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Invisibly Visible: A Study of African-American Females and their Ascent to the Superintendency

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ASCENDING TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY

Invisibly Visible: A Study of African-American Females and their Ascent to

the Superintendency

By

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Abstract

African-American women leading school districts as public school superintendents of schools is rare. It is even more infrequent for multiple African-American women to serve in the position of superintendent of schools in the same state. This historical qualitative study investigated and documented the history of African-American women who served in the position of public superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. Research on the topic of African-American female superintendents is scarce. This study contributed to the growing body of research focused on the personal stories and experiences of African-American women who served and continue to serve as superintendents. The researcher documented factors and experiences the participants perceived as influential in their ascent to the position. Seven African-American females, either former or current superintendents in the state of Missouri, participated in this study. Personal interviews, along with a semi-structured interview schedule, served as the primary data collection method used to capture data for this study. A Black feminist thought lens was used to examine barriers and experiences of oppression. Findings from this research identified the participants' various paths to the superintendency, suggested that barriers of race, gender and oppression existed, highlighted perceived accomplishments, provided explanations for why multiple African-American females have served as public school superintendents in the state of Missouri, and proposed recommendations for aspiring African-American females interested in becoming a superintendent.

Dedication

Nothing in life has ever come easy without hard work and determination. With the support and guidance of God fearing women replete of wisdom, I have been able to persevere and overcome obstacles that have tried to obstruct my path. While my journey is just beginning, the cobblestones have been laid. The twists and turns and peaks and valleys I may experience have already been ordained by God. As I continue on this path, the eyes of Mary are watching and shining a light to help illuminate and guide my moves of life.

This dissertation is in memory of my grandmother Mary "Gram" McCullough. My grandmother, the matriarch of the family, instilled in me the power of resilience, confidence, and the importance of family. At a young age, I observed the success of a strong Black woman who made the challenges of life look effortless. Gram was the epitome of a hard working women. She taught me the power of integrity and how to keep my head up. She showed me how to bounce back and keep moving forward.

I will forever cherish the last moment we spent in your hospital room. You waited for the two of us to make eye contact before you took your last breath of life. Our connection was strong and I will always be your Blinkey. Thank you for the principles of compassion, honesty, dedication, commitment, and of course sense of style you inspired in me. I will always be thankful and pray that I will be at least half the women you were here on Earth.

Love Always,

Blinkey

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I would like to thank my family and friends. Wow, I never thought this day would come. To the members of Unity United Methodist Church, thank you for your

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Chapter 1

That is why for a Black woman to write about Black women is at once a personal and an

objective undertaking. It is personal because the women whose blood runs through my

veins breathe amidst the statistics.[1]

Introduction

Strong and resilient African-American women surrounded and inspired me from a

very young age. My grandmother Gram, the matriarch of the family, expected excellence

from her children and grandchildren and led with a gentle hand. Gram always taught me

to persevere and set high expectations. An African-American male professor and former

superintendent, unintentionally or perhaps purposefully, planted the superintendent seed

as I sat in a graduate level course one evening. From that moment on, I launched my

superintendent journey by strategically organizing my career and obtaining various

credentials. This historical research study examined and uncovered stories of driven

African-American females who became superintendents in the state of Missouri.

Background

African-American female superintendents' voices habitually are suppressed. Few

researchers defied the status quo and investigated these women. These voices, once

silenced, have gradually been recorded and documented. Margaret Grogan composed the

following poem using the participant's own words in a study focused on the intricacies

associated with being a female superintendent:

Upon taking the job as the new superintendent, I found some shady deals.

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[1] Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 5.

> I think I can withstand the storm; I'll take some hits; my work will speak for
>
> me; the high school's in deplorable condition. The principal should be
>
> removed. No press, thank God, no press. They'll get me if I talk to them,
>
> they'll get me if I don't.[2]

The African-American female participant attained her first superintendent position in 1998. The participant depicted challenges superintendents confronted when they accepted the position of superintendent of schools. The participant's reflection suggested challenges that ranged from facilities not meeting satisfactory conditions to ineffective leaders holding significant positions. Superintendents face several challenges when they accept this position; however, females may be scrutinized more by media and the community. Barbara Jackson suggested other challenges including politics, student achievement concerns, relationships with board members, and adequate funding had an impact on African-American female superintendents.[3] Unfortunately, few records currently exist that document African-American women on their superintendent journey. This research documented and brought to life stories of African-American female superintendents.

The Problem

It is no secret various gaps and inequities exist in the realm of education. One of the most documented gaps is the achievement gap. Other inequalities and disparities exist in the field of education. To name a few, gaps exist between male and female students

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[2] Margaret Grogan, "A Black Woman Superintendent Tells," *Urban Education* 35, no. 5 (2000).

[3] Barbara Jackson, "Getting inside History-against All Odds: African-American Women Becoming Female Superintendents," in *Sacred Dreams-Women and the Superintendency*, ed. C. Cryss Brunner (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

studying science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses, students from

lower social economic status (SES) enrolling in pre-kindergarten preparation programs

compared to middle and higher (SES) families, and male to female educators in

classrooms.   A noticeable disparity in education is the gap that exists between the

number of male and female superintendents. Female educators in the classroom is

disproportionate compared to their male counterparts. The roles reverse with

administrative positions. The visible disparity between male and female superintendents

is apparent. This disparity increases when one looks at the gap between male and

African-American female superintendents.[4]

Brunner and Grogan reported Caucasian males comprised 99 percent of school

superintendents in 1980.[5]   Women historically dominate teaching positions; however,

they take a back seat to men in filling administrative positions, most notably as

superintendents of schools.   Brunner and Grogan suggested the role of teacher became

feminized; they reported in 1900, that 70 percent of teachers were women with 20

percent being women of color.[6] The feminized role of teacher is rooted in the assumption

of women as nurturers and men as leaders and problem solvers.

Women continue to be underrepresented among American public school

superintendents across the country.[7] When dissecting the data further, the gap between

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[4] C. Cryss Brunner, Margaret Grogan, and Washington D. C. American Association of School
    Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment* (Rowman &
    Littlefield Education, 2007).
[5] Brunner et al, *Women Leading School Systems*
[6] Brunner, Grogan, and American Association of School Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems:
    Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*.
[7] Linda Skrla, Pedro Reyes, and James Joseph Scheurich, "Sexism, Silence, and Solution: Women
    Superintendents Speak up and Speak Out," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 36, no. 1
    (2000).

male superintendents and African-American female superintendents gets much larger.

The Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducts a study of superintendents

every decade. Information collected from the decennial studies provides a portrait of the

status of superintendents of schools.   Theodore Kowalski, Robert McCord, George

Peterson, Phillip Young and Noelle Ellerson served as the researchers for the 2010

decennial study. Research participants from this study included 1,867 superintendents.

Of the 1,867 participants, 1,340 were male and 426 were female. The number of female

superintendents (24.1%) doubled from the 2000 study (13.2%).[8] Glass, Bjork, & Brunner

suggested 13 percent of superintendents of schools were women, but only 5 percent were

African-American women in the AASA 2000 study.[9] These data suggested gender and

racial inequities existed in the role of superintendent across the country. Data suggested

African-American females attaining the position of superintendent of schools were rare

and limited research focused on the experiences of Black female superintendents were

documented.[10]

<center>Purpose of the Study</center>

This study documented the history of African-American females who served in

the position of superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. The state of Missouri

had multiple African-American females who served in the position of superintendent of

schools. The researcher documented factors and experiences the participants perceived

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[8] Theodore J. Kowalski et al., *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study* (Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2010).

