of the six who did not participate, two were no longer superintendents, one declined to participate due to district responsibilities, one was involved in a car accident and was on medical leave, and the latter two individuals had committed to participate in the study but ultimately did not. Due to the relatively small number of African American female superintendents in this country, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect her identity. To further protect participants from being identified, information on age, marital status, and other demographic and work history were not requested as a part of this study. Five of the six participants have doctoral degrees and one is a doctoral candidate.

According to Brown (2005), a majority of African American leaders are employed in large urban districts where challenges such as lack of resources, underfunding, teacher certification, and student achievement are constant. The African American female superintendents included in this study were from

a variety of settings that included urban, suburban, rural, and county school districts. Most of the districts led by the study participants were racially and economically diverse.

Instrumentation

Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit, “Interviews allow us to find out what is *in* and *on* someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 6 African American female superintendents. Patton (2002) identified three basic approaches for collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews: (a) the formal conversational interview, (b) the general interview guide approach, and (c) the standardized open-ended interview. According to Patton (2002), a general interview guide approach identifies “the questions or issues that will be explored during the interview,” and it ensures that “the interviewer has carefully decided how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation” (p. 343). For these reasons, the general interview guide approach was selected for use in this study.

Interviews yielded in-depth information that aided in developing an understanding of the experiences and views of African American female school superintendents, in particular ways they continue to be motivated to serve their communities. An interview protocol with questions created from themes identified in the literature review was used for interviews. The general areas of inquiry included: strengths, challenges, and resiliency. Prior to conducting the interviews with consenting participants, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with an African American female superintendent who was not participating in the study to confirm the functionality, feasibility, and ease of response for each question. Given the feedback provided by the pilot superintendent, more time was allotted for the interview so study participants could talk more informally at the end of the interview about topics not covered under the study, if they so desired. More time also was viewed as necessary to allow more probing, with an intentional focus on connections to race and gender on each of the relevant questions.

Data Collection

As mentioned previously, 12 African American female pre-K–12 superintendents met the selection criteria for participation in the study. Only 6 of the 12, however, were able to schedule a time for the interview.

Individual interviews were conducted with each of the 6 participants by means of Skype. At the beginning of each interview, the study participant was thanked for participating, provided information about the significance of the study, informed that the session was being taped, and reassured that information would be kept confidential. Each interview was disc-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Using the general interview guide described above, questions were asked in sequential order to aid in identifying themes from the data. Frequently, however, responses flowed in ways that varied from the original sequence but that were meaningful and connected for the respondent. When appropriate, probing questions were used to gain additional data that led to a deeper understanding of the information reported. At the end of each interview, study participants were asked if they had further questions about the study, including ways in which data would be organized, presented, and used. They were then thanked again for their time and participation. Each interview lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected each participant’s interview on a CD using Skype. Each study participant was assigned a pseudonym for anonymity. Verbatim transcripts from each interview were created, saved as a Microsoft Word document, and then imported into the qualitative software package QSR NUD*IST. Copies of each transcript were sent to each participant, inviting them to comment and make additions or other changes as they viewed appropriate. None of the participants responded to this invitation with either changes or concerns.

The researcher reviewed each transcript to gain a holistic understanding of each superintendent’s story to discern themes identified in the literature review. Additionally, they analyzed emergent themes related

to the resiliency framework and other relevant topics shared by the interviewee. Data were organized and analyzed with the aid of QSR NUD*IST. Nodes were created with themes identified in the research and across the six interviews. Topics included assets/strengths, challenges/barriers, resilience, and motivation. Data categorization assisted the researcher with analyzing responses within and across each interview. The analysis used descriptive writing to capture the emergent findings.

RESULTS

This chapter presents a comprehensive set of findings that resulted from interviews with African American female school superintendents. The purpose of the study was to examine resiliency in the context of the superintendency of African American females in K–12 public school systems. This study asked African American females to recall how they responded to barriers and adversity in their respective roles as superintendents. They discussed the processes and strategies employed to overcome institutional sexism and racism. Additional questions explored how they developed the confidence and resiliency to manage the complex challenges of their districts. Finally, the participants shared what grounds and motivates them to remain in the position of school superintendent.

Responses to Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine ways by which African American female superintendents in K–12 public school systems become resilient and persevere in the face of adversity. Below is a collective set of findings drawn across all participants related to each of the four research questions.

