3-Dimensional Portrait of the Female CEO[*]

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Sumario en espanol

Dobie y Hummel (2001) afirmó que la superintendencia de la escuela es la posición más dominada por los hombres dentro del campo de la educación. Según un 1992 estudio, 72% de educadores fue mujeres; sin embargo, sólo 13,2% de supervisores es mujeres (Vidrio, 1992). La inspección más reciente por la Asociación norteamericana de Educa a Administradores (AASA) encontró que progreso había sido hecho, como 24,1% de los directores generales de distrito de escuela fue femenino (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, los Jóvenes, & Ellerson, 2010); sin embargo, estos datos continúan reflejar una disparidad.

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1 Introduction

There is still the "good ole' boy" network out there [in the community], and you've got to be really cognizant of it. . . . You've got to find a way into that network, and you've got to find a way to be respected in that network. . . . I made some very conscious decisions that I needed to make. . .so that I would be seen as a very strong woman. After two years. . .I'm past that now. I feel like I don't need to worry about the "woman thing" any more. As to superintendents, if you walk into a room of our association, it is still, well, predominately male, and I have to say that in all my experiences. . .the first time I walked into one of those meetings, it was probably the least comfortable I've felt in terms of being a woman in leadership. It is so clearly that male network, that "good ole' boys' club." . . .I think we are starting to make inroads. Even in the last year and a half there have been a number of new women appointed in the state. . . . We're still in the vast minority, but it was a real interesting dynamic for me because I had never felt that with the male leaders I had worked with on my way up to the superintendency. It was really noticeable when I first went into that organization, though, but you need to be able to network in that organization. . . . I tell young women moving up in the ranks that we are not quite done, yet; you still have to overcome some of that gender issue. (Sitting female superintendent, personal communication, December 8, 2010)

Dobie and Hummel (2001) asserted that the school superintendency is the most male-dominated position within the field of education. According to a 1992 study, 72% of educators were women; however, only 13.2% of superintendents are women (Glass, 1992). The most recent survey by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) found that progress had been made, as 24.1% of the school district CEOs were female (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010); however, these data continue to reflect a disparity.

Statistics indicate that the female superintendent operates in a world not of her making and in a paradigm designed around men. Miller (1986) wrote,

It is important that women start from their own experience, especially when it may not "make sense." As women continue to do so, I think we will find that the prevalent systems of thought are inadequate. Even the words available will be inappropriate, both the scientific and the common words. It makes sense that they would be. To say this does not mean that all women are always "right" about everything. It does mean that we can create a climate for ongoing elucidation. We can critique each other's thinking and foster a deepening dialogue. (p. 142)

Considering that 50% of students in the classroom and 72% of teachers are female, nowhere do we see a dissonance that is greater than in the area of the school superintendency. Yet, the data tell only part of the story. The image the data conjure up is of a passive victim, yet women are increasingly making significant contributions in terms of defining district leadership.

2 Historically Speaking

Pioneering women who wrote feminist theory literature several years ago helped the profession to view feminism in a different way. Two who immediately come to mind are Carol Gilligan (1982) and Jean Baker Miller (1976). Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice,* was controversial, and some credited it with beginning a revolution. In it she posited that the problem is not that women cannot lead, but that their way of leading and administering is different from that of their male counterparts. She eloquently stated,

As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection. The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part *from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation.* (Gilligan, 1982, p. 173)

Miller (1976) was a medical doctor and did not hesitate to speak of male and female psychological differences; she also noted that there was a factor of inequality. She spoke particularly of the inequality "fundamentally of status and power" (p. 3). She gave rise to the theoretical foundation of this research in noting that women had not done a good job in our search for equality, overlooking the sociological ties and the psychological elements of domination and subordination. Miller's message was not negative, however, in that she encouraged women to engage; her message was that engagement in the discussion of feminism brings with it new thoughts and feelings, that we can have connection rather than disconnection to our world (p. 140).

