The Journal of Educational Foundations
Vol. 35, No. 1
Spring 2022, pp. 33-51.
Copyright 2022 by Caddo Gap Press

A Pouring Into

Theorizing Black Women's Educational Leadership Through the Afrocentric Epistemological Lens

Lisa Maria Grillo
Sosanya Jones
Melody Andrews
Lyndsie Whitehead

Introduction

Black women currently enroll in graduate school programs and earn doctoral degrees at higher rates than all other demographic groups in the United States. Nonetheless, Black women remain noticeably underrepresented in educational leadership positions in public education. They lead a only small fraction of the nation's school districts, holding fewer than 5% of all superintendent positions in the United States (Olive-Cadet, 2018). In terms of leadership roles, Black women's involvement in school administration has historically been limited to the principalship, a role that takes demonstrably longer for Black women to reach compared to their White and male counterparts (Alston, 2000; Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

Research explorations of Black women who lead in public education primarily speak to the dynamics of the principalship, superintendency, and other top executive roles, including their multifaceted experiences at the intersection of race and gender (Alston, 2000, 2005; Dillard, 1995; Katz, 2004; Katz, 2012; Reed, 2012; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). A number of these studies are framed theoretically by various dimensions of the

Lisa Maria Grillo is an assistant professor and doctoral coordinator, Sosanya Jones is an assistant professor of higher education leadership and policy studies, Melody Andrews is a doctoral student in the K-12 education leadership and policy studies program, and Lyndsie Whitehead is a doctroral student in the higher education leadership and policy studies program, all in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies of the School of Education at Howard University, Washington, D.C. E-mail address: lisa.grillo@howard.edu

Black feminist/womanist framework, which connects Black women collectively, as a group, through a unique set of experiences in the context of oppression related to race, gender, and age (Alexander, 2010; Bass, 2012; Davis, 2016; Dillard, 1995; Grant, 2012; Horsford, 2012; Horsford & Tillman, 2012). In her work, Collins (1990) acknowledged a common glue binding Black women in what Horsford and Tillman (2012) call the "reinvention" of themselves, as well as their relentless opposition to oppression. Collins noted that despite the diverse lived experiences of Black women in the United States, these experiences accrue and stimulate a "distinctive consciousness" (Collins, 1990, p. "Why U.S. Black Feminist Thought?" para. 6).

Black feminism, considered a dialectical opponent to systematic oppression for Black women, has advanced in its evolution and application to the field of educational leadership over the past decade. Black women scholars in educational leadership have explored particular concepts within, and informed by, Black feminist theory. For example, Bass (2012) explored the ethic of caring as a Black feminist epistemological dimension among five Black women leaders in education, calling it a "changing force in school reform" (p. 82). Horsford (2012) discussed the intersectional identities and leadership of Black women within a democratic, community-situated bridge leadership approach. Reed (2012) applied Bloom and Erlandson's four assumptions of Black feminist epistemology to describe how the intersection of race and gender influences the practice of Black women principals.

The present study extends the work of these Black women scholars by responding to Collins' call (1990) to further explore theoretical interpretations of Black women's realities. We intend to contribute to the growing body of literature on Black women and educational leadership by exploring their leadership through an Afrocentric epistemological lens. We aim to place Black women and their leadership at the epistemological center, in order to discover new theoretical knowledge that speaks directly to and about them. Additionally, we offer a perspective regarding the ways in which we study, reflect upon, and judge educational leadership through an exploration of the cultural origins (and reinforcing manifestations) of leadership. At the deep structural level of culture, we extend Alston's work (2005) to unveil the deep inner workings of culture that inspire a leadership orientation among Black women as a cultural group (Myers, 1998). From a practical perspective, this research is intended to produce findings, implications, and suggestions for future research inquiries that support the active agency of Black women who lead. The voice and power of Black women leaders as a cultural group are illuminated through this research.

Background

Throughout herstory, Black women have persistently impacted public education. Mary McLeod Bethune, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Septima Clark are among a host of Black women who, historically, have transformed educational systems (Alexander, 2010; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Although the transformative power of Black women in shaping educational practice has been insufficiently recognized in public intellectual spaces, Black women have historically understood the significance of their own agency and its influence in their cultural communities. Anna Julia Cooper (2016) captured this sentiment in her seminal work, A Voice from the South, stating, "only the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'" (p. 31).