[9] Thomas E. Glass et al., "The Study of the American School Superintendency, 2000. A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium," (2000).

[10] Judy A. Alston, "Missing from Action: Where Are the Black Female School Superintendents?," *Urban Education* 35, no. 5 (2000).

as influential in their ascent. This research used the terms Black and African-American interchangeably. Limited research focused on both race and gender in the superintendency existed, and even less information on women and minorities.[11] It was time for the stories of these few women who ascended to the position of superintendent of schools to be told. Jackson suggested that larger audiences should be able to experience the stories of these women and recommended a study of "cities that have had more than one African American woman superintendent."[12]

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The research questions answered in this study were:

1. What are the stories of present and former African-American female superintendents?

2. What factors motivated present and former African-American female superintendents to aspire to the superintendency?

3. What successes and challenges did present and former African-American female superintendents encounter on their journeys and during their tenure as superintendent?

4. What specific experiences do present and former African-American female superintendents feel prepared and shaped their ascent to the superintendency?

5. Were there any specific factors that attracted these African-American women to pursue a superintendency in Missouri?

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[11] Jackson, "Getting inside History-against All Odds: African-American Women Becoming Female Superintendents."
[12] Ibid.,156

Theoretical Framework

The researcher employed Black feminist thought as the predominant lens for this study. Black feminist thought delves deep into exploring the unique history of the oppression of Black women and the intersection of gender and race. Patricia Hill Collins, a Black feminist theorist, explained, "In its broadest sense, feminism constitutes both ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group."[13] Historically, women have been assigned inferior roles in society compared to men. The feminist movement had been entrenched in promoting gender equality and exposing inequalities that permeated society. Prominent agendas for feminists encompassed a range of vested interests: economic status of women including educational opportunities, industrial development, employment policies, political rights including voting, holding public office, equality with human rights, and marital and family interests including domestic labor, marriage and divorce laws and child custody rights.[14]

While the feminist movement served as a catalyst for women to attain equal status in society, it remained questionable if African-American women had been able to garner the same incremental progression towards gender equality as White women. African-American women not only had race as a hurdle they had to leap over, but gender served as another obstacle that impeded the jump over the next hurdle in life. Bell hooks asserted:

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[13] Patricia Hill Collins, Patricia Hill Collins, "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond," *Black Scholar* 26 (1996).

[14] Ibid.,

Privileged feminists have largely been unable to speak to, with, and for diverse

groups of women because they either do not understand fully the interrelatedness

of sex, race, and class oppression or refuse to take this interrelatedness seriously.

Feminist analyses of woman's lot tend to focus exclusively on gender and do not

provide a solid foundation on which to construct feminist theory... Certainly it has

been easier for women who do not experience race or class oppression to focus

exclusively on gender.[15]

Significance of the Study

Recent studies, focused on African-American female superintendents, provided

general demographic information and identified various challenges and successes these

women faced on the job.[16] There remains a dearth in research focused on the personal

stories and experiences of African-American women who served in the role of

superintendent of schools.[17] This study aimed to contribute to the growing body of

research that existed on African-American female leaders in education, specifically

superintendent of schools. The narratives of these women have remained isolated and

their unique stories needed to be shared with the world. Current research on

superintendents of schools typically focused on the Caucasian male, primarily because

they dominated the role of superintendent in education. However, the comprehensive

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[15] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory : From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

[16] Alston, "Missing from Action: Where Are the Black Female School Superintendents?."; Nancy L. Arnez, "Selected Black Female Superintendents of Public School Systems," *Journal of Negro Education* 51, no. 3 (1982); Amie B. Revere, "Black Women Superintendents in the United States: 1984-85," *Journal of Negro Education* 56 (1987); Margaret Grogan, *Voices of Women Aspiring to the Superintendency*, Suny Series, Educational Leadership (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), Book; Jackson, "Getting inside History-against All Odds: African-American Women Becoming Female Superintendents."

[17] Jackson, "Getting inside History-against All Odds: African-American Women Becoming Female Superintendents."

story has not been justly revealed. African-American women represent a small

percentage of superintendents of schools. Insight on the anomaly of how these women

persevered and triumphed over the status quo needed continued investigation. There has

been a slight increase in the interest regarding African-American female superintendents.

This study provided further data and strengthened the growing body of research on

African-American female superintendents.

Student demographics in Prek-12 education continue to become more diverse.

Leaders in education should reflect this diversity. The Digest of Education Statistics

reported in 2000, 61.2 percent of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary

schools were White, 17.2 percent were Black, 16.4 Hispanic, 4.1 percent Asian/Pacific

Islander and 1.2 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native. The projected 2020

numbers for students enrolled in public elementary and public education were 46.4

percent White, 15 percent Black, 28.9 percent Hispanic, 5.4 percent Asian/Pacific

Islander, and 1.0 percent American Indian/Alaska Native.[18] Increased knowledge and

understanding of African-American female superintendents might also assist local and

state school boards recruit candidates. Colleges and universities can use this information

to enhance curriculum in educational leadership preparation programs to encourage

African-American females to apply to these positions after they have achieved

certification.

Aspiring female leaders in education like me, can use the personal experiences of

these women to serve as a road map while pursuing a superintendent position. Numerous

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[18] U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics,
    "Digest of Education Statistics," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2014).
    http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/guide.asp

African-American females have not experienced being under the leadership of an

African-American female superintendent, thus making it difficult to form a relationship

and come under the guidance of a mentor who is an African-American female. The data

from this research could serve as a quasi- mentor/mentee relationship as future leaders

study their journey.

Limitations

This study presented various limitations; the small sample size of research

participants served as a primary limitation. The researcher identified sixteen former and

current African-American female superintendents; however, some women could not be

contacted after an exhausted search, and some women decided not to become participants

in this study. The apprehension of some participants to divulge authentic information

impacted the study. Some of the participants politely refused to share their candid

thoughts because of the political nature of the position. The silence or politically correct

responses could potentially have an effect on the internal and external validity. The

researcher of this study is an African-American female interested in potentially becoming

a superintendent of schools. Although the researcher is trained in being an objective

researcher, subjectivity may unconsciously interfere with interpreting data from a

complete observer lens.

Delimitations

The researcher's primary interest for the scope of this study focused on African-

American females who currently or previously served in the position of superintendent of

schools. Including African-American female assistant, deputy or associate

superintendents would have increased the participant pool; however, the researcher

wanted to document women who attained the position of superintendent of schools.

While there are some states that have yet to hire its first African-American female

superintendent, the researcher identified sixteen African-American females who served in

the position of interim or superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri (not including

superintendents of charter schools).   The researcher focused on the state of Missouri not

only because it had multiple African-American female superintendents, but occasionally,

more than one African-American female served as a superintendent concurrently. Five

African-American females served as a superintendent in 2012.

Definitions of Key Terms

APR: Annual performance reports that includes student growth and achievement on various indicators in the state of Missouri.

Black Feminist Thought: The study of the unique history of the oppression of Black women and the intersection of race and gender.

Board of Education: An elected or appointed group of officials who govern and set policy for a school system.

Discrimination: The unfair treatment of a person or a group of people based on perceived bias.

Equality: The notion that an individual people or group of people are afforded the same opportunities and rights as others and are treated fairly.

Feminist Movement: The movement started by middle class White women that championed for gender equality in society.

Marginalization: To limit or decrease the social status or position of a group of people or an individual.

Mentee: A person who is under the tutelage of a mentor.