***Research Question #1:** In what ways do African American females respond to barriers and adversity in their role as superintendents?*

Each superintendent was asked to share a particularly challenging situation and ways in which she responded. The situations described were diverse, involving discipline, adults' abuse of power, public scrutiny, and personal attacks. The strategies for approaching the situations, however, were consistent. The superintendents used prior experience and also made sure they were familiar with the community and context. They brought others to the table so that a wider circle of people could be informed of a particular response, even if those people were not involved in making the decision. As time and circumstance allowed, processes may have been facilitated that fostered ownership of responses as well.

The superintendents who participated in this study expect adversity and challenges. They understand that the position that they hold requires them to develop a high tolerance for ambiguity and complexity. When presented with these challenges and/or adversities, some of their own makings, they understand the need to focus on opportunities and to expect good things to happen despite adversity. They are clear about the values they hold and attempt to align values with actions. These resilient school leaders are willing to act on what matters even when the stakes are high.

These six individuals spoke about the importance of being true to their beliefs and values. All valued the experience of having worked in different roles and at different levels in a K-12 district and saw it as an asset in their role as superintendent.

Each expressed the belief that her individual strengths and the assets she brings to the position must be used along with the development of a strong team to improve the overall performance of the district and to address the various challenges. Three exemplary verbatim quotations illustrate this point:

Five of the six superintendents expressed the need for being up-to-date on educational reform and understanding the research on best practices for improving student achievement. One of the six superintendents, however, shared that it is critical to also have content knowledge related to finances and understanding the budget.

All six superintendents stressed the importance of communications and of listening. Honoring people's ideas, experiences, and backgrounds was viewed as important for understanding the diverse views and cultures of the various district stakeholders. Several superintendents expressed the need to not ignore the

school board in the stakeholder group. One superintendent identified continuous communication with the board and keeping the board informed about major issues as central to her work. She explained,

The six African American female superintendents in this study were confident in their abilities and skills as leaders and understood that their experience with success and failure have been important to their work and will ground their future success. Communicating a vision about the district's work to various stakeholders has taken on even more significance for these superintendents over the years due to declining resources and waning support for public education. The district's work and understanding of how to connect are critical and frequent emphasis of communications.

Research Question #2: *What specific processes or strategies do African American female superintendents employ to overcome adversity? Racism and sexism?*

Presented in Table 6 is a summary of the strategies identified by the superintendents who participated in this study. Four of the African American female superintendents framed their experiences as women and as women of color. The other two required probing questions from the researcher to ground and then articulate their experiences about school districts led by males and more specifically, White males. Women are now acquiring more top leadership positions and are finding themselves testing external notions about who is a leader and characteristics of leaders. The study participants who grew up in the South had a clear view of how they thought about race and gender. For the women who are currently working in the South, it is clear that the history of Black women and their treatment in the South seems to have changed little. One superintendent shared,

Women are in some really great positions down here [but] still use the backdoor entrance to get stuff done. You know, they're not equal partners at the table. And so, you've got to understand where you are and how people are seeing you when you talk. (Superintendent Myles)

The superintendent who was not working in the South could relate to her colleague's experiences of feeling invisible or dismissed. She offered a specific example involving a staff person who made a key decision about a grant without consulting her. She stated,

A grant proposal for over 2 million dollars was submitted to a foundation. I received a call to ask my thoughts about the proposal. I told them I needed to look into the proposal. When I asked the individual—a White male—he said, “Oh, okay, we should have brought you in.” I asked him this question: “Would you have initiated a grant opportunity for over 2 million dollars with the [preceding superintendent, a white male]?” His response took a long time. He said, “You know, I don't know.” So, I think that the answer to the question is he would not have. (Superintendent Lundy)

One superintendent talked about the inner circle of the “old boys” network and how difficult it is for women to break through the levels to the top tier of the various educational organizations and structures. She offered,

My approach has been to insert myself into the arenas, and if they have difficulty with it, they just have to have difficulty with it. I have not shied away from speaking up and being seen and involving myself in issues that I think are important, but you do know that there is a small circle that you're not a part of and will never probably be a part of. (Superintendent Hoskins)

One superintendent shared the experience of being the only African American leader in the entire district and how her colleagues had stereotypical ideas about her. She discussed that,

Some of them felt that “Black women are sapphires¹,” if you understand the term. Some people think we’re like pack mules—we’re just going to carry everything and if you say you’re not going to do it, we’re going to do it and see that it gets done. (Superintendent Myles)

The “achievement gap” continues to be the most salient challenge that African American superintendents have to overcome. Each superintendent discussed how critical it is to close the gap in the work of her district. Yet they also expressed both surprise and resignation that our present society is not outraged. One offered a specific example,