The physiological feminist arguments first published in the 1960s and 1970s were enhanced during the 1980s and 1990s by researchers studying the sociological foundations of the personal characteristics of leadership. Boyan (1988) identified these characteristics as the antecedents of leadership behaviors. Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins (1990) took this idea a step further, as they noted, "Gender related socialization experiences also seemed to contribute to a relative large proportion of women viewing themselves more as curriculum and instructional leaders; relatively larger proportions of men, in contrast viewed themselves as general managers" (p. 26).

Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) inferred there are within-culture female characteristics that influence women's career choices as well as experiences that are "salient to understanding how they exercise educational leadership" (p. 136). Northouse (2007) also noted the argument that women are simply different from men; thus, they lead differently. Indeed, he discussed a model that used a tri-fold explanation of the glass ceiling: (a) human capital, (b) gender differences, and (c) prejudice (p. 271).

The first element of the model, human capital, is espoused by some educators, who claim there is a shortage of women in the leadership pipeline. Recent data, however, from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2004) and a *Business Wire* article ("Women's Influence," 2004) refuted this stance. Northouse (2007) noted that the evidence did not indicate a lack of education in professional women, but there was clear "evidence that the lack of women reaching the top" was due to their being in the early part of their career path (p. 271).

Prejudice was another of the three reasons that Northouse (2007) discussed as a possible cause for the continuation of the glass ceiling. Prejudice is related to gender bias, as was recently claimed during the campaigns of Senator Hillary Clinton and Governor Sarah Pallin. Men are often described as independent, strong, and decisive; they are viewed as change agents. Women, on the other hand, are called collaborative, nurturing, supportive, and vulnerable. Specifically, Northouse wrote, "In sum, substantial empirical evidence reveals that gender stereotypes can significantly alter the perception and evaluation of female leaders and directly affect women in or aspiring to leadership roles" (p. 278).

Hence, this review of the literature is based on a three-part conceptual framework suggesting that women lead in different ways than men do based on physiological and socialization differences, which are viewed negatively by the male-dominated culture. This gender bias is expressed in both the glass ceiling women face when approaching the superintendency as well as their experiences as superintendents.

3 Review of the Literature

As we look at the research of the last decade or so, we do not see the type of discussions taking place of which Miller (1976) spoke. Much of the discussion is one dimensional, providing informational statistics and a description of the hodge-podge of roles that come with the superintendency—passive literature. This literature is important and needs to be included, but it does not move the discussion of the school district CEO to one that is more sociological in nature.

Reflecting their relative prevalence in the field (or lack thereof), far more studies of women and leadership relate to the principalship, teacher leadership, and central office positions as opposed to the superintendency. Those studies that have been conducted on women in the superintendency have been undertaken primarily by women, with a few researchers dominating the field (e.g., Brunner, Grogan, and Ortiz). Furthermore, the number of studies on women and educational leadership, particularly the superintendency, published between 1990 and 2000 is far greater than the number of studies published since 2000, thereby reflecting an apparent "slowdown" in the area.

3.1 The Beginning Brush Strokes

The majority of the workforce in education has been and continues to be female. As mentioned previously, however, women as CEOs of school districts are underrepresented. One of the reasons women have not traveled the path to the superintendency is that the pathway to that position is generally through the high school principalship. Seventy-five percent of all elementary teachers are women; many go on to the elementary principalship, a position from which we seldom see a superintendent emerge. Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley (2004) noted, however, that most positions that lead to the superintendency are in secondary schools or the central office.

Glass (2000) listed several reasons for women's not being tapped for the superintendency: (a) women are not preparing for the superintendency, (b) personal relationships hold women back, and (c) women enter leadership roles when older. Sharp et al. (2004) wrote that women serve in central office positions, but in the areas of curriculum—rather than in personnel or finance.

The pathway of the female leader not only often takes a turn away from the superintendency but also is fraught with gatekeepers her male counterpart may or may not face. These gatekeepers may be school board members: a male board member who can picture only the former football coach as the superintendent or a female school board member who holds to the tenet that only the male spirit can handle such a challenging job.