Mentor: An experienced individual who is responsible for training and providing guidance to a mentee.

Oppression: The systematic control and unfair treatment a person in a position of power has over an individual or group of people who have less authority.

Racism: Conscious and unconscious beliefs and behaviors a dominant group has over the oppressed.

Social Justice: The belief that "everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities."[19]

Sexism: The belief that one sex (typically male) is dominant and superior over the other.

Superintendent of Schools: A person hired by the board of education to serve as the chief school administrator who is responsible for the executive and daily functions of a school district.

Women's Suffrage: The right for women to vote.

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[19] National Association of Social Workers, "Social Justice," http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/features/issue/peace.asp.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The role of superintendent of schools is a multifaceted position that encompasses a broad range of responsibilities. Superintendents have to balance professional, financial, social, and political aspects of the job. Traditionally, Caucasian men filled the position of superintendent of schools. According to Jackie Blunt, White men held approximately 82 to 99 percent of superintendent of school positions.[20] In 1980, White men reached their zenith nationally; they held 99 percent of all superintendent positions.[21] The underrepresentation of women, specifically African-American women, has garnered the interest of various researchers in the field. Queries at the forefront include: Why do African-American women hold only a sparse number of superintendent positions? How are the stories of these African-American females who attained the position unique? When will African-American female superintendents be accepted by mainstream America as viable candidates? What successes and challenges have African-American females encountered as a superintendent? Why do African-American women who possess credentials for the superintendent position choose not to apply? These aforementioned questions have piqued the interest of various researchers; however, more questions abound on this issue.

For the scope of this study, the researcher revealed experiences of African-American female superintendents in the state of Missouri. The researcher reviewed

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[20] Jackie M. Blunt, *Destined to Rule the Schools : Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995*, Suny Series, Educational Leadership (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), Book.

[21] Brunner, Grogan, and American Association of School Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*.

literature concentrated on gender and the superintendency, descriptions of African-American female superintendents, challenges and successes of the superintendency for African-American females who attained the position, individual stories of African-American female superintendents, mentor/mentee relationships and African-American females who aspired to become superintendents. The feminist movement played a critical role in fighting for equality for women; however, Black women have been underrepresented in this movement and continued to experience gender and racial barriers in their pursuit for equality. This underrepresentation of Black women attributed to the formation of Black feminism thought. The researcher employed Black feminist thought as the predominant lens.

<div align="center">Gender and the Superintendency</div>

Gender roles in society typically mandate the professional positions one seeks in life. Society has cultivated tacit norms that have guided males into perceived masculine roles and females into perceived feminine roles and positions. For example, roles associated with management, law enforcement, heavy lifting, and combat are traditionally reserved for males; while caretaking roles including nursing, teaching, social and secretarial work are retained for women. Masculine roles have been defined as roles heavily populated by men and traditionally fit the notions of men's work, whereas feminized roles are characterized as roles dominated by women and viewed as women's work.[22] These perceived gender role beliefs could have a strong bearing on how women decide responsibilities and positions they seek in the educational field.

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[22] Ibid.,

The study of gender in the educational realm is not a new phenomenon and the deconstruction of leadership roles, primarily superintendent of schools, is an area that is gaining momentum. Lars Bjork stated, "Women scholars are making significant empirical contributions to our understanding of women's experiences in aspiring to the superintendency and leading and managing school districts."[23] In most classrooms today, there is female dominance in the role of teacher; however, compared to leading schools, male dominance is abundant. Ironically, the teaching field began as a male-dominated field. Women were not allowed to work. "In one of the first recorded instances of formal teaching, ancient Sumerian priests passed the lucrative craft of accounting on only to their sons."[24] Males were the only individuals allowed to receive an education.

> In the beginning, only literate White men were teachers. Women of all ethnicities were thought to be of lower intelligence than White men were and were not educated. Teaching was a masculine profession. Once White men were convinced that White women were the appropriate teachers of their sons, education for White women increased. Because teaching was the first (legitimate) profession for women, women were willing to accept low wages. After the Civil War, African-Americans moved into teaching jobs primarily in the South. By 1900, 70 percent of teachers were women, 20 percent being women of color, and the role was considered feminized.[25]

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[23] Lars G. Björk, "Introduction: Women in the Superintendency—Advances in Research and Theory," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2000).
[24] Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools : Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995*.
[25] Brunner, Grogan, and American Association of School Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*.

The feminized role of teacher can be aligned to the commonly held societal belief that women are the nurturers of the world and men are providers and problem solvers. In the classroom, female teachers are perceived by their students to be a mother figure, especially in the primary grades. Teachers can be found assisting students with learning developmental tasks, comforting students, and providing those smiles that seem to make all students' worries and fears subside. Female teachers were responsible for the care and instruction while men were responsible for discipline and leadership. Male teachers are traditionally more visible at the secondary level. During this stage of development adolescents take on more responsibilities. It may be perceived that students do not require the same level of nurturing. These societal norms can be attributed to the organization of most school systems. Blount argued teaching became more feminized, while administrative roles become masculinized.[26] A clear distinction exists between the two [administrators and teachers]. The masculinity of the role of administrator is associated with tasks of finance, organization, and mechanical concerns, while the femininity of the role of teacher is associated with nurturing, instilling morals and values, and guiding and instructing children.[27]

Linda Skrla, Pedro Reyes, and James Joseph Scheurich interviewed three former female superintendents who had more than 3 years experience in the same superintendency and departed their position voluntarily.[28] These women were identified by intensity sampling. According to Michael Patton, "Intensity sampling involves using

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[26] Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools : Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995.*

[27] Judith A. Adkison, "Women in School Administration: A Review of the Research," *Review of Educational Research* 51, no. 3 (1981).

[28] Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich, "Sexism, Silence, and Solution: Women Superintendents Speak up and Speak Out."

of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely). Extreme or deviant cases may be so unusual as to distort the manifestation of the phenomenon of interest. Using the logic of intensity sampling, one seeks excellent or rich."[29] The study focused on four questions: How do former female superintendents perceive the way gender is represented socially? How the role of the superintendency is socially represented? How former female superintendents experience and deal with differences or similarities of the two aforementioned questions? How do former female superintendents experience the role gender plays in understanding problematic work situations? The participants were involved with personal interviews and a focus group interview. The results of this study were categorized into three sections: Sexism, Silence and Solutions.

Sexism was defined as, "stereotyped, persecuted, or discriminated against based on gender."[30] The former female superintendents identified examples of sexism ranging from questioning their level of competence, sex-role stereotypes, and intimidation. One participant reported a "continual questioning of her actions because she was perceived as not knowing about particular areas of school district operations."[31] Another participant reported the focus of the superintendency should center on the superintendent being the primary instructional leader; but from her experience, the Board of Education was reluctant or questioned a "woman's competence in non-instructional areas and do not

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[29] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods (2nd Ed.)* (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1990).

[30] Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich, "Sexism, Silence, and Solution: Women Superintendents Speak up and Speak Out."

[31] Ibid.,

allow 'women to serve as they really are prepared to serve.'"[32] The participants

experienced sex role stereotypes in the form of perceived behaviors that distinguished

women from men.

> Although I'd already been through one [building program] and had been very
>
> successful with that, [board members] would ask, 'Has the super been down to
>
> walk the site?' You know. 'Has the superintendent been over to check the
>
> elementary school?'….So, again, it's just all those innuendoes that you pick up
>
> on. I shouldn't be able to manage a building program and finance.[33]

Participants experienced prevalent sexism during their tenure as superintendent. This

sexism demonstrated that gender bias was not a phenomenon of the past, but a persistent

issue that infiltrated educational leadership.   Even though these participants had been

appointed to serve in the capacity of chief school administrator, their authority was

covertly and overtly questioned.