Understanding who they are and their relationship to others reflects a reality among Black women that is epistemologically rooted in an Afrocentric perspective. According to Asante (1987), Afrocentricity places African ideals at the center of analyses that involve African culture and behavior (p. 6). It calls for the study of Black people to originate from a Black frame of reference (Burgess & Agozino, 2011). As an epistemology, Afrocentricity seeks to describe what and how persons of African descent consider, construct, and validate knowledge. It is important to note that persons of African descent are not a monolith, and that there are a variety of attitudes, cultures, languages, and traditions found in the diaspora around the globe. However, we embrace indigenous universal values found within the continent that point to an ontological perspective regarding the nature of an African existence (McClendon, 1995). While there has been some debate about the tension between this universality and individuality, in this research we have embraced the principle of African universality in order to highlight an epistemology that is often ignored and devalued. Summed up by the phrase, "we are, therefore I exist" (Harris, 1998; McDougal III, 2014), Afrocentric epistemology contends that one's existence, and the expression of this existence, can only be experienced in relationship to others and a supreme being. The nature of reality, from the Afrocentric perspective, is simultaneously physical and metaphysical; spiritual and material; sensory and extrasensory (Asante, 1988; Harris, 1998; Karenga, 1993; McDougal III, 2014; Myers, 1998; Nobles, 1984). The Afrocentric epistemology, or Afrocentric knowing, therefore validates knowledge through both historical knowledge and intuition.

Two assumptions in Afrocentric knowing are particularly relevant to the present study. The first assumption, *the extended self*, focuses

on the way we think about relationships with the self, others, nature, and the supernatural (a supreme being). African knowing is primarily sociocentric, grounded in communalism and cooperation. One achieves a sense of knowing oneself, others, and the world through interaction with others. The highest value is placed on relational interdependence in the Afrocentric orientation, and knowing becomes a collective act (Bakari, 1997; McDougal III, 2014).

The idea of *cultural permanence*, the second assumption, predominates as the conceptual frame for this research study. According to Nobles (1984), culture provides a general design for living and patterns for interpreting a group of people's reality (para 2). As a total way of life of a people, the ubiquitous nature of culture provides an explanatory lens for all aspects of human life (Myers, 1998). According to Asante (1988), "Everything that you do, all that you are and will become is intricately wrapped in the Kente of culture" (p. 38).

Explorations of culture in African knowing consistently involve the idea of essentialness, or the permanent quality of culture. Afrocentric scholars emphasize the existence and continuity of a cultural thread, a force, that permeates the lives of its cultural members, namely diasporic Africans (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1987; Burgess & Agozino, 2011; Kershaw, 1998; Nobles, 1984). Ani (1994) represented cultural permanence as the *asili*, a Kiswahili term meaning source or origin, and described it as a culture's DNA, which gives meaning to cultural creativity, logic, and behavior (pp. 12-13). A blueprint for cultural expression, the asili organizes cultural members into an interest group and as an ideological unit (p. 16; McDougal III, 2014; Myers, 1998). The asili is not readily observable or visible to its cultural members, and therefore its meaning is often elusive. It encompasses those elements of culture that are *felt* through confrontation and observation. Nobles (1984) likewise described an African world view that has persisted despite European invasion of the African existence. He spoke to the preservation of cultural "residuals" among Black Americans, noting that the African world view lives at the base of the Black cultural sphere.

This study invokes Afrocentricity in its design of a culturally truthful exploration of Black women as persons of African descent, with the understanding that such explorations of Black women's lived experiences do not often take place (Pellerin, 2012; Tillman, 2002). In his discussion regarding epistemological problems in European-centered interpretations of Black reality, Nobles (1984) discussed "cultural transubstantiation," where beliefs within cultural systems are "translated" from one culture to another. The first culture superimposes its beliefs upon the second culture, yielding an interpretation of meaning often "lost in translation," that is, more reflective of the first culture's ethnocentric understanding

of the second culture than the second culture's epistemological reality. Therefore, explorations of Black women's leadership that use existing, predominantly White male-dominated theoretical leadership frames where Black women are not centered are fundamentally flawed; such pursuits lead to transubstantive errors resulting in untruthful findings. Collins (1990) likewise noted that the control of knowledge validation by elite White men—including theoretical paradigms and epistemologies—has rendered Black women's voices and experiences as insignificant and distorted (p. 1).

An Afrocentric exploration of Black women's leadership seeks to generate new, truthful knowledge by (a) resisting white dominant leadership theories asserting universal application; and (b) offering to the field culturally specific knowledge that may be used in both theory and practice (Tillman, 2002, p. 3). Conceptually and methodologically, we center the lived experiences of Black women leaders in culturally relevant ways through the amplification of their voices (Alexander, 2010; Dillard, 2016).

Method

This narrative qualitative study was designed to explore the cultural permanence of Black women's leadership within the field of education. Our research question—How do Black women reveal aspects of their leadership as cultural residuals? (Nobles, 1984)—was grounded in Afrocentric epistemology (i.e., an assumption of cultural permanence). The study's research question was refined through a simultaneous and cyclical process of data collection and analysis, consistent with a grounded theory methodological approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2012).

We chose narrative inquiry because this tradition of qualitative research treats the stories of participants as the primary source of data and aligns to the indigenous African tradition of storytelling as a way to transfer knowledge (van Wyk, 2014). In this work, we embrace and elevate the voices and stories of Black women as valuable and necessary for knowledge sharing and generation. Narrative inquiry can take many forms. Lieblich et al. (1998) make a very basic distinction between content and form, and between holistic versus categorical examination of narratives. Being interested in coherence, we focused mainly on the study of form and analyzed "life stories." Even when interested in specific parts, we found it necessary always to consider the whole of the narrative (holistic examination).