The system had three major disproportionality reports with no progress and no strategy to close the achievement gap, and they’d talk about it every year. It took a person of color as a superintendent to say, “This isn’t good enough. How are we addressing this issue?” When we talk about having high expectations for all groups of students and the expectation that they all excel at a high level, people say, “That’s all you talk about.” (Superintendent Fields)

African American female superintendents who participated in this study were cognizant of the fact that on a daily basis they must challenge the negative perceptions of not only the urban school districts they serve, but also must address questions about whether they, as school leaders, are capable of doing the challenging and complex work that is demanded. They described working hard to earn the respect of their communities. They understand that their position and title only get them a seat at the table. They all reported having to assert themselves in policy deliberations and to be strategic and intentional to make sure that their voices are heard as women and as African Americans.

Research Question #3: How do African American female superintendents develop the confidence and resiliency to manage the complex challenges of their districts?

The superintendents in the study all agreed that they are resilient. Each superintendent described what supported her in developing the confidence and resiliency to manage the district she leads. All of the superintendents reported being raised in supportive families and communities where educational attainment was important.

Several also reported being given opportunities that were not defined by gender roles. Three superintendents shared their experiences:

My mother and grandmother were both teachers and they were strong women. Having strong parents and strong women in my life and also having a father and other men in my life who were strong advocates influenced my being able to see and appreciate my own capacity. (Superintendent Nelson)

Several of the superintendents talked about having strong mentorships from the beginning and throughout their careers. One superintendent noted the necessity of a good mentor. She stated:

You are only as good as the mentor they assign you. Just because they are superintendents and they’re experienced doesn’t necessarily mean they’re good and will be a good fit for you based on their background, to work with your situation or your particular style. (Superintendent Nelson)

Another superintendent noted that throughout her career she has connected with more male than female mentors. She reflected,

Black women have always moved forward under the coattails of a White person, historically, because there's not a Black person that can get you there. I don't even think there is a Black person today that can get you there. Isn't that sad? (Superintendent Myles)

All of the African American female superintendents identified religious faith and optimism as key characteristics drawn upon when addressing challenging issues.

I don't think I could be resilient without a strong family, without strong faith, and without strong and caring adults who were there to support me and to encourage me to see myself in a leadership role. I think early on those three things—my faith, my family and other adults, particularly other women leaders, but not exclusively women leaders, were important. My personal faith in God would be one important element of resiliency—my spiritual connection. (Superintendent Field)

One superintendent also reported that a spiritual connection is important, but also expressed the importance of balance. She offered,

My ability to balance health, exercise, fun, and work is important. You can work yourself to death if you don't have that balance. If you don't have some kind of spiritual connection, if you don't have balance in your life you can't be resilient. One of the things I have learned is that I have to know when to let my body and my mind rest. (Superintendent Myles)

Each of the superintendents in this study shared the importance of faith, family, friends, and others as critical to their early development into confident and resilient leaders. Faith and spirituality were not only seen as worshipping but also how you lived your life. They believed treating people properly and with respect, regardless of how bad the situation, was important to being true to their values. They all expressed that, ultimately, having a healthy mind and body was important to being able to serve in the role of superintendent and meeting the goals of improving academic outcomes for students.

Each superintendent described her leadership in relationship to, not only service to a school or an institution, but also involvement in social change. These women leaders understand influence differently to make change.

There is also the whole leadership context. You've got to be able to understand situational leadership, and some people even talk about something called situational ethics; you'll hear that from a lawyer. (Superintendent Fields)

A second stated:

You have to rely more on your people skills and your influence skills because the average superintendent is not a woman and people have typical ideas about whether a woman can lead. In every aspect of American culture, there is this underlying assumption about the characteristics of leadership, where leaders are not people of color and not women. (Superintendent Webster)

Research Question #4: *What motivates African American females to remain in the position of superintendent?*

The women who participated in this study believe in their ability to make a difference and they believe that they cannot accept failure. They also believe in the capacity of education and its ability to transform the lives of people in poverty. Several reflected,

I'm in awe of the change that can happen in one generation. Think of it: If you could educate every single child to graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary, you could wipe out poverty in one generation. Not multiple generations. One generation. It's pretty darn transformative. It's such a great gift to be able to impact lives like this. I think that's what hits you, every day. (Superintendent Lundy)

The African American female superintendents who participated in the study reported that they were motivated to remain in the superintendency because they were able to make a difference in the lives of students and families and because they understood that education could transform families. One of the superintendents was very clear that she identified with the children and families she serves. Four of the African American female superintendents felt they were in a position to create the best programs for kids and to have an impact on closing the academic achievement gap. Several of the African American female superintendents shared a belief that early access to an equitable education would dramatically improve options and possibilities for all students. These African American female superintendents also reported having to work against negative perceptions of being African American and female. They challenged traditional stereotypes regarding race and gender through their leadership work. Several expressed their love for the work and the celebration of achieving "wins" on behalf of kids.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all such superintendents. Instead, the findings were intended to provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena of the resiliency of these study participants.