This study categorized silence as personal silence, silent preparation programs,

and silence of the profession.   Personal silence centered on these women remaining

quiet on issues related to gender while they were superintendents. One participant

described it as "almost like what we used to say about children not being heard."[34] The

conversation about gender in preparation programs was a topic that traditionally had not

received a wealth of attention. According to one participant, when asked if any of her

professors had ever addressed if the superintendency might be different for females, she

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[32] Ibid.,
[33] Ibid.,,
[34] Ibid.,,

reported, "No…it was never brought up."[35] All of the former female superintendents

reported, that in their experience as a superintendent, concerns regarding women

superintendents about sexism were not brought to the table.

The former female superintendents not only shared information and provided

examples about how female superintendents' gender roles differed from males who held

the same position, they offered solutions. The solutions fell into six categories:

"research, integrated discourse, university preparation programs, state agencies and

professional organizations, school boards, and women's upbringing."[36] These solutions

provided insight related to bringing awareness to the inequities that existed and proposed

remedies. The participants expressed research needed to go deeper and be readily

available to a larger audience. One participant explained that the research needed to be

"out there."[37] At the academy, programs need to be restructured to include women in the

curriculum to reflect the changing dynamics of leadership roles held by women. One of

the primary functions of the school board is to hire a superintendent who will lead a

school system to high levels of student achievement and financial stability. If school

boards perceive women in the traditional feminized roles, the opportunity for women to

attain the position of superintendent is diminished. The participants agreed that board

members should have training on topics related to gender. One participant asserted,

"Boards of trustees need sensitizing to issues of gender and discrimination, particularly

those boards that are operating with traditional conceptions of school leadership."[38]

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[35] Ibid.,,
[36] Ibid.,,
[37] Ibid.,,
[38] Ibid.,,

Even though most superintendents of schools are male, females are aspiring to the position. Women have gradually gained access to these positions over the years and have made some progress. In 1930, women filled 11 percent of superintendent positions.[39] During this time in history, a powerful women's movement thrived. Women gained voting rights nationally in the year 1920 and the suffrage movement was going strong. Women benefited from the domino effect the suffrage movement had on education and their newly attained status in society. By the end of World War II, the percentage of female superintendents began to decline as men assimilated back into the workforce to reclaim their role in educational administration.[40]

While women made some gains in obtaining the superintendent of schools position, progress had been slow and stagnant at times. In 1980, women comprised only one percent of superintendent positions.[41] Only a small fraction of women were superintendents over a 14-year span.[42] Women superintendents saw a slight percentage increase in 1992. More women began to ascent to the position of superintendent of schools by the end of the 20th centur. Approximately 13 percent of superintendents were women.[43]

A growing body of research suggested women began to pursue the position of superintendent of schools.   In a decennial study of superintendents of schools, of the 95

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[39] Brunner, Grogan, and American Association of School Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*.
[40] Charol Shakeshaft, *Women in Educational Administration. Updated Edition* (Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, 1989).
[41] Brunner, Grogan, and American Association of School Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*.
[42] Grogan, *Voices of Women Aspiring to the Superintendency*.
[43] Glass et al., "The Study of the American School Superintendency, 2000. A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium."

percent of respondents (n=1,875) who answered the gender question, approximately one of four were women.[44] The number of female superintendent respondents almost doubled from the prior decade. Youlanda Washington, Stephen Miller and Jeanne Fiene studied women who ascended to the position of superintendent of schools in the rural state of Kentucky. In the state of Kentucky for example, 16 women served as superintendents at one time.[45] The research questions focused on identifying patterns and themes that described the work of female superintendents, strategies that these women used to establish professional identify and sharing successful ways to ascending to the position of superintendent. Thomas Glass, Lars Bjork, and C. Cryss Brunner reported an increase in female superintendents. The number of female superintendents grew from 5 percent in 1992 to 14.1 percent in 2000 in suburban and urban districts comprised of 3,000-24,000 students.[46] Seventy one percent of the female superintendents stated they were currently working in their first superintendency.[47] The Council of the Great City Schools, a consortium of the nation's 66 largest urban school systems published a report, *Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary Eighth Survey*. In this report 55 of the 63 school superintendents returned the survey. The results reported approximately 70 percent male participants and approximately 28 percent female participants. Thirteen percent of the females were Caucasian and thirteen were African-

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[44] Kowalski et al., *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*.

[45] Youlanda C. Washington, Stephen K. Miller, and Jeanne R. Fiene, "Their Work, Identity, and Entry to the Profession," *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership* 5, no. 4 (2007).

[46] Glass et al., "The Study of the American School Superintendency, 2000. A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium."

[47] Ibid.,

American.[48] These data suggested more women aspired to become superintendents and were selected to the superintendent of schools position.

The 2010 AASA decennial study devoted a chapter focused specifically on gender and race/ethnicity. Gender was defined as either male or female and race/ethnicity was defined as White (non-Hispanic or Latino) or non-minority and minority. The race/ethnicity information in this section while informative was not investigated because data were not disaggregated into an African-American female category. School district and community data from the study suggested a higher percentage of women were superintendents of districts with fewer than 300 students (11.7 percent) and 3,000-24,999 students (33.1 percent) compared to their male counterparts (8.8 percent and 26.6 percent) respectfully.[49] The results from this study suggested a difference between the time males and females entered the superintendency. Males became superintendents at a much younger age than women. Male superintendents 40 years or younger had a higher percent compared to their female counterparts. Approximately three percent of women were superintendents at the age of 40 or younger compared to approximately six percent of males. The difference in age continued until the age span of 51-55 years of age. Female superintendents at this age span were approximately 29 percent and male superintendents were approximately 23 percent. The percent of women between the age of 51-66 and older increased compared to male

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[48] Council of the Great City Schools, "Urban Indicator:Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary Eighth Survey and Report," (Washington, D.C.2014). http://cgcs.schoolwires.net/cms/lib/DC00001581/Domain/87/Urban%20Indicator_Superintendent%20summary%2011514.pdf

[49] Kowalski et al., *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*.

superintendents.[50] This information suggested men gained access to the position of

superintendent of schools at a much younger age than women; therefore, having more

experience in the position. Women acquired more experience in subordinate positions

due to their delayed entry to the position of superintendent compared to their decreased

levels of experience at the helm as superintendent.

The boards of education perceptions of professional expectations align to the

traditional societal viewpoint differences between women and men. Over 30 percent of

the female participants felt the reason they were selected to the position of superintendent

was to become an instructional leader compared to men. Over 35 percent of the male

participants believed they were selected because of their personal characteristics

(honesty, tact, etc…) while approximately 16 percent of men believed they were hired to

become the instructional leader.[51] Men and women in the superintendency distinct

differences included: teaching experience, first teaching experience, previous

administrative experience, experience as a superintendent, perceptions of experiencing

discrimination and restricting access to the position. Twenty-seven percent of male

participants in the study taught an average of 1-5 years while only approximately 13

percent of women taught for 1-5 years. Approximately eight percent of female

superintendents taught 21-26 years compared to approximately three percent of men who

taught 21-26 years.[52] These data suggested men ascended to the position of

superintendent of schools with less years of teaching experience in the classroom.