We closely aligned the study's epistemological stance with an Afrocentric methodology, which operationalizes African centeredness, is conceived from a Black perspective, and actively works toward the

liberation of the cultural community by finding solutions and generating emancipatory knowledge (Burgess & Agozino, 2011; Kershaw, 1998; Pellerin, 2012). Understanding that all research conducted by Black scholars about Black people is not Afrocentric, we attempted to remain honest to an Afrocentric methodology during the research process by asking ourselves and one another: "Is this research in the best interest of Black people according to Black people?" (Kershaw, 1998, p. 34). Decisions involving the sampling strategy, data collection and analysis methods, and trustworthiness were approached primarily from the Afrocentric methodological perspective. A secondary grounded theory approach complemented Afrocentricity, assisting in the creation of a methodological space for the emergence of new knowledge. We adopted a social-constructionist grounded theory approach which included reflexivity, researcher-participant-data interaction, and flexible data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2012; Shank, 2002).

Participants

Participants included four Black women who currently lead in various roles in public schools or school districts in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Table 1 presents information regarding the individual participants, including professional roles at the time of the study and relevant details that illustrate the diversity of experiences, perceptions, and attitudes that each participant brought to the study. (All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy.)

Utilizing purposive sampling (Wengraf, 2001), we recruited the participants through the various professional networks of the principal investigator, who sent filers to superintendents and leaders in local school districts and charter school networks, sorority members in local chapters, and members of professional associations. The principal investigator initially engaged with potential participants who expressed interest via email and through telephone conversations, making them aware of the study's goals. The principal investigator then held extensive conversations with ten potential participants who met the study's criteria. We wished to prepare them for potentially intimidating data collection activities (autobiographical storytelling) and prolonged engagement with researchers. Based on these conversations, we chose four participants based on their availability and willingness to engage.

We chose the sample size of four participants based on previous qualitative studies on Black women leaders in education that likewise used small samples. Use of small samples in these studies on Black women leaders allowed for multiple, in-depth opportunities to understand participants' lived experiences, as well as helped researchers to utilize themselves as instruments as they established interpersonal connections

with participants (Bass, 2012; Dillard, 1995; Grant, 2012; Peters, 2012). Likewise, use of autobiographical stories in the focus group required participants to share personal and intimate information about their lives and careers. Including only four participants provided a safe and affirming environment to accomplish this goal. Four participants was a large enough sample to uncover various opinions, yet small enough to develop deep and contextualized understandings that could potentially allow for transferability of findings.

Data Collection and Analysis

We initially interacted with the four participants through a two-hour focus group on the campus of a local university. Participants were

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	*Background Information*
Maya	• Current charter school network executive • Raised in the Southwest part of the United States • A first-generation college graduate • Worked in under-resourced districts in CA and DC • High expectations for her success were established by family • Believes she experienced some degree of poverty in her upbringing • Believes system-level reform is needed on behalf of children
Robin	• Current Assistant Principal • Held previous positions of principal and central office leader • Born into a family of educators • Previously experienced a successful career in communication • Describes her leadership as "people-centered"
Felicia	• Current Assistant Principal • Held pervious positions of teacher, counselor, and pupil personnel worker • Interactions with parents and Black women educators during her childhood led to career in education • Serves as an adjunct professor at a small liberal arts college • Writes culturally responsive curricula
Joan	• Current Principal • Held previous positions as a teacher and instructional technology coach. • A graduate of the school district in which she currently leads • Feels that she has always had to prove she is "capable" • Describes her leadership as supportive, family-oriented, relationship-oriented, and rooting in coaching.

given 15 minutes to share their leadership stories orally with other focus group members (Sanders-Lawson et al., 2006). Prior to the focus group, researchers provided participants with sentence stems to help in the crafting of their stories. Stem examples included, "I chose to become an educational leader because" and "As a leader, I am inspired by." Sentence stems were crafted by the principal investigator based on use of leadership storytelling in the graduate-level educational leadership courses she teaches. Additional sentence stems shared with participants are shown in Table 2. Participants were advised to choose a storytelling approach that was most comfortable for them, and at best, reflective of their personalities and oratory styles.

We chose autobiographical storytelling as a methodological expression of Afrocentric epistemology, because as Myers (1998) noted, "autobiography…is so purely consistent with the Afrocentric epistemology of self-knowledge as the basis of all knowledge" (p. 11). As a culturally sustaining research method, autobiographical storytelling is rooted in the oral tradition of griots, and by extension the oral tradition which exists throughout the Black diaspora (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 423). Furthermore, autobiographical storytelling lies at the core of qualitative research as an authentic method (Fisher, 1985; Lewis, 2011) and gives participants the reflexive authority to construct their own stories in ways that make sense to them. It was chosen for its utility in granting agency through the centering of those who have been historically marginalized and silenced.