All experienced traditional advancement to the superintendency, moving from teacher to principal to district administrator and last to superintendent. Five of the six superintendents have a doctoral degree, with one pending. There is recognition among the superintendents that they must have a doctorate to be taken seriously by their peers. They also understand that having a degree is not enough and they must assemble a strong team as well as exercise leadership that fully grasps the context in which they are leading. The themes or the findings from this study align with those from the literature and research on resiliency (e.g., Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

There is no long-term trend information on the demographics, leadership characteristics, and experiences of African American female superintendents. Although "there is a small but growing knowledge base on women in educational administration, there is a paucity of research available on Blacks in the superintendency and even less on Black women in the superintendency" (Alston, 2005, p. 675). The primary purpose of this study was to ask African American female superintendents in K-12 public school systems in the United States to identify what makes them resilient and enables them to face the adversity inherent in their leadership. This study also asked African American female superintendents to provide examples of how they sustain themselves in their work to assist other African American females who are interested in acquiring and maintaining the position of superintendent. The specific research questions were:

1. In what ways do African American females respond to barriers and adversity in their role as superintendents?
2. What specific processes or strategies do African American female superintendents employ to overcome adversity? Racism and sexism?
3. How do African American female superintendents develop the confidence and resiliency to manage the complex challenges of their districts?
4. What motivates African American females to remain in the position of superintendent?

The findings of this study were intended to provide an understanding of resiliency as understood and described by the 6 study participants, while also adding to the paucity of research on African American women in the superintendency. Many themes emerged across the interviews with each of the African American female superintendents. Similarities, as well as distinct differences, are noted.

Each superintendent was asked to share a particularly challenging situation and ways in which she responded. Each situation described was diverse, involving discipline, adults' abuse of power, public scrutiny, and personal attacks. Patterson and Kelleher's (2005) resiliency cycle lends itself to the flexibility of the various situations shared by the superintendents who participated in this study. Each situation began with a disruption to "normal conditions" where the superintendents constructively handled frustration at the constant disruptions by maintaining focus on the core work. Superintendents moved through the various phases from deteriorating at a dysfunctional level, through stages of adapting, recovering, and growing, to a level where they begin to flourish because of the crisis; to a level of strength and resilience, which led to moving to a level of strength and resilience.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) posit that a person's "level of optimism (or pessimism) serves as a filter for interpreting adversity that strikes" and that "interpretation of adversity directly affects your response to the adversity and your overall resilience" (p. 19). The superintendents in the study provided three words that describe themselves that also point to their level of optimism. They shared that they are persistent, passionate, courageous, optimistic, and positive to describe their belief that they can positively influence the future and that good things will happen with a lot of work.

Each saw traditional advancement as a strength in their role as superintendent, especially as it relates to the core mission of school districts, improving academic outcomes for students. Academic outcomes are subtle at best in the research on African American female superintendents. Glass et al. (2000) analyzed the 10-year study of American school superintendents showed that most school boards claim a keen interest in the instructional program but see the management of fiscal resources to be a critical component of the superintendency. Though essential to the success of educational leaders, female superintendents often lack financial, administrative, and community relation opportunities (Glass et al., 2000).

Glass and colleagues further asserted that this lack of experience and training "in managerial skills is what most often dooms superintendents' tenures, regardless of their sex or race" (Gewertz, 2006, p. 2).

Superintendents who participated in this study, the majority of whom work in diverse school districts where challenges such as lack of resources, underfunding, teacher certification, and student achievement are constant, cherished strong support networks and inner circles that included family, colleagues, friends, and mentors. The existing research corroborates the challenges these superintendents face and also suggests that these challenges ultimately have a direct effect on the performance and tenure of African American leaders (Brown, 2005).