Approximately 50 percent of the female superintendents in the study taught 16 or more

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[50] Ibid.,
[51] Ibid.,,
[52] Ibid,.

years in the classroom compared to approximately 33 percent of male superintendents

teaching 16 or more years in the classroom.[53]

Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, and Ellerson reported approximately 35

percent of female superintendents began their first teaching position as elementary

teachers compared to approximately 18 percent of the male superintendents. Over 70

percent of the male superintendents reported their first teaching position being at the

secondary level, while approximately 45 percent of female superintendents reported their

first teaching experience at the secondary level.[54] These data suggested female and male

superintendents followed a separate path when they entered into the field of education.

Less than half of the female superintendents entered into the profession at the secondary

level. Female superintendents first teaching experience as an elementary teacher almost

doubled the number of male superintendents first teaching position as an elementary

school teacher. The trend towards female superintendents having more elementary

school experience is also suggested when compared to the first administrative positions

between females and males.   Approximately 30 percent of female superintendents served

in the capacity of elementary or secondary administrator respectfully, while

approximately 18 percent of males held an elementary administration position and

approximately 56 percent held a secondary administrative position.[55] These data

suggested slight differences between the first administrative position at the elementary

and secondary level for female superintendents. The difference between male

superintendents, and their first position as either at the elementary level or secondary

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[53] Ibid.,,
[54] Ibid.,
[55] Ibid.,

level, was approximately 39 percent.[56] The data suggested male superintendents entered

the profession as teachers and administrators at the secondary level in higher proportions

than females.

The decennial study reported on the impact of gender related to experience as a

superintendent and the age of a novice superintendent. Approximately 11 percent of the

female participants reported 13 or more years of experience as a superintendent compared

to approximately 29 percent of male superintendents. Female superintendents with less

than five years of experience reported approximately 43 percent. Male superintendents

with less than five years' experience was approximately 30 percent. As a novice

superintendent, approximately 14 percent of females were 40 years old or less compared

to 36 percent of males who were novice superintendents at 40 years old or less.

Approximately 70 percent of the novice female superintendents were over 45 years old

compared to approximately 34 percent of novice male superintendents who were 45 years

of age or older.[57] The data suggested men not only enter the profession at a younger age

compared to women, they also had more years of experience as a superintendent. While

female superintendents have more experience teaching in the classroom, the numbers are

not replicated at the superintendent level. Approximately 18 percent of male

superintendents had thirteen or more years of experiences compared to female

superintendents.[58]   The data suggested women entered the profession at an older age.

Over half of the female superintendents entered into the profession over the age 45.

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[56] Ibid.,
[57] Ibid.,,
[58] Ibid.,,

Males became superintendents at a much younger age than females, averaging over two times the rate of female entry into the profession.[59]

Factors associated to superintendents encountering discrimination and factors restricting access to the superintendency were examined. Approximately 45 percent of the female superintendents reported encountering a form of discrimination, while approximately 13 percent of male superintendents reported encountering discrimination. Over 80 percent of male superintendents reported they did not encounter discrimination compared to over 48 percent of female superintendents.[60] The data suggested clear distinctions between perceptions of female and male superintendents regarding discrimination. Female and male superintendents reported a 30 percent difference with experiencing discrimination. Approximately 48 percent of female superintendents reported gender discrimination restricted their access to the position of superintendent compared to approximately 15 percent of male superintendents.[61] The data suggested female superintendents overwhelmingly perceived discrimination as a restriction when accessing the superintendency. Female and male participants' perception of the role discrimination played in accessing the position of superintendent differed approximately 33 percent.[62]

Throughout history, women have fought to seek higher status in society. Women have traditionally been viewed as the caregiver and homemaker and were not encouraged to seek positions of higher status. The roles men and women take are typically

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[59] Ibid.,,
[60] Ibid.,,
[61] Ibid.,,
[62] Ibid.,,

predetermined by the culture of society. There are explicit and implicit messages received daily from mass media, family, school and church that perpetuate the social rules of boys and girls, and men and women. While women were more often than not confined to these roles, there were female trailblazers along the way who began to challenge these roles.

As women made gains in society, their interest and status toward traditionally viewed male positions started to increase. Education was one of the first socially accepted occupations for women, so it was not surprising teaching became of the first professions for women to experience upward mobility into leadership positions. Women gradually ascended to leadership positions in education; however, under the umbrella of gender, another factor existed, race. It is important to mention the acceptance of these leadership roles in education were traditionally reserved for Caucasian women compared to African-American women. Judy Alston suggested women slowly progressed into more powerful positions in education, as well as other fields, while African-American women continued to remain underrepresented in top leadership positions.[63]

<div style="text-align:center">Black Feminist Thought</div>

This section is important to the study because it explains valuable content related to African-American women and equality. African-American women were not considered members of the mainstream feminist movement and endured more gender and social injustice as they fought to gain equal status in society. African-American females faced discrimination and many of their concerns were not addressed. African-American

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[63] Alston, "Missing from Action: Where Are the Black Female School Superintendents?."

women were involved and played a critical role in the woman suffrage movement, even though challenges existed.

> In the antebellum period, many black women became active abolitionist and supporters of women's rights. Sojourner Truth, a former slave, became famous as both an abolitionist and an Advocate of woman suffrage. In 1851, she made her famous speech, 'Ain't I A Woman,' at a convention in Akron, Ohio. Other black women suffragists from this time period include Margaretta Forten, Harriet Forten Purvis, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary.[64]

In order to have a voice, African-American women established organizations to assist with representing their needs. Organizations including, National Association of Colored Women, Alpha Suffrage Club, and sororities were formed.[65]

African-American women not only had to confront gender, but race. The duality of gender and race working in concert can be perceived as a silent curse. Race and gender are tacit in nature because neither can be spoken or be touched. The dynamics of the atmosphere and conversation instantly changes when an African-American female enters the room. There are some people who may perceive the ability of instantly changing the conversation as commanding the room, but for African-American women it is not commanding the room, but rather allowing those in command to dictate what and how information is communicated. Gender and race are factors that have worked against African-American women because of oppression and historical stereotypes commonly

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[64] National Women's History Museum, "Rights for Women: The Suffrage Movement and Its Leaders-African-American Women and Suffrage," National Women's History Museum, https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/rightsforwomen/AfricanAmericanwomen.html.

[65] Ibid.,,

associated with African-American women. This section focused on how Black women experienced the world through the lens of being African-American and female and provided a foundation from the Black feminist perspective.

Black Feminist Thought is grounded in six features that provide support to justify why it is relevant and significant. These features include: (a) resisting oppression; (b) linking experiences and ideas; (c) connecting U.S. Black women's experiences and collective knowledge and views; (d) acknowledging contributions of African-American intellectuals; (e) recognizing change must occur and (f) defining the connectedness to other models and philosophies that support social justice.[66] There is extensive debate regarding Black feminist thought. People have disputed the need for feminism to be further defined or separated by race.

> Unlike their white counterparts, African-American women did not have a history of existing in a sphere separate from African-American men. In addition, since neither African-American men nor women were considered humans throughout slavery and were counted as only three-fifths of a person, the notion of 'true womanhood' which expected women to be 'pious, submissive, domestic and pure was not one that was extended to African-American women.[67]

African-American women's plight and struggle from the beginning illustrated they were not regarded as an equal to African-American men, Caucasian men or women. African-American women experienced oppression that plagued their psyche throughout history.

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[66] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[67] Linda M. Perkins, "The Role of Education in the Development of Black Feminist Thought, 1860-1920," *History of Education* 22, no. 3 (1993).

This oppression, implicit or explicit, impeded progress; however, African-American women continued to break the shackles of the past one chain at a time.