Table 2

Sentence Stems Provided to Participants for Leadership Stories

I chose to become an educational leader because….
I first thought about becoming a leader in education when….
This is what I believe about students….
I'd like to change education by….
As a leader, I am inspired by….
I would describe my leadership style as….
I believe that my job as a leader is to….
I'd like my professional/leadership legacy to be….
Each day, this is what motivates me to lead….
Leaders in education and other fields whom I admire include….
The experiences I had as a child and young adult that led me to leadership include….
The experiences I had as a child and young adult that have shaped my leadership include….
My cultural background influences my leadership in the following ways….

At the conclusion of the leadership stories, participants reacted to and discussed one another's stories. The entire focus group was audiotaped, including this interaction among participants.

Following the focus group, we transcribed the audiotape and began the initial analysis of the data, which subsequently informed the construction of questions we used in semi-structured follow-up interviews with participants. The principal investigator held one-hour audiotaped, semi-structured interviews with three participants in a location of their choice. (One participant chose not to participate in the study beyond the focus group for personal reasons). We also held follow-up conversations with participants as we crafted vignettes and engaged in member checks to evaluate the congruence between our findings and participants' realities (Shenton, 2004).

There are many ways to analyze narrative data. We chose a dual approach derived from Polkinghorne (1988): paradigmatic analysis of narratives, in which themes are derived from previous epistemological and theoretical work (Afrocentricity and Black feminist epistemology), and in which themes are also inductively derived from the data using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to integrate high-level emergent themes into a theoretical whole (Shank, 2002). We also maintained an open and flexible data analysis process by meaningfully questioning the data, encouraging new concepts to emerge.

The coding was conducted by the four authors, at first individually. We then came together as a discussion group in numerous meetings and compared analysis results to reach consensus. At that stage, two colleagues who had also assisted in the data collection offered useful comments.

Positionality

Nobles (1984) stated that membership in a particular cultural group gives one a "greater capacity to understand information relevant to that cultural group" (p. 402). We therefore situated ourselves in this research as insiders, using our access as Black women to (a) recruit participants through our professional connections with Black women, (b) develop prolonged connections with participants, (c) interpret findings using a participant voice, and (d) extend connections with participants beyond research settings into professional contexts, at participants' requests. We made use of the identity we shared with participants in our methodology, such as in capturing the deep meaning in Black idiomatic expressions (i.e., "I've got to do better, be better") and creating safe spaces for participants to be vulnerable when speaking of leadership failure. As researchers, we were reflexively aware of our investment in this re-

search regarding Black women. In this regard, we considered ourselves "advocatory agents" in this research (Boykin, 1978, p. 78). In light of our personal and philosophical investments in this work, we integrated several strategies towards rigor and trustworthiness. These included triangulation involving focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews, as well as member checking, collaborative debriefs among researchers, and researcher journaling (Grant, 2012; Shenton, 2004).

Limitations

When considering issues of transferability, there are a few limitations in this study related to sample. Use of only four participants in this study, intended to draw theoretical implications regarding often elusive understanding of the cultural origins of behavior, limits our ability to draw conclusions or suggest definitive implications for practice. Moreover, participants were all located within a specific geographic location, which may have influenced their epistemological beliefs and cultural understandings in all aspects of their lives. A more diverse geographical sample may have yielded different findings. Finally, losing one participant during the course of data collection may have limited our ability to respond to the study's research question with greater complexity.

Findings

Several themes emerged in this study. This article presents findings related to the primary theme of "*leadership as pouring into*." In the initial focus group, three of the four women used the phrase *pouring into* to emphasize both the importance of relationship building in their leadership and the extension of leadership to benefit others. Relationships were central to participants' leadership identities.

Pouring into resonated in a profound way for the participant we called Maya, who spoke of the ways in which she was poured into and how, in turn, she poured into others. Maya felt she was not poured into early in her career in ways "good enough to meet [her] standard." She regarded *pouring into* as a way to help others "grow exponentially" and "find joy in their work." She stated the following:

> I've developed a skill set around the ability to give and receive feedback. And so being thoughtful about, if I can understand what [Justine] needs, if I can understand really what [Justine's] strengths are, and if I can give her feedback around that, then [Justine] is probably going to grow exponentially under my leadership.

As Maya grew and became more focused on those who worked under her leadership, her focus on others became more individualized. This

lesson emanated from leadership failure, which caused her to think differently: "[Failure] forced me to say, 'Okay, everybody gets pie, but there is something that [Justine] is great at. My work is to figure out what she's great at and then give her the pie.'"