The superintendents in this study who are in the top leadership positions in their districts find their authority questioned based on internal and external notions about who is a leader and leadership characteristics. Several superintendents shared experiences about working hard to earn respect from peers and having not only a place at the table, but also having their voices heard. The study participants who grew up in the South had a clear view of how they thought about race and gender. For the women who are currently working in the South, it is clear that the history of Black women and their treatment in the South seems to have changed little. The superintendent who was not working in the South could relate to her colleagues' experiences of feeling invisible or dismissed. She offered a specific example involving a staff person who made a key decision about a grant without consulting her. When she asked if he would have done the same thing when the previous superintendent [White male] was leading the district, his response was that he did not know. This superintendent felt, however, that the staff member's actions would have been different. One superintendent shared the experience of being the only African American leader in the entire district and how her colleagues had stereotypical ideas about her. Others expressed the need to have an advanced degree and to be more knowledgeable than their colleagues as critical.

In responding to the first question, "What strengths or assets do you bring to the superintendency?", almost all of the superintendents recognized that their prior life and work experiences were beneficial to their ability to collaborate with stakeholders and communicate effectively, both strong strategies for problem-solving. They also noted that hiring the right people for the job was a talent that was critically important to being the superintendent. Hiring the right people to complement their own abilities while also, as Jim Collins (2001) would say, placing them in the right seats on the "bus," was a recurring theme.

The African American female leaders defined the importance of their leadership not only in terms of improving schools or school districts but also in terms of advancing social change, specifically increasing equality and opportunity for children. According to Murtadha and Watts (2005), women historically took on roles as community activists, public speakers, and civil and women's rights advocates. The superintendents who participated in this study viewed and enacted their work in similar ways that aligned to the roles of community activists and public speakers. Study participants reported advocating for the children and the families they serve and communicating frequently their vision to garner support and buy-in from various stakeholders.

The study participants identified challenges and constraints they experienced as superintendents. All study participants shared their perspectives about school boards. Each recognized the importance of having a supportive school board as well as the importance of frequent and open communications with board members. Although several superintendents shared challenges pertaining to their work with school boards, they worked diligently not to allow these challenges to keep them from focusing on the core work. It should be noted, however, that dysfunctional school boards were cited as creating challenges to maintaining focus on students and their academic achievement.

One study participant shared how the perception of African American women superintendents can also be a challenge. These perceptions include people thinking of them as pack mules as well as an awareness of the need to be careful with how they present themselves in their personal attire.

The African American female superintendents who participated in the study reported that they were motivated to remain in the superintendency because they were able to make a difference in the lives of students and families and because they understood that education could transform families. One of the superintendents was very clear that she identified with the children and families that she serves. Four of the African American female superintendents felt they were in a position to create the best programs for kids and to have an impact on closing the academic achievement gap. Several of the African American female superintendents shared a belief in early access to an equal education and what it would mean in terms of possibilities for all students. These African American female superintendents also reported having to work against negative perceptions and being viewed in preconceived ways as it relates to their leadership role.

Therefore, several expressed their love for the work and celebrated the "wins" on behalf of kids. This is corroborated in the literature where Black women took on roles as community activists and being stabilizing and consistent forces in communities (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

Implications

Gaps continue to exist in the study of the superintendency because, as Immegart (1988) suggested, little research involving real-life people and events has been conducted on this position of responsibility and importance. This research study adds to the developing research base on the experiences of African American female superintendents. Much of what the superintendents shared during the interviews is supported in the literature; however, there are developing themes that are implied or silent in the literature that need further exploration and study. Tillman and Cochran (2000) suggest that more research is needed in areas of racial and gender equity that should lead to a sustained inquiry into the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents as well as women superintendents from other underrepresented groups (p. 55). A review of the literature reveals the beginnings of research on resilient women administrators; however, there is little evidence of this research on Black women administrators.

Implications for Policy

The policy implications of this research study are numerous. The study findings and the literature review both point out the importance of an intentional policy discussion regarding the need to understand the experiences of African American female superintendents and to provide support for their development and ultimate success.

Currently, traditional superintendent programs are designed to follow the White male's experience and perspective and do not account for the experiences of diverse populations. More and more programs like The Broad and Harvard Superintendent's program, both year-long programs that also provide an internship

and a mentor, understand the need to attract a diverse group of individuals and to provide an in-depth study of the superintendency.

Study participants referenced the support they had while aspiring to the position of superintendent and also the need to have a network of other superintendents to be successful. These mentor relationships were informal and provided support during challenging times. Many of the women in this study belong to a unique sisterhood that keeps them connected in ways that allow them to be “real” and share their most vulnerable thoughts and challenges. Establishing a strong mentor program is critical to the development of superintendents. Having a mentor is important to success but having a “sisterhood” goes beyond policy to practice. State departments should strongly consider educational resources to support funding yearlong superintendent internships with carefully selected mentors who might influence more women to enter the superintendency by gaining a close view of the position. Carefully designing learning opportunities and determining the right mentors might sway more women to consider the superintendency.