Black feminist thought played a crucial role in bringing awareness to oppression and developed strategies for resistance. African-American women continued to find themselves at the bottom rung of the ladder. One step in overcoming this situation was active resistance. "The overarching purpose of U.S. Black feminist thought is also to resist oppression, both its practices and the ideas to justify it. Black feminist thought and similar oppositional knowledges would not be necessary if intersecting oppressions did not exist."[68] African-American women were challenged to overcome the obstacle of triumphing oppression. Black feminist thought did not accept the status quo and presented different ideologies to empower African-American women. Sexism, racism, ageism, and classism were examples of oppression African-American women experienced and continuously resisted. Black feminist thought challenged this oppression and brought awareness to contradictions that occurred. "On the one hand, democratic promises of individual freedom, equality under the law, and social justice are made to all American citizens. Yet on the other hand, the reality of differential group treatment based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship exists."[69]

While experiences of African-American women can be generalized to the group, each woman's experience is unique and her interpretation of that experience may have a different effect or be internalized through a different lens. Black feminist thought acknowledged this distinction and brought to the forefront variance that connected

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[68] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.
[69] Ibid.,

experience and ideas. African-American women were confronted with challenges,

several common in nature; however, this did not mean they would respond to these

challenges the same. For example, African-American women have been stereotyped as

working in lower level positions including service, secretarial, child care, and hospitality.

Every African-American women who has a job at an office is not the secretary. African-

American women who work in higher level positions do not need to individually

experience being approached by a customer and being asked to speak to the manager,

when they actually are the manager, to know and understand the perception of their

inferiority.   The undertones and themes of these experiences created patterns.

Awareness of these experiences assisted with building collective knowledge.

The connections between U.S. Black women's experiences to collective

knowledge and views were essential to Black feminist thought.

As members of an oppressed group, U.S. Black women have generated alternative

practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women'

group empowerment. In contrast to the dialectical relationship linking oppression

and activism, a dialogical relationship characterizes Black women's collective

experience and group knowledge. On both the individual and the group level, a

dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by

changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed

consciousness.[70]

There is a commonly held belief that actions speak louder than words. In relation to

Black feminist thought, actions and thought should be synchronized so actions inform

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[70] Ibid., 33-34

thought and knowledge influences actions. The continuous growth of knowledge through lived experiences and the response of African-American women serve a crucial role in Black feminist thought.

Intelligence is acquired through experiences, whether it be achieved through formalized training in education or not. African-American women historically have been marginalized in their pursuit to receive education; however, through their lived experiences they were able to overcome these obstacles. African-American women shaped their knowledge and became influential in eventually contributing to society by becoming involved and forming scholarship.

> Denied positions as scholars and writers which allow us to emphasize purely theoretical concerns, the work of most Black women intellectuals has been influenced by the merger of action and theory. The activities of nineteenth-century educated Black women intellectuals such as Anna J. Cooper, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Ida B. Wells-Barnet, and Mary Church Terrell exemplify this tradition of merging intellectual work and activism.[71]

Black feminist thought acknowledged contributions of African-American female intellectuals. Their scholarship and experience was essential to Black feminist thought. Collins suggested four contributing factors to explain why Black female voices were crucial to Black feminist thought. The first factor concentrated on experiences of African-American women. "Only African-American women occupy this center and can 'feel the iron' that enters the Black women souls, because while U.S. Black women's experiences

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[71] Ibid., 37

resemble others, such experiences remain unique."[72] Secondly, acknowledging the

struggle and not walking away. African-American women inside and outside of the

academy are less likely to ignore the challenges and struggle. Thirdly, African-American

women using their voices to become empowered and creating a self-definition. The

notion of not only having a voice, but using a voice to become empowered and

empowering others is essential. Lastly, forming coalitions with other groups.[73] Joining

forces and building coalitions with other groups provided strength in numbers.

As the world changes, practices and ideologies must change. Black feminist

thought recognized the importance of evolution. The struggles of the past may still be

present, but the strategies used to resist them have to be flexible and dynamic. "The

changing social conditions that confront African-American women stimulate the need for

new Black feminist analyses of the common differences that characterize U.S. Black

womanhood."[74]

Lastly, Black feminist thought recognized not only one voice, but a voice of many

who stood alongside groups that supported social justice.   The National Association of

Social Workers define social justice as "the view that everyone deserves equal economic,

political and social rights and opportunities."[75] Several groups recognized the existing

disparities of economic stability, political savviness and social acceptance of African-

American women.   These groups acknowledged and assisted with sharing the voice to

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[72] Ibid., 39
[73] Ibid.,
[74] Ibid., 44
[75] Workers, "Social Justice."

bring awareness to oppression and the struggle of African-American women. They stood in support of eradicating these challenges.

Black feminist thought sought to examine experiences of oppression African-American women were subjected to in their daily lives. The knowledge of these experiences allowed African-American women to: develop strategies to resist oppression and recognize change must occur, link experiences and ideas to identify patterns to challenge stereotypes and connect experiences with knowledge to have a collective voice that will not be silenced or suppressed. Black feminist thought advocated an understanding that African-American women could be analytical and critical thinkers who contributed to academia and society, recognized change must occur, and welcomed and stood beside other groups who supported social justice.[76] The relevancy of Black feminist thought would not be as profound if the oppression of African-American women was not as prevalent and entrenched in various facets of their daily experiences. Black feminist thought stood in support of eliminating oppression and fostered experiences that promoted equality.

<div align="center">Aspiring to the Superintendency</div>

What role models exist for African-American females who aspire to become superintendents? How many African-American females are encouraged by professors to actively pursue superintendent positions? Do African-American females who currently hold high ranking positions in educational leadership choose not to apply for a superintendent position because of the internalized belief they do not stand a chance? Why do experienced and credentialed African-American females remain stagnant in

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[76] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

positions that do not include superintendent? How are African- American females introduced to expanding their horizons by actively pursuing the position of superintendent? C. Cypress Brunner and Lisa Peyton-Caire examined an aspiring African-American female graduate student's reaction to narrative data of an African-American superintendent. The researchers in this study identified three barriers that affected women of color in educational leadership programs: narrow perspectives, risky research and curriculum and a scarcity of published literature representing African-American female superintendents.[77]

Narrow perspectives represented the inability to offer diverse topics in education programs that deviated from the White male perspective in educational leadership. White male dominance in educational leadership positions is a fact. Most educational leadership programs predominately mirror this White male domination by restricting a focus on women and people of color. Risky research and curriculum is associated with the belief that, "attention to topics focused on women and people of color is 'risky business' for a junior professor in a tenure track."[78] While the study of African-American female superintendents held a special meaning and importance to the researcher, could this same level of enthusiasm be generalized to the larger audience? Will others perceive this topic as important? Research on African-American superintendents is limited and published works are far and few in between. Does the lack of published works support the notion that this topic serves little interest to the general public?

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[77] C. Cryss Brunner and Lisa Peyton-Caire, "Seeking Representation Supporting Black Female Graduate Students Who Aspire to the Superintendency," *Urban Education* 35, no. 5 (2000).
[78] Ibid., 533

The position of superintendent of schools traditionally has been regarded as a position of prestige and command. African-American female superintendents have not always experienced the respect of the position. Rosa Smith, an African-American female superintendent, participated in an interview to convey her personal experience as a superintendent.[79] The researcher developed a plan to allow her students to hear and read the thoughts and experiences of Rosa. The researcher sought out a graduate student, Lisa Peyton-Claire, to respond in writing to the interview transcripts and speech. The researcher felt it was important to examine the understanding and impact responding to narratives of an African-American female superintendent would have on an African-American graduate student. Rosa Smith began her career as a music teacher. She later completed her Ph.D. and served in the capacity of various administrative roles. Rosa served as superintendent for three years at the time of the study. Lisa Peyton-Claire, a graduate student at the time of the study, responded in writing to Rosa's narrative data. Rosa discussed the role marginalization played in her experience as a superintendent. She shared an experience when she was the only female in a board meeting. Rosa realized the topic of discussion had been previously discussed and she was the only person at the table who had not been privileged to the information prior to the meeting.