As self-described "achievement-oriented" women, each participant explored her journey to become a leader who poured into others. Through different experiences, they shared leadership focus shifts from evidence-based outcomes (i.e., final product deliverables, achievement scores, and other data sources that indicated educational improvement or progress) to the *actual people doing the work*. Each learned that the work is about the people they grow, support, and help to find joy in their work. Robin, for example, was given a charge by district leaders to turn around a failing school. Initially, she enacted an outcome-oriented approach, focusing on the technical aspects of the work:

> I go in and that's exactly what I do. We do backwards mapping, we have collaborative planning….our scores are like 98%, and they're like, "How did you do that?" And I broke down our data, we had our data wall. But my culture was a sinking ship, because sometimes…I was telling instead of modeling; in all transparency, I had males teary- eyed, and I was like, "This is the bus, this is where we're going. Stay on the bus or find a different bus."

Realizing that her school culture was suffering, Robin changed her leadership approach:

> But again, I didn't look at the people who had to do the work. They did it, it was great work, but I didn't look at them as people. So with my strengths of being a learner…being responsible, a strategic commander and achiever, all of those…You can make some strides, but none of that deals with connecting with people and building relationships….Now, [I] look at it differently. So now my vision is very different in that it's about people. So now I'm not about just moving the needle and not only about students, but about the people that you work with and valuing them.

Maya likewise was outcome-focused in her leadership but observed a morale deficit among her team members. Her pouring into focus evolved from failure, which recognized her past as "…being a leader who initially in my career was so product- and outcome-focused that I did not think about the people and what they needed. What I cared about was the results." A mentor helped to refocus her leadership:

> I was talking to a mentor at the time and I said to her, "We just crossed that finish line and I don't understand why no one is happy besides me. This is a huge win. We're done, right?" And she said to me, "Maya, you are achievement-oriented and you relate through achievement…so what happens to your team and your staff when they aren't achieving? What does their relationship look like with you?" So I was like, "Oh,

> there is no relationship if we're not winning." Right? I relate through achievement….and so one of the things I had to learn in my leadership is people don't care if you crossed the line if they're bloodied and bruised. They just want the race to be over. They could care less about the win. I realized that my job wasn't to manage the work but to lead people. And so if I was going to lead people...I had to lean into my own discomfort about what that meant and being the complete introvert and not necessarily being interested in what your stuff is, but lean into it to say, if I can understand it and pull it out, then I could be the type of leader where I can believe in things that [Justine] can do and she doesn't even believe it in herself.

Another participant, Felicia, reflected on the notion of *pouring into* during both the focus group and interview. She accepted responsibility for pouring into others, despite not benefitting from it herself. She shared:

> I think there was a common theme [in the focus group] of people pouring into you, and...I remember sitting there wishing like, "Gosh, I wish I had somebody who took to me like that"… but I think in hearing that [I ask myself] "What can we do now so that we're doing this, we're pushing others up in this work?"

The significance of relationships saturated the data. Rather than viewing relationship- building as a skill to be acquired and honed, participants viewed relationships as central to their leadership identities. Participants saw themselves as reflections of those whom they touched as leaders. If they reflected their leadership in a mirror, they would see themselves as others experienced them. This is not to imply self-consciousness, but more an awareness that relationships act as tools in mutually edifying experiences (Ani, 1994; Grillo, 2019). Helping others to find joy, balance, and satisfaction reflected the purpose of relationships.

Felicia spoke to the centrality of relationships in her collaboration efforts with adult stakeholders:

> When I think of myself as a leader, I think the one thing that comes to mind that's very important for me is relationships. And I think my favorite quote by Dr. James Comer, who I absolutely love to quote, is, "No significant learning can occur without significant relationships," and that's important.

Felicia further explored her use of relationship "hats" to support others, build understanding, and reach consensus, particularly with stakeholders who were deemed difficult or challenging, such as parents:

> I think about the various hats that I've worn as an educator over 25 years, and how I bring all of those to the table when I sit down with a family. So if it is a mom, if I gotta put on my mom hat when I'm sitting down with a family, then I'm like, "Okay, this is not Miss Robinson to Miss [Jones], this is [Felicia] to [Marla] now. We're gonna have a

> conversation about raising our children and what that's like and how difficult it is."

Maya echoed the significance of relationships in leadership, reflecting on how a focus on others shapes one's leadership identity:

> Content is not enough for you to be successful here. It requires deep relationships, and it requires the ability and the commitment to understand that you are more than a teacher; you must provide nurturing and support.

The idea of *pouring into* others captured the nature of relationships between participants and others, including those in superior positions. Specifically, they viewed relational leadership acts as extensions of their energy for the enlightenment and growth of others (Harris, 1998; Myers, 1998).

Discussion and Implications

In her study on Black women in the superintendent role, Alston (2005) cautioned against simplifying the experiences of Black leaders. To understand their complex experiences, she offered the tempered radical/servant leader conceptual frame to understand the important and complex aspects of Black women's leadership (p. 683). The tempered radical/servant leader conceptual frame, in large part, stems from an Afrocentric conceptual system and includes elements such as the *Ma'at* (the relationship between the knower and the known); the *Sankofa* (the reclamation of the past to understand who we are and a prerequisite to forward movement); and the *Nguzo Saba* (Karenga, 1993; McDougal III, 2014). Peters (2012) likewise applied an Afrocentric feminist framework in her study of Black women engaged in school reform. We reviewed and considered this previous research in our exploration of Black leadership through the Afrocentric epistemological lens.