Women often are omitted from the "good ole boy" fraternity. They have not been a part of the community golfing tournaments, the fishing and hunting trips, the meetings around the club tables after a conference dinner. By their absence, women experience the gatekeeping of exclusion by virtue of being female. Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) suggested that this phenomenon also may keep potential women leaders from having mentors, thus not having those "in the know" fostering their careers. Brunner (1993) explained it another way; in her research she found that women who desire to access power circuits need to be "bilingual." The statement implied that females must "speak the language of those in the male circuits of power while remaining feminine" (p 198).

Not only do the values and culture of their peers and colleagues exclude women from the "inner circle," but there are also individuals in the community who may represent barriers. These community gatekeepers are those who are concerned about having a female in a position of power and making a salary that may be the highest for any public worker in the county or city in which she serves. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) noted that "because women are not usually observed in the more powerful leadership positions, cultures generally will not consider options of electing or appointing a woman to a position that has always been filled by men" (p. 51).

Barrios (2004) surveyed 38 superintendents; 42 assistant, deputy, or interim superintendents; and 55 school board members. Her respondents had such strong beliefs about some of the research questions that they provided personal comments on the survey: "The most overwhelming comment with 26 responses was. . .women are equally capable to perform superintendents' duties. . . . Lack of support from school board members, community, districts, or other females was the next frequent comment" (p. 106). One of the most important findings from Barrios's research, however, was that regarding many important female leadership issues there were significant differences in the perceptions of male administrators and female administrators. The women in the sample indicated that the following factors are barriers with regard to their upper mobility toward the position of CEO of a school district:

1. limited time for career mobility;
2. career aspirations being placed behind family responsibilities;
3. family commitments are a priority [over] career advancement;
4. limited access to mentors within the organization;
5. exclusions from established network system;

6. sponsorship not available within the organization;
7. limited support system within the organization; and
8. educational administrative positions entered into too late. (Barrios, 2004, pp. 114-115)

Another impediment to the superintendency for women is that they come to this position at a later age. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) found that 72% of female superintendents are mothers. This particular statistic, along with women's staying in the classroom longer than their male counterparts, usually means that women are coming to the superintendency later in life, with less leadership experience than their male counterparts. Shakeshaft (1989), more than 2 decades ago, noted that men begin their administrative career nearly 10 years earlier than women. This age difference puts many women at a selection disadvantage before they even have their first interview (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Tallerico, 2000).

Another challenge that many females face is difficulty relocating for a new position as well as other responsibilities of family. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) suggested,

Women's care giving responsibilities for maintaining family life and rearing children becomes problematic, if the men in marriages do not share the responsibilities of caregivers. It is particularly problematic if women with children aspire to enter increasingly powerful professions and increasingly powerful leadership positions, which require additional training, longer hours, and more responsibility. (p. 23)

This situation is complicated further by women's often being unable to relocate. It is expected that women follow men as they move from position to position. The same, however, is not the case for women. For the spouse's job to come first and the woman's family to be kept together, a married woman often must take a pass on promotions and superintendencies (Harris, Lowery, & Arnold, 2002).

Berman (1999) conducted her research in the area of upward mobility for women administrators in international schools. She came to several conclusions after receiving 146 returned surveys:

1. Mentoring is an important factor in female administrators' careers. Mentors give protégées career directions and support, and they assist with career changes.
2. Having a strong self-concept supports upward mobility.
3. Geographic locale has nothing to do with barriers to upward mobility. Regardless of the country involved, respondents seemed to express the same views about female access and leadership.

3.2 Bringing the Canvas to Life

Although the research base on women and educational administration is growing, the literature is predominantly focused on career paths and *obtaining* a position of leadership as opposed to women's experiences *in* the leadership position. In the research literature that does exist, certain key aspects of women and the superintendency appear to emerge. These aspects are related to leadership context, leadership style, power and leadership, priorities for female superintendents, and the apparent qualities and focus of successful women superintendents. These themes are explored in greater depth in this section.