> Where there might be some merit in this issue, and I can see the point of view of …but because I did not have an opportunity to be consulted on this prior to this meeting as some other people had I have to wait to express where I really think I

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[79] Ibid.,

will be on the issue because I need to think about it. And after all, others have

had a chance to think about it.[80]

This reflection suggested marginalization, whether intentional or unintentional, is

present even when the superintendent is at the table. Lisa's written response to the

superintendent's narrative suggested she internalized and made a connection to the

experience. As an African-American female, she too had experienced marginalization

and was curious to know how many times the superintendent experienced being

marginalized. She associated her experience of being a co-developer of a precollege

academy. Lisa organized, wrote and led a project initially. She noticed overtime that she

was being left out of important meetings and eventually her name was taken off the

proposal. Lisa suggested that being denied the opportunity to have a voice at the table

while actually having a seat presented a challenge for females of color who aspire to

become a superintendent.[81]

The connection Lisa made with Rosa demonstrated how different experiences

resonated with a community and built collective knowledge. Participants provided

examples of how they experienced oppression. Black feminist thought suggests that

while the individual experiences of oppression African-American females confront may

look different on the surface level, the connections made could be generalized to the

collective knowledge of the group. Lisa learned crucial points as it related to her future

aspirations of becoming a superintendent. She indicated the experience of responding to

the narratives was empowering. Questions that rustled through her mind regarding what it

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[80] Ibid., 539
[81] Ibid.,

would be like to be an African-American female superintendent were validated. African-American female superintendents not only have the pressure that come along with the position of superintendent, but the additional layer of continuously proving their abilities.[82]

Roma Angel, Jim Killacky, and Patricia Johnson conducted a phenomenological study that examined lived experiences and barriers of African-American women who attained the credentials and experience of a superintendent, but had not applied for the position of superintendent of schools.[83] The researchers examined why there was a lack of African-American females in the position of superintendent of schools in the state of North Carolina and investigated factors that impacted their desire to apply for the position in the future. A phenomenological study, "describes one or more individual experiences of a phenomenon."[84] The participants included 10 African females who served in the capacity of district administrator. They were either a director or assistant/associate superintendent. All the participants in this study were currently enrolled in a doctor of education program, or they had previously obtained the degree. Interviews were conducted either face to face or by telephone. The interview questions relied heavily on the participants' "early influences and role models; education background and training opportunities; actual work experiences in public education; identified supports, mentors, and sponsors; and community, political, and cultural

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[82] Ibid.,

[83] Roma B. Angel, Jim Killacky, and Patricia R. Johnson, "African American Women Aspiring to the Superintendency: Lived Experiences and Barriers," *Journal of School Leadership* 23, no. 4 (2013).

[84] Michael Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, Third Edition* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 2002).

experiences."[85] Latter questions in the interview gave participants the opportunity to

reflect on experiences that contributed to their decision to pursue the position of

superintendent of schools.

Four themes related to early personal lives emerged from the data collected. The

themes included: internalized ethical system, recognition of early supports systems, high

expectations from the community, and the requirement of being prepared. Ethical

practices were highly valued. The participants valued honesty, integrity, equity, and hard

work. These attributes played a crucial role in developing the leadership styles of the

participants.[86] One participant explained, "I cannot sacrifice my integrity for anyone. I

am not changing for anyone. If you cannot accept me for who I am, then I am sorry. I am

fair and I am not going to give this person or that person an unfair advantage."[87]

Educators constantly set high expectations for their students and themselves. The

practice of setting these expectations is not a skill developed overnight. Individuals who

set high expectations, more than likely, had a community of supporters who offered

continuous encouragement and did not allow them to settle for anything less than their

capabilities. Participants explained that expectations set by the community, family and

themselves served as cornerstones to their leadership style and their pursuit for creating

opportunities.

Growing up in a family with seven aunts who were educators, it was an

expectation that the next generation would do better. My parents established an

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[85] Angel, Killacky, and Johnson, "African American Women Aspiring to the Superintendency: Lived
    Experiences and Barriers." 601
[86] Ibid.,
[87] Ibid., 602

> unspoken expectation, you will go to college and you will do well. There were no
>
> questions about it.[88]

Each participant shared the common belief that in order to apply for the position of

superintendent, she needed to hold the necessary credentials to accompany her

experience. In order for the women to even ponder applying for the position of

superintendent of schools and be taken seriously, they had to have the highest level of

certification to accompany their experience.

> One of these days I plan to apply for the superintendent position. Every job
>
> posting that I   have read in the last 3 or 4 years clearly states 'doctorate
>
> preferred.' In my case, being a Black female seeking the position without a
>
> doctorate would mean no consideration for the job.[89]

> Angel, Killacky and Johnson reported potential barriers participants felt were

factors in their pursuit to applying for the position of superintendent of schools. The

three barriers included oppression, selection and disconnection. Participants labeled

racism, sexism, and workplace glass ceilings as factors of oppression that presented

challenges in their pursuit for the superintendency.[90] One participant explained,

"Oftentimes the voices of the oppressed are never heard. Women and minorities around

here are better seen than heard."[91] This explanation illustrated race and the impact it had

on how others were viewed. While African-American females are often noticed when

they are fortunate to sit at the table, their voices are still silenced by others who do not

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[88] Ibid., 604
[89] Ibid., 604
[90] Ibid.,
[91] Ibid., 606

view them worthy of having an equal voice. Participants additionally expressed concern for the lack of formal and informal networking systems for African-American female administrators. Some of the participants reported they did not even have a formal mentor who encouraged them to seek the superintendency.

> I don't even think African America women realize the value of a network. I think everyone is busy doing their own thing. We are so busy making sure that we have crossed every T and dotted every I in order to present quality work to our superiors that we forget we have to find time to promote ourselves. Networking I think is viewed more as socializing among African American women.[92]

The participants shared various forms of oppression that presented challenges when they pursued the position of superintendent of schools. They experienced forms of oppression including marginalization, racism, and sexism. Participants held a strong conviction that in order to access the superintendency, their experience and levels of education had to be superior compared to other aspirants who were not African-American female.[93] The belief that if you did not have a doctorate degree, you need not apply permeated their psyche. The duality of race and gender and triangulation of race, gender and education affected the perception these African-American aspiring females had regarding their assent to the position of superintendent of schools.

<div align="center">Mentors and Sponsors</div>

The position of superintendent of schools is not an easy feat to gain entry. Most practicing educators probably do not even have the desire to climb to the top of the

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[92] Ibid., 607
[93] Ibid.,

educational ladder to pursue a superintendency.   For the select few who have ascended to the position, gaining entry was not done in isolation. While some superintendents may have ascended without the assistance of a formal mentor or sponsor, along their journey, there was an individual who guided, motivated, or recommended them to apply for the position. African-American females serve as the anomaly. The number of African-American females who hold high ranking leadership positions in education is miniscule. For African-American females who aspire to the superintendency, the lack of access to role models, sponsors or mentors who are African-American and female is limited. Mentors are traditionally viewed as providing support while sponsors are involved with opening doors that potentially lead to gaining entry into positions.