A major finding of the present study involved the ways in which participants regarded relationships when enacting their leadership. Use of the phrase *pouring into* reflected their views of their own leadership as an extension of their personal and spiritual selves, and more broadly, their views of leadership as a human-oriented endeavor involving giving to others.

Participants' relationships were integral to leadership identity development; they grew in their confidence and autonomy as they moved toward more harmonious connections with others in professional spaces. They viewed their work, their purpose, as pouring into others in edifying ways, even when they did not benefit reciprocally.

African sociocentrism, a critical element of Afrocentric epistemology,

is reflected in the ways participants collectively conceived their leadership (Asante, 1987; Asante, 1988; Harris, 1998; Schiele, 1998). This sense of pouring into, of extending themselves, reflected the dual nature of the African cultural reality—the material and the spiritual—and their leadership became a giving of themselves, both tangibly and intangibly. Notably, participants did not particularly view their leadership in this way at the beginning of their leadership journeys, but they found through challenges, opportunities, and failure that the focus on "we" rather than "I" or "it" (the work itself) was an authentic expression of their leadership identities. They each desired to see Black people, as a collective, thrive. As Black women they "embod[ied] the 'we-ness'" of themselves (Shockley & Holloway, 2019, p. 270), and each desired to see their staffs and students grow and thrive as well.

Relationships as *pouring into*, or reflections of the extended self, may be connected to findings in the educational leadership literature (and beyond) related to the mothering/other-mothing/caring nature of Black women leaders, as well as their mentoring experiences. The historical, self-sacrificing characterization of Black mothers "speaks to their self-sacrifice so that their children might be positioned to take advantage of opportunities that they themselves were not afforded" (Bass, 2012, p. 79; Panton, 2016). As a result, Black women educational leaders become caregivers in their leadership, providing for the multifaceted needs of the students, families, and other stakeholders whom they serve. Even when they choose not to emphasize the mothering/other mothering nature of their leadership, this other mothering appears to be linked to the legacy and spirit that has been a part of Black women's legacy and caring (Horsford & Tillman, 2012).

While participants discussed *pouring into* by supervisors, mentors, and others in higher professional positions on their behalf, they also expressed disappointment with the infrequency of these exchanges relative to White and/or male leaders. Few research studies have explored mentoring within underrepresented groups, including Black women (Grant, 2012). Mentoring has been generally examined within a patriarchal frame where there is an unequal distribution of power between the mentor and mentee, and the focus of the mentoring relationship is working within and maintaining the status quo. Given the dearth of mentoring experiences afforded to Black women as compared to white leaders (Grant, 2012), Tillman and Cochran's work (2000) on mentoring relationships for Black women leaders—discussing the need for mutual choice to enter into the mentoring relationship, as well as mutual opportunities to engage—is particularly meaningful.

Afrocentric knowing is promising in its proffer of a cultural lens through which we may see educational leadership with broader consid-

erations and greater fluidity. In understanding the complexity of Black women's leadership, however, we must confront troubling realities expressed by participants in this study. While aspects of their leadership may be seen as cultural residuals, the cultural truth of who they are, and how they are permitted to be who they are, is largely shaped by their practical existence in White spaces. Transnationally, all women of African descent may not consciously acknowledge the imposition of oppression upon their lived existence (Reed, 2012). Yet many do. The White genocidal compulsion toward the African being has made its impact globally upon women through various forms of oppression, including the daily interactions with racism, sexism, and ageism faced by Black women in the United States. When Black women speak on these experiences, it is important to provide frameworks that allow the complexity of their voices to be heard.

In the "Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," Collins (1989) described Afrocentric feminist epistemology as a way to make sense of Black women's realities with greater lucidity, stating that "since Black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black woman's standpoint reflects elements of both traditions" (p. 756). Collins used Black women's experiences as a "point of contact" between Afrocentricity and Black feminism (p. 757).

The Afrocentric feminist epistemology, therefore, allows us to understand the complexity of Black leadership within the U.S. context. Although an exhaustive comparison of the two epistemologies is beyond the scope of this discussion, this exercise is noteworthy for future explorations. A layering of the Black feminist epistemology upon the Afrocentric epistemology, as an extension of Collins' 1989 work, not only provides us with a conceptual and lexical tool to explore and express Black women's multiple identities, but also enables us to interrogate patriarchal notions that may invade Afrocentric scholarship.

One example of how the Afrocentric feminist epistemology may illustrate Black women's leadership more precisely relates to the idea of *pouring into* through mothering/care. While they may be culturally predisposed to a relational-mothering leadership orientation, the glorification of motherhood for Black women within White contexts is problematic, in that Black women's emotional and psychological wellness is often sacrificed for the so-called greater good (Collins, 1990; Hill, 2002).