Background. Most female superintendents serve in urban and rural districts. Indeed, 60% of women serve in districts of fewer than 3000 students (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). In contrast, 26% of women superintendents serve in districts of more than 5000 students, as compared to only 16% of all male superintendents. As Kowalski noted in her 1995 book *Keepers of the Flame: Contemporary Urban Superintendents*, data from the prior decade suggested "women were twice as likely to be hired as administrators in urban districts as in other types of communities" (p. 27). In 2003, the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) reported that 28% of the superintendents in 61 of the largest districts in the country were women, 18%, women of color (Simmons, in Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). By the 2010 CGCS survey, 27% of the superintendents in 65 of the largest districts in the country were women, 18% were women of color (Council of Great City Schools, 2010). Hence, there has been virtually no change in the demographic makeup of the urban superintendent in the past seven years. These types of jurisdictions report higher rates of special student populations, poverty, student mobility, teacher turnover, and facilities in disrepair than their suburban counterparts (Buchanan, 2006; Haas, 2000; Kozol, 1991, 1995; Reeves, 2003; Ziebarth, 2004). Women are more likely to be appointed from within the district, but men are more likely to spend more time in the superintendency. Nearly three fifths (58%) of men have been in the superintendency more than 7 years, as opposed to only 31% of female superintendents (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). The general portrait is of women who do not have much experience disproportionately leading troubled, urban districts.

There are several reasons why women, particularly African American women, are selected to lead urban districts. Kowalski (1995) noted the confluence of factors that allowed women and people of color to break the glass ceiling in urban districts. Women and people of color were desirable for these positions, ironically, because the positions themselves were not seen as attractive by the dominant-culture superintendent. Conditions in urban districts have been reported as mired in politics, corruption, and the threat of state or mayoral takeover (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Ziebarth, 2004). Hence, just at the time job opportunities were opening up for women and people of color in general, the conditions of urban districts deteriorated and were viewed by mainstream administrators as intractable (Earle & Kysilko, 1990). Although the literature specifically paints the hiring of urban superintendents who are women of color pejoratively, that is, no one else will take the positions, our supposition is that these women are hired from a position of strength. That is, they are hired precisely for their resiliency, their ability to work collaboratively, and their understanding of the urban culture.

Another reason women are selected to run urban districts is because urban areas in general tend to tolerate difference. Tolerating women and women of color may be one benefit of the diverse urban environment. African American women, like their male counterparts, may be perceived as more culturally adept with predominantly African American populations (Kowalski, 1995). Although this theory has been posited for African American superintendents, the data do not suggest a similar pattern in hiring Latina superintendents, who make up 2% of the urban superintendency (CGCS, 2010).

The average tenure of the urban superintendent has spiraled downward over the past two decades and remains far lower than that of suburban and rural districts (Buchanan, 2006; Kowalski, 1995). In 1995, the average tenure of an urban superintendent was 3-4 years. By 2004, "the superintendent carousel [had] spun out of control. . .with many, if not most, of America's large urban school districts looking for new leaders" (Buchanan, 2006, p. 15). The average tenure of an urban superintendent in 2003 was less than 3 years, and for about one third of the superintendents, it was less than a year (Buchanan, 2006). Therefore, another reason women were proportionally more prevalent in urban superintendencies may simply be because positions turned over more frequently, causing a wealth of vacancies. It is difficult to know if women feed into the turnover statistics or benefit from them, that is, take the vacant positions left by men. The 2010 CGCS survey noted that the downward trend in longevity has been reversed and the average tenure of an urban superintendent has slightly increased, to 4 years. The fact that this trend has been reversed, whereas the proportion of women in urban superintendencies has not changed, may indicate that these women are making a positive impact in the urban setting and, hence, remain leading their districts.

As noted, there is very little research in this area from which to draw conclusions (Funk, Pankake, & Schroth, 2002). Beekley (1999) noted that women often experience isolation in the superintendency, are frozen out of the "ole boy" network, experience blatant gender bias by both staff and school boards, and suffer personal attacks on their character. This experience results in women's resigning and taking lower leadership roles in other districts. Yet, it is also clear that urban school boards, and boards in general, are seeking the very skills that women are said to possess.