Kim Allen, Steve Jacobson and Kofi Lomotey examined the important role mentors and sponsors played for African-American females in administration. Current African-American females in administration or actively pursuing administration positions completed questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Results from the study suggested 63 percent of the participants were raised in the lower and middle lower class, 85 percent held a master's or doctorate degree and only five percent of the participants had parents who held a bachelor's degree or higher. Thirty percent of the participants indicated they entered into administration because they wanted to be a role model. Twenty-one of the 38 participants stated a mentor provided support. Of the 21 mentors, only four participants indicated their mentor was an African-American female. Most of the mentors were African-American males. Nineteen participants indicated they had

sponsors who assisted with potential employment opportunities.[94] Participants viewed

both mentors and sponsors as important to their professional growth. Mentors were

commonly viewed as providing moral support and encouragement.[95]

> I have two African-American mentors, both were an inspiration to me. They kept
>
> encouraging me, to the point I had an interview once and I didn't really have
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> anything adequate to wear and they sponsored [sic] me a nice suit.[96]

> The participants in this study recognized the important role of their mentors and

sponsors. The mentors and sponsors provided moral support, encouragement and

professional guidance. The participants acknowledged they did not always have an

African-American female superintendent to serve in this capacity, of the 38 participants,

only four were under the guidance of an African-American female. Although all of the

mentors and sponsors were not African-American females, those mentors and sponsors

who continued to support these women intentionally or unintentionally became connected

to the movement of opposing oppression and striving for equality.

> Ernestine Enomoto, Mary Gardiner and Margaret Grogan conducted a qualitative

study to investigate the relationship between women of color and mentors. Eighteen

women of color participated in this study. Fourteen participants were African-American

and four were Hispanic.[97] A mentor was described as a person who supported, guided,

protected and advocated for their mentee. Mentees did not always have to actively seek

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[94] Kim Allen, Steve Jacobson, and Kofi Lomotey, "African American Women in Educational Administration: The Importance of Mentors and Sponsors," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (1995).

[95] Ibid.,

[96] Ibid., 418

[97] Ernestine K. Enomoto, Mary E. Gardiner, and Margaret Grogan, "Notes to Athene: Mentoring Relationships for Women of Color," *Urban Education* 35, no. 5 (2000).

out mentors. Potential mentors approached mentees in some instances. Mentors were not always the same race and gender as their mentee, particularly for African-American females. The participants suggested that regardless of race and gender, the most important factor their mentor possessed was genuine faith in their abilities as a leader and care about their success.[98]   One participant gave the example of a White male being her mentor. She accepted the position in a different district and a Black male superintendent served as her mentor. The participant was grateful for the guidance from both mentors; however, she returned to work for the district of her first White mentor. There were six needs the mentees expressed they needed support from mentors: political savviness and learning how to navigate the education terrain of the district, access to networks that allow new professional relationships to form, similar mentors to assist with shared experiences and ease of communication, different mentors, having multiple mentors and seeking out alternate support systems including family, friends or church.[99]

Black feminist thought supports the significance of building coalitions with others who support social justice. The oppression of African-American females in leadership positions require continued action and awareness. Individuals who took a risk and supported these African-American females became a part of the movement of chipping away a layer of oppression. The relationships established between mentors and sponsors served to provide guidance and expertise to African-American women. The more support African-American females received gaining access to the position of superintendent of schools, the greater opportunity they had in securing the position.

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[98] Ibid.,
[99] Ibid.,

African-American Women and the Superintendency

The opportunities for African-American women to attain the position of superintendent of schools have been far and few between. Data from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) suggested in 2000, 15 percent of superintendents were women, and five percent were minority women.[100] Amie Revere asserted an African-American female superintendent was essentially nonexistent.[101] While White women and even Black men have experienced growth in attaining the position of superintendent of schools, African-American women have shown the fewest gains. Questions abound about why African-American female superintendents have not been able to attain this position at a rate more commensurate with Caucasian females or males. Do African-American females lack credentials required to attain the position of superintendent? Are African-American females aspiring to gain entry into the role of superintendent overlooked by boards of education and superintendent search firms? Are African-American females more inclined to remain in non-superintendent positions because these females feel they lack administrative experience? How frequently are African-American females encouraged to pursue superintendent positions by their supervisors or academic programs? Research on African-American women in superintendent positions is a rare commodity; but research interest of these women is starting to change. African-American female superintendents have been studied on various factors: The lack of African-American female superintendents in education systems, the career paths of the women into the superintendency, common threads shared

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[100] Catherine Gewertz, "Race, Gender, and the Superintendency. Departures of Black Women Spark Frank Talk of Factors Making a Tough Job Harder," *Education Week* 25, no. 24 (2006).
[101] Revere, "Black Women Superintendents in the United States: 1984-85."

among these women, and challenges, among others are topics researchers are starting to investigate with a critical eye.

<p style="text-align:center">Description of African American Female Superintendents</p>

There have been efforts to capture a picture of what an African- American female superintendent looks like in today's society. Is she at the middle of her career or is she approaching retirement? Does this woman have children and is she married? How long has she been in the field of education? How long did it take her to attain the position of superintendent of schools? How many times did she apply for the position of superintendent of schools before actually receiving a contract? Do these women share the same career path or are they able to achieve this position through various avenues? Does she hold the same credentials as her Black male counterparts and females and males of a different race? Is she predominantly leading schools with less than 5000 students or over 10,000? These are various questions that come to mind regarding African American superintendents. The following section reviewed studies that explored some of these aforementioned questions and described major characteristics of some of the women who accepted the position of superintendent of schools.

Amie Revere identified 29 African-American superintendents in the United States during the 1984-1985 academic school year.[102] Of the 29 African American female superintendents, 22 participated in the study. Personal and telephone interviews were tape-recorded and field notes were taken and transcribed for this study. An interview guide was developed and used to provide a biographical description of superintendents. The results from this study provided various descriptions of these women. At the time of

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[102] Amie Revere, "A Description of Black Female School Superintendents," (1986).

the study, 63.6 percent of these women were 46 years of age or older; the mean age of

their first administrative position was 36 years of age; and the mean age of the first

superintendency was 46. Sixty three percent of the superintendents were married, with

27.3 percent being divorced or widowed.[103] For three of the participants, a master's

degree was the highest achieved degree. Four women received an educational specialist

degree, and 68.2 percent of the women held doctorate degrees. Eighty-six percent of the

superintendents were hired by their current school board. The majority of these women

were superintendents in city/urban districts, with only two women working in a rural/

suburban area. These women had been in the educational field for a mean of 25.5

years.[104] The major commonality among these women was that they had all previously

served as classroom teachers. Their path to the superintendency was diverse.

Participants assumed the role of both elementary and secondary principals, supervisors,

directors, assistant and associate superintendents and university professor.

> Nine women followed the path of teacher to elementary principalship to
> superintendency.Four respondents' career paths were from teacher to
> administrator to central office to superintendent. Three women followed the
> progression of elementary teacher, elementary principal, secondary
> administration, central office supervision and finally the superintendency. Six of
> the women…moved directly from the classroom teacher to central office and
> subsequently, to the superintendency.[105]

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[103] Revere, "Black Women Superintendents in the United States: 1984-85."
[104] Ibid.,
[105] Ibid., 515

Results from this study suggested many participants did not initially aspire to the superintendency