Another example involves the lack of support systems available to nurture participants' leadership. Participants counter-storied the assumption that they do not need support. The lack of culturally sustaining support available to Black women leaders mirrors the lack of support discussed in the literature for Black women teachers (Carver-Thomas &

Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dingus, 2008; Farinde-Wu, 2018). Afrocentric feminist epistemology allows us to deconstruct underlying reasons for the denial of access to these systems critical in leadership development and also to provide an understanding of how Black women use existing structures and systems to pour into one another.

Davis (2019) stated the importance of Black women supporting one another by creating a space of rest and respite as they work towards transformative change (p. 288). The interdependency of Black women is required for Black women leaders to be poured into. As Audre Lorde (1979) wrote, "interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive be and the active being" (p. 112).

Further research on the leadership of Black women, approached through the Afrocentric feminist lens, is warranted in terms of (a) exploring findings more deeply with larger participant groups, and (b) looking at the ways in which Black women lead in other disciplines. As we explore the idea of leadership as a cultural residual with greater depth, we intend to look at transnational experiences of women leaders of African descent. The Afrocentric framework will aid in the understanding of cultural similarities, while the Black feminist framework may help us see how global oppression results in differences in women's ideas and approaches regarding their leadership.

Findings from this research may be used towards improving our understanding of leadership as a lever toward more equitable educational systems for students. As Black women increasingly seek leadership roles in education, it is critical that efforts to prepare, develop, and support them, as well as to evaluate their performance, consider the ways in which they lead as cultural markers and essential aspects of their leadership identity. Likewise, observing the specific ways in which Black women lead expands and deepens our current understanding of leadership as a collection of relational experiences between leaders and followers.

References

Alexander, T. (2010). Roots of leadership: Analysis of the narratives from African American women leaders in higher education. *International Journal of Learning, 17*(4), 193. http://libproxy.unm.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=64405464&site=eds-live&scope=site

Alston, J. (2000). Missing from action: Where are the Black female school superintendents? *Urban Education, 35*(5), 525-531.

Alston, J. (2005). Tempered radicals and servant leaders: Black females persevering in the superintendency. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41*(4), 675-688.

Ani, M. (1994). *Yurugu*. Africa World Press.

Asante, M. (1987). *The Afrocentric idea*. Temple University Press.

Asante, M. K. (1988). *Afrocentricity*. Africa World Press.

Bailes, L. P., & Guthery, S. (2020). Held down and held back: Systemically delayed principal promotions by race and gender. *AERA Open, 6*(2), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858420929298

Bakari, R. S. (1997). Epistemology from an Afrocentric perspective: Enhancing Black students' consciousness through an Afrocentric way of knowing. *Different Perspectives on Majority Rules, 20*. p. 1. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi2/20

Banks-Wallace, J. (2002). Talk that talk: Storytelling and analysis rooted in African American oral tradition. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(3), 410-426.

Bass, L. (2012). When care trumps justice: The operationalization of Black feminist caring in educational leadership. *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 73-87.

Boykin, A. W. (1978). Black psychology and the research process: Keeping the baby but throwing out the bath water. *Journal of Black Psychology, 4*(1-2), 43-64.

Burgess, M., & Agozino, B. (2011). A review of Africana methodologies from Molefi Kete Asante, Terry Kershaw and Ama Mazama: The Africana paradigm we need to embrace [Critical essay]. *The Western Journal of Black Studies, 1*, 67. http://libproxy.unm.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgea&AN=edsgcl.253626919&site=eds-live&scope=site

Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Why Black women teachers leave and what can be done about it. In A. Farinde-Wu, A. Allen-Handy, & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *Black female teachers: Diversifying the United States' teacher workforce* (Vol. 6, pp. 159-184). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Collins, P. H. (1989). The social construction of Black feminist thought. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 14*(4), 745-773.

Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Unwin Hyman. https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999621346002121

Cooper, A. J. (2016). *A Voice from the South*. Dover Publications.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A.v(2012). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Davis, D. R. (2016). The journey to the top: Stories on the intersection of race and gender for African American women in academia and business. *Journal of Research Initiatives, 2*(1). http://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol2/iss1/4

Davis, T. (2019). The transformational impact of Black women/womanist theologians leading intergroup dialogue in liberation work of the oppressed and the oppressor. In *Race, work, & keadership* (pp. 275-290). Harvard Business Review Press.

Dillard, C. B. (1995). Leading with her life: An African American feminist (re)interpretation of leadership for an urban high school principal. *Education Administration Quarterly, 31*(4), 539-563.

Dillard, C. B. (2016). To address suffering that the majority can't see: Lessons from Black women's leadership in the workplace. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 152,* 29-38. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace

Dingus, J. E. (2008). "I'm learning the trade": Mentoring networks of Black women teachers. *Urban Education, 43*(3), 361-377.