Leadership style. School boards may hire women because they perceive that women will be more adept at collaborative decision making and decentralization (Handy-Collins, 2008; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Kowalski, 1995). Yet the extent to which women actually lead differently from men is disputed. Bolman and Deal (2003), in their investigation of men and women leaders, utilizing the four frames of leadership defined by the researchers (structural, human resources, symbolic, and political) found "no differences in frame orientation among men and women" (p. 346). Their review of the literature suggested that men and women in like positions were viewed "more alike than different" (p. 346). Similarly, Hoyt (2007) noted that differences in leadership among men and women may be more a byproduct of women's learned behaviors. That is, women know that hierarchical and dictatorial behavior will not be received well by men; therefore, women self-select to act in a more collaborative manner. In two meta-analyses conducted by Early and

Johnson in 1990 and van Engen in 2001, as cited by Hoyt, gender "differences were found only in settings where behavior was more regulated by social roles, such as experimental settings" (p. 266). The only durable difference found between men and women was that women tended to be more democratic or participative than men (p. 266). A third theory is that given the bias women face in the workplace, it is much more difficult to obtain the superintendency. Faced with these barriers, only the best women administrators make it to the superintendency (Bogotch, 1995). Irrespective of whether the leadership styles exhibited by women are different, women are reported to experience the superintendency differently from the way men experience it.

Differential approaches to power and leadership. Although women have been found to perform slightly better in leadership roles that are consistent with their gender in fields such as education, government, and social service (Hoyt, 2007), researchers have found that one of the key ways in which women superintendents differ from men is in their approach to power. As Brunner (1994) noted, traditional conceptions of power are rooted in domination and reflected in control and *power over* another, whereas women tend to view power from a social production paradigm, working in collaboration with others, that is, *power to*. In their recent book Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) wrote, "Women have modeled ways to use power and make change through understanding, a process that requires listening, not just talking" (p. 91). Arendt and Parsons (as cited in Brunner, 1994) described power as collective, existing for an individual only in concert with others, the purpose of which is to get things done. Brunner found that it is this conception of power that women superintendents describe.

Yet, it appears that women have been so acculturated to view power as an oppressive force, they may actually avoid even using the term. Brunner quoted one woman superintendent, who said,

"I have a difficult time with the word power because it has negative connotations for me. Culturally women were not supposed to be the power base. And their being powerful was not looked upon as a positive characteristic for a female. And so when you asked me about power, I want you to know that I want to get around the word. I just want to tell you that as a female, the word just isn't a good word" [laughing]. (Brunner, 1998, p. 167)

Brunner (1994) found that women avoid using the term, rarely perceive themselves as powerful, and are more likely to describe themselves with terms such as "good listener," "patient," and "someone who gets things done" than with the word "powerful."

Consistent with this conception of power as getting things done, Alston (2005) described the work of successful Black women in the superintendency through the theory of tempered radicalism. Alston noted that African American superintendents have been acculturated with a "double whammy" of power-based oppression that is related to their being women as well as their being Black. Yet, through tempered radicalism these women are able to harness the power that is intended to control them and utilize it in support of the goals of the organization, in this case supporting the education of children. In these instances, Black superintendents are able to lead with a strong moral authority in support of children, exerting their influence "for the cause" and, in this way, to outflank the oppressive power players in the community.

Bogotch (1995) also brought focus the theme of *power to* when he described the power definitions of the woman superintendent in his case as being equated to information, consistent with the common adage "knowledge is power." In his case study of a first-year superintendent, knowledge reflected the personal power of the superintendent, but as information was given to others, knowledge was conceived as empowering to others. For this superintendent, when board members thought they were not being fully informed, relations were strained as this practice was considered a move toward the superintendent's *power over*, and power was perceived as a zero-sum commodity.

Both Brunner and Alston described an approach to power and influence that is indirect yet equally as effective as the traditional control orientation to power. Successful women superintendents, it appears, do not attempt to directly control others to accomplish their agenda. In fact, efforts by women to exert authority directly are often met with hostility. As one respondent noted to Brunner, "women can't be directive or before long they are called bitches. So if women want to stay in power they have to find a way to circumvent by using a softer style" (p. 169). It is this approach to power that characterizes women as collaborative leaders and makes them successful in districts that require collaboration and the bringing together of diverse stakeholders. Further, this style is consistent with the tendency of women superintendents to focus more clearly than male superintendents on the core technology of education, curriculum and instruction for student learning, which has made women successful in the superintendency.