School boards should reconstruct district-level support to alter the workload for female superintendents so that they have more time for critical tasks and family life. They should support the superintendent by funding a position to shift the day-to-day expectations regarding fiscal management to another district leader with external monitoring. To improve student performance, African American female superintendents should allow more hands-on activities for instructional programs in which most have experience and expertise.

Implications for Superintendent Development

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) created eight general professional standards for the superintendency. Districts should use these standards, along with accountability for student academic achievement, teaching improvement, and principal performance to improve the selection, preparation, and development of superintendents (Cuban, 1994).

Tillman and Cochran (2000) reported that schools and departments of education continue to perpetuate the dominance of White men; generally failing to provide adequate support for diversity in professional preparation programs. They further posited that the coursework taught from the White male superintendent’s perspective and that issues of gender, race, and ethnicity create “silent preparation programs” (Tillman & Cochran, 2000, p. 55). The majority of African American leaders serve large urban districts where lack of resources, underfunding, teacher certification, and student achievement are consistent challenges. These challenges ultimately have a direct effect on the performance and tenure of African American leaders. Therefore, programs must equip individuals for the realities of leadership positions by supporting theory with practical experiences (Brown, 2005). Understanding the “real” experience of African American female superintendents would enhance preparation programs. Additionally, an emphasis on management areas such as finances is critical to her ultimate success. Glass et al. (2000) posited that women have fewer opportunities to “gain experience in finance, administration, and community relations, areas viewed by 80% of superintendents as essential to their success” (as cited in Kowalski, 2006, p. 320). They further asserted that this lack of experience and training “in managerial skills is what most often dooms superintendents’ tenures, regardless of their sex or race” (Gewertz, 2006, p. 2).

Implications for Practice

The day-to-day work of being superintendent demands that policy, research, and theory along with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to interface with past and current reality and future possibilities are needed and all are shaped by the individual’s values, efficacy, and energy. Practice is where the resiliency of the superintendency is tested each day through actions and communications (Patterson and Kelleher, 2005).

Across the country, a set of licensure competencies that serve as general professional standards for the superintendency are now being required. These licensure standards can also serve as a guide to understanding superintendents’ daily regimens in the operation of their districts as well as how they approach problem-solving. Cuban (1994) is critical of the absence of standards that address accountability for student academic performance, teaching improvement, and principal performance.

African American female superintendents usually have great expertise and experience in academics. Having someone who takes the lead for the managerial role allows the superintendent to focus on other areas of the district. It should be clear that the superintendent, as the sole employee of the board, is the one that ultimately is responsible for every aspect of the district. The superintendent must have a clear accountability system that gives her confidence that the managerial work is being done with integrity and excellence.

Limitations

This study purposely focused on a small population of educational leaders: African American female superintendents who were currently in superintendencies in American preK–12 school districts and had experience as superintendents in at least two separate districts. This specificity led to an important limitation of the study. Of the 12 superintendents invited to participate, 8 confirmed their desire to participate in the study. However, only six superintendents (50% of the population) ultimately completed the interviews for several reasons. It is not clear how the six superintendents who agreed to participate differed from those who did not.

Another limitation stems from the conducted interviews. First, the researcher conducted only one interview with each superintendent. Second, the fact that the interviews were conducted on Skype, rather than in a face-to-face format, may have limited the interviews' outcomes. Feasibility demanded the use of Skype as the data could not otherwise have been collected. The dearth of extant research documenting the lived experiences of Black female superintendents suggested the importance of collecting as much data as possible in any manner possible.

A final limitation of the study stems from its use of psychological resiliency theory and research that has historically been focused on youth and adolescents. An assumption was made that concepts of resiliency would apply to the population of African American female superintendents, and, indeed, they appeared to help explain the experiences discussed.

Implications for Further Research

Each of the superintendents provided information about her experiences as the leader of a preK–12 school district. The questions that were posed to each superintendent provided insight into the challenges and opportunities she faces each day as she tries to bring together a community focused on achieving better outcomes for students. Resiliency was evident among these African American female leaders.