Farinde-Wu, A. (2018). #Blackwomenatwwork: Teaching and retention in urban schools. *Urban Review, 50*, 247-266.

Fisher, W. (1985). The narrative paradigm: In the beginning. J*ournal of Communication, 35*(4), 74-89. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1985.tb02974.x

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Transaction.

Grant, C. M. (2012). Advancing our legacy: A Black feminist perspective on the significance of mentoring for African-American women in educational leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 101-117.

Grillo, L. M. (2019). A laying on of hands: How Black women shaped my leadership through communal connection. In R. T. C. Palmer, Mykia O., K. LeNiles, & J. Hughes (Eds.), *Personal narratives of Black educational leaders: pathways to educational success* (pp. 73-85). Routledge.

Harris, N. (1998). A philosophical basis for an Afrocentric orientation. In J. D. Hamlet (Ed.), *Afrocentric visions: Studies in culture and communication*. Sage Publications.

Hill, S. A. (2002). Teaching and doing gender in African American families. *Sex Roles, 47*(11-12), 493-506.

Horsford, S. D. (2012). This bridge called my leadership: An essay on Black women as bridge leaders in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 11-22.

Horsford, S. D., & Tillman, L. C. (2012). Inventing herself: Examining the intersectional identities and educational leadership of Black women in the USA. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 1-9.

Karenga, M. (1993). *Introduction to Black studies* (Second ed.). The University of Sankore Press.

Katz, S. (2004). Women school superintendents: Perceptions of best practices for leadership. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership, 121*, 15-43.

Katz, S. J. (2012). Border crossing: A Black woman superintendent builds democratic community in unfamiliar territory *[Periodical], 4,* 771. http://libproxy.unm.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbl&AN=RN320930532&site=eds-live&scope=site

Kershaw, T. (1998). Afrocentrism and the Afrocentric method. In J. D. Hamlet (Ed.), *Afrocentric visions: Studies in culture and communication* (pp. 27-44). Sage Publications.

Lewis, P. (2011). Storytelling as research/research as storytelling. *Qualitative Inquiry, 17*(6), 505-510. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409883

Lorde, A. (1979). *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. Crossing Press.

McDougal III, S. (2014). Africana Studies' epistemic identity: An analysis of theory and epistemology in the discipline. *Journal of African American Studies, 18*(2), 236-250.

Murtadha, K., & Watts, D. M. (2005). Linking the struggle for education and social justice: Historical perspectives of African American leadership in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41*(4), 591-608.

Myers, L. J. (1998). The deep structure of culture: Relevance of traditional African culture in contemporary life. In J. D. Hamlet (Ed.), *Afrocentric visions: Studies in culture and communication* (pp. 3-14). Sage Publications.

Nobles, W. W. (1984). *Africanity and the Black family: The development of a theoretical model*. Black Family Institute.

Olive-Cadet, M. (2018). *A phenomenological study: Examining the experiences of African-American female superintendents with longevity in urban districts*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Howard University. Washington, DC.

Panton, R. (2016). Transformative learning and the road to maternal leadership. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning, 147*, 19. http://libproxy.unm.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=117808805&site=eds-live&scope=site

Pellerin, M. (2012). Benefits of Afrocentricity in exploring social phenomena: Understanding Afrocentricity as a social science methodology. *The Journal of Pan African Studies, 5*(4), 149-160.

Peters, A. L. (2012). Leading through the challenge of change: African-American women principals on small school reform. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 23-38.

Reed, L. C. (2012). The intersection of race and gender in school leadership for three Black female principals. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 39-58.

Sanders-Lawson, R., Smith-Campbell, S., & Benham, M. K. P. (2006). Wholistic visioning for social justice: Black women theorizing practice. In C. Marshall & M. Oliva (Eds.), *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education* (pp. 31-63). Pearson Education.

Schiele, J. H. (1998). Rethinking organizations from an Afrocentric viewpoint. In J. D. Hamlet (Ed.), *Afrocentric visions: studies in culture and communication* (pp. 73-85). Sage Publications.

Shank, G. D. (2002). *Qualitative research: a personal skills approach*. Merrill Prentice Hall.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*, 63-75.

Shockley, M. E., & Holloway, E. L. (2019). African American women as change agents in the White academy. In L.M. M. Roberts & A. J. Thomas (Eds.), *Race, work, & leadership: New perspectives on the Black experience* (pp. 253-274). Harvard Business Review Press.

Tillman, B. A., & Cochran, L. L. (2000). Desegregating urban school administration: a pursuit of equity for Black women superintendents. Education and *Urban Society, 33*(1), 44-59. http://libproxy.unm.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ615900&site=eds-live&scope=site

Tillman, L. C. (2002). Culturally-sensitive research approaches: An African-American perspective. *Educational Researcher, 31*(9), 3-12.

van Wyk, M. M. (2014). Conceptualizing an Afrocentric-indigenous pedagogy for an inclusive classroom environment. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5*(4), 292.

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods.* Sage Publications.