Priorities for female superintendents. Consistent with the path they take to the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007), women tend to focus on issues associated with student learning while in the superintendency. In the age of *No Child Left Behind* (2002), the superintendent is being called upon increasingly to serve as the chief academic officer (Petersen & Barnett, as cited in Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). Ostensibly, this focus on student achievement actually supports the hiring of more women into the position of superintendent. Reciprocally, "the increased focus on academics and accountability should make the job more attractive to more women who tend to have more focus on curriculum, teaching, and learning" (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 88). There is growing evidence that women's focus on student learning has had a direct impact on their ability to be hired in the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Handy-Collins, 2008). Brunner & Grogan (2007) reported in their 2003 survey that 35% of the women employed as superintendents were hired because they were instructional leaders, and fully 46% were expected to be instructional leaders in the position of district CEO. The difference between the reason they were hired and the expectation once they were hired (35% to 46%) reflects both their actual focus on student learning and the stereotype that women are strong instructional leaders, perhaps at the expense of political and financial leadership.

Being a strong instructional leader can be a double-edged sword for women superintendents. Successful women superintendents have been found to be highly ethical, "doing what is right regardless of the circumstances" (Funk et al., 2002). Indeed, Bogotch (1995) chronicled the demise of a first-year superintendent who took moral offense when stakeholders were not fully committed to student learning in her district. In some instances, remaining highly focused on student learning instead of district politics and other issues can hinder a woman's marketability and lead to professional isolation. Brunner (2000) noted that the women superintendents she studied often were silenced by their male colleagues, who were much more interested in discussing finance and politics than student learning. Moreover, although they are interested in improving student achievement, school boards and other community members still tend to think of male leadership in terms of fiscal stewardship (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Handy-Collins, 2008). Nonetheless, *No Child Left Behind* (2002) is increasingly placing pressure on school districts to improve student achievement, and school boards are increasingly turning to women who place a high priority on enhancing student achievement while in the superintendency.

Qualities of successful women superintendents. Researchers have suggested that women approach the superintendency in very different ways from men and that successful superintendents stress different leadership styles and characteristics than their male counterparts do (Alston, 2005; Brunner, 1998; Funk et al., 2002). Bogotch (1995) described the female superintendent he studied as valuing other people, possessing a strong commitment to children, and being collaborative. Similarly, Brunner (as cited in Alston, 2005), noted that women "dedicate themselves to the care of children. . .[and] use collaboration that is more relational and consensus building" (pp. 681-682). Funk et al. described the strengths of female administrators as "including collaborative and transformation leadership, a focus on curriculum and instruction, inclusion of all clienteles in decision making, empowerment of teachers, students, and parents, and articulation of new missions of what schools should be" (p. 3). In their study of six outstanding superintendents in Texas, the researchers identified eight leadership themes, including the following: (a) developing and holding her own vision and creating a collective vision of those around her; (b) maintaining high ethical standards of honesty, fairness, integrity, and determination; (c) being a visionary; (d) communicating and relating to people, especially the school board; (e) hiring and motivating people who are committed to the success of children; (f) possessing a strong sense of commitment to the success of students; (g) working hard with a strong sense of responsibility; and (h) maintaining high energy, stamina, and good health. Although it can be argued that these eight strategies for success may be applied to both men and women in the superintendency, these themes emerged from the researchers' data as the strongest in relationship to their female subjects.

In contrast, Brunner, in her 1998 study noted seven gender-specific key strategies that successful women superintendents used. These included the following: (a) balancing both role and gender expectations; (b) keeping their agenda simple to focus on the care of children and their academic achievement; (c) remaining "feminine" in their communication styles while navigating the masculinized culture; (d) disregarding the concept of "acting like a man" while working in, essentially, a male role; (e) removing anything that blocks success; (f) maintaining a fearless, "can do" posture, while also ensuring "down time" to rejuvenate; and (g) sharing power and credit, much as a servant leader orients her work toward the service of others. These findings suggested that women both approach and experience the superintendency in significantly different ways than men do and that traditional theories of leadership are limiting when describing women in the superintendency (Bjork, 2000).