Further research is necessary to understand the experiences of African American female superintendents. Specifically, the following should be pursued:

1. Repeat the research study with additional African American female superintendents who work in diverse settings. Currently, the literature is focused more on superintendents who work in urban school districts.
2. Expand the methodology to include triangulating data from the interviews with superintendents, school board members, community members, and key internal constituents so as to provide a greater comprehension of the context and understanding of the challenges faced by the superintendents.
3. Explore more deeply the challenges, opportunities, and various forms of support experienced by superintendents to inform policy and practice related to initial superintendent preparation and ongoing professional development. The review of research and the interviews point to a lack of alignment between the needs of superintendents and the policies that support the core work and ongoing growth.
4. Trace the pathway to the superintendency and the supports and constraints that are present in the position.
5. Explore African American female experiences in other district leadership roles.

ENDNOTE

1. *Sapphires is a Jim Crow term that refers to Black women as rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing; today's term—Angry Black Woman.

REFERENCES

- Alston, J. (1999). Climbing hills and mountains: Black females making it to the superintendency. In *Sacred Dreams: Women and The Superintendency* (pp. 79–90). State University of New York Press. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.37-2298>
- Alston, J. (2000). Missing from action: Where are the Black female school superintendents? *Urban Education, 35*(5), 525–531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085900355003>
- Alston, J.A. (2005). Tempered radicals and servant leaders: Black females persevering in the superintendency. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41*(4), 675–688. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x04274275>
- Bailey, S. (1998). Different Questions: Better Answers. *Educational Researcher, 27*(9), 13–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1176680>
- Banks, C.M. (1995). Gender and races as factors in educational leadership and administration. In *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 65–80). New York, NY: MacMillan Pub.
- Barritt, L. (1986). Human sciences and the human image. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 4*(3), 14–22.
- Bass, B.M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Bell, C., & Chase, S. (1993). The underrepresentation of women in school leadership. In *The New Politics of Race and Gender: The 1992 Yearbook of the Politics in Education Association* (pp. 140–154). Washington, DC: Falmer.
- Benard, B., & Marshall, K. (1997). A framework for practice: Tapping innate resilience. *Research/Practice, 5*(1), 9–15.
- Bennett, L. (1988). *Before the Mayflower: A history of Black America* (p.103). Chicago, IL: Johnson.
- Blake, R.R., & Mouton, J.S. (1964). *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf.
- Blanchard, K.H. (1985). *SLII: A situational approach to managing people*. Escondido, CA: Blanchard Training and Development.
- Blount, J.M. (1998). *Destined to rule the schools: Women and the superintendency, 1873–1995*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brown, F. (2005). African Americans and school leadership: An introduction. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41*(4), 585–590. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x04274270>
- Brunner, C.C. (2000). *Principles of power: Women superintendents and the riddle of the heart*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Clinton, H.R. (2008). *Concession Speech*. Speech presented at the National Building Museum, Washington, DC.
- Coleman, C. (2004, November 17-21). *Presentation at the National Alliance of Black School Educators: Superintendent's strand* [conference]. Dallas, TX.
- Coleman, C., Collins, C., & Harrison-Williams, S. (2004, November 17-21). *Presentation at the National Alliance of Black School Educators: Superintendent's strand* [conference]. Dallas, TX.
- Coleman, C., Collins, C., Harrison-Williams, S., & Sawyer, W.L. (2009, November 18). Achieving the Superintendency: Barriers, Strategies, and Maintenance Behaviors. Paper presented at the *Annual Conference of the National Alliance of Black School Educators*. Indianapolis, IN.
- Collier, V. (1987). *Identification of skills perceived by Texas superintendents as necessary for successful job performance* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Texas, Austin.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap... and others don't*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Cuban, L. (1976). *The urban school superintendency: A century and a half of change*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.
- Cuban, L. (1976). *Urban school chiefs under fire*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Doctoral degree awards to African Americans reach another all-time high. (2006). *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. Retrieved February 16, 2008, from http://www.jbhe.com/news_views/50_black_doctoraldegrees.html
- Dudley-Grant, G.R., Comas-Diaz, L., Todd-Bazemore, B., Hueston, J.D., & Barbanel, L. (2003). *Fostering resilience in response to terrorism: For psychologists working with people of color*. Washington, DC: APA. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e420772005-001>
- Fiedler, F.E. (1967). *A theory of leadership effectiveness*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Foster, L. (2004). Administrator and teacher recruitment and selection post-Brown: Issues, challenges and strategies. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 25(2), 220-232. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jspr.25.2.220>
- Gall, M., Gall, J., & Borg, W. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Getskow, V. (1996). *Women in Community College Leadership Roles*. ERIC Digest, ED4000025.
- Gewertz, C. (2006). Race, gender, and the superintendency. *Education Week*, pp. 1, 24, 25.
- Giddings, P. (1984). *When and where I enter: The impact of Black women on race and sex in America*. New York, NY: Amistad.
- Glass, T.E. (1992). *The study of the American school superintendency: America's education leaders in a time of reform*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.
- Glass, T.E. (2000). Where Are All the Women Superintendents? *School Administrator*, 57(6), 28-32. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED440475>
- Glass, T.E., Björk, L., & Brunner, C. (2000). *The Study of the American Superintendency 2000: A Look at the Superintendent in the New Millennium*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Graen, G.B. (1976). Role-making processes within complex organizations. In *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1202–1245). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- Graen, G.B., & Cashman, J. (1975). A role-making model of leadership in formal organizations: A developmental approach. In *Leadership Frontiers* (pp. 143–166). Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.
- Greene, M. (1998). Moral and Political Perspectives: The Tensions of Choice. *Educational Researcher*, 27(9), 18–20. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X027009018>
- Grogan, M., & Brunner, C. (2005, February). Women leading systems: What the latest facts and figures say about women in the superintendency today. *School Administrator*, 62(2), 46–50.
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K.H. (1969). Life-cycle theory of leadership. *Training and Development Journal*, 23, 26–34.
- Hodgkinson, H., & Montenegro, X. (1999). *The U.S. school superintendent: The invisible CEO*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.
- House, R.J., & Mitchell, R.R. (1974). Path-goal theory of leadership. *Journal of Contemporary Business*, 3, 81–97.
- Immegart, G.L. (1988). Leadership and leader behavior. In *Handbook of research on educational administration* (pp. 259–277). New York, NY: Longman.
- Jackson, B.L. (1999). *Getting inside history—against all odds: African-American women school superintendents*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kowalski, T. (2006). *The school superintendent: Theory, practice, and cases*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McCabe, D., & Dobberteen, K. (1998, April). *Women Superintendents: Overcoming Constraints* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, United States.
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