This was noted as well in the research of Ardovini, Trautman, Brown, and Irby. Rather than working with traditional leadership theories, they validated synergistic leadership when investigating female behaviors and experiences. In addition to what Brunner (1998) discovered, they reported that superintendents expressed a need for a connection of all concerned stakeholders. "The female superintendent was very intent on the need to be in touch with what was going on in the community and described the need to have an inclusive vision" (p. 43).

Working with colleagues. Historically, women ascended to the superintendency in the early part of the 20th century because they were perceived to represent an honest, ethical alternative to their corrupt male counterparts (Funk et al., 2002). Although community stakeholders preferred this transition, to be unseated by women must not have been popular with their male predecessors. In the 1930s, women were seated in almost 28% of the superintendencies nationwide (Funk et al., 2002); that number subsequently diminished to a low of 3% by 1970 (Blout, 1998). Women have been found to be disadvantaged when either supervising or being rated by a high proportion of men (Hoyt, 2007). In such instances, women tend to be evaluated less favorably than men. This pattern holds in the superintendency as well. Women have been found to be sabotaged by new male board members and male subordinates alike (Beekley, 1999).

Brunner (1994), in her study of power relationships in the superintendency, noted that the differing discourse of power among men and women leads to alienation for women who cross over to male power circuits, for example, women who become superintendents. Women superintendents reported that their male counterparts talked about irrelevant or inappropriate things in collegial gatherings, ignored comments by women, interrupted or talked over women, and "in general left them out of the conversation" (Brunner, 1998, p. 168).

Yet, consistent with their approach to power, women also have found ways to circumvent this type of gender bias and, at times, to use it to their advantage. Brunner (1998) described women superintendents that used male subordinates as their spokespersons to ensure that men communicated with males, who discounted their opinions. Women have reported talking differently to various audiences to be heard, depending on the audiences' perceptions of women. For example, one superintendent noted that she utilized much simpler language when discussing issues with her school board, if board members perceived women as less capable. She noted that by using simpler language, she was perceived as less threatening to some board members (Brunner, 2000). Although women still face unique challenges of bias, isolation, and alienation by their colleagues, they remain committed to leading collaboratively in support of children and academic achievement. This commitment may contribute to the slow increase in numbers of women among the population of superintendents nationwide.

3.3 The Final Portrait

The 1990s saw an increase in the number of published studies on the superintendency (Bjork, 2000). Along with this upsurge was an increase in the number of studies of women superintendents and women superintendents of color. Such studies chronicled the career path of women seeking the superintendency; the gender bias women faced while in the position; and the actions, characteristics, and leadership styles of successful women superintendents. In 2000, Bjork utilized Shakeshaft's six stages of a paradigmatic shift in "understanding women in school administration" (p. 7). These stages included "documentation of the absence of women, the search for women who have been administrators, women as disadvantaged or subordinate, women studied on their own terms, women as challenge to theory, and transformation of theory" (p. 7). Since the 1990s, fewer empirical studies have been published on women and the superintendency. Those studies that have been published more recently have focused heavily on the use of descriptive surveys. These studies not only have painted women in a passive posture with respect to their own careers, but also have regressed to the earlier stages of Shakeshaft's paradigmatic shift continuum. As Bjork (2000) noted, few empirical studies have encompassed stage four and stage five. Hence, at a time when there are fewer studies being conducted, those that are tend to use a survey to capture the status of women in the superintendency. Yet consistent with Bjork's assertion, it may be time to explore the very analytic core upon which the articles rest.

The research reviewed in this section provides some insight into women studied on their own terms. Indeed, these studies do suggest that women experience the superintendency in fundamentally different ways based on their gender. Hence, there is a need to conduct more research that challenges prevailing theories of the superintendency and develops new theories that take into account women in the superintendency.

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