- Mertz, N., & McNeely, S. (1998). Women on the Job: A Study of Female High School Principals. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34(2), 196–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X98034002003>
- Moran, M. (1992) Up against the glass ceiling. *American School Board Journal*, 179(2), 38–41.
- Murtadha, K., & Watts, D. (2005). Linking the struggle for education and social justice: Historical perspectives of African American leadership in schools. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 41(4), 591–608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x04274271>
- Northouse, P. (2001). *Leadership theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patterson, J., & Kelleher, P. (2005). *Resilient school leaders: Strategies for turning adversity into achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Revere, A.B. (1987). Black women superintendents in the United States: 1984–85. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 56(4), 510–520. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295349>
- Richardson, G., Neiger, B., Jenson, S., & Kumpfer, K. (1990). The resiliency model. *Health Education*, 21(6), 33–39.
- Saleebey, D. (Ed.). (2002). *The strengths perspective in social work practice* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Shakeshaft, C. (1989). *Women in educational administration*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Spaulding, F.E. (1955). *School superintendents in action in five cities*. Rindge, NH: Richard R. Smith.
- Tallerico, M. (2000a). *Accessing the superintendency: The unwritten rules*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Tallerico, M. (2000b). Gaining access to the superintendency: Headhunting, gender, and color. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(1), 18–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131610021968886>
- Tallerico, M., & Blount, J. (2004). Women and the superintendency: Insights from theory and history. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(5), 633–662. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x04268837>
- Taylor, F.W. (1947). *Scientific Management*. New York, NY: Harper Bros.
- Tillman, B.A., & Cochran, L.L. (2000, November). Desegregating urban school administration: A pursuit of equity for black women superintendents. *Education and Urban Society*, 33(1), 44–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124500331005>
- Tyack, D., & Hansot, E. (1982). *Managers of virtue: Public school leadership in America, 1820–1980*. New York, NY: Bask Books.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *2005–2007 American Community Survey*. Retrieved February 2008, from <http://factfinder.census.gov>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010). *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition*. Education Administrators. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos007.htm>
- Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. In A.M. Henderson & T. Parsons (Eds. and Trans.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wong, K.K., & Jain, P. (1999). Newspapers as policy actors in urban school systems: The Chicago story. *Urban Affairs Review*, 35(2), 210–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780879922184365>
- Yeakey, C., Johnston, G., & Atkinson, J. (1986). In pursuit of equity: A review of research on women and minorities in educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 22(3), 110–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x86022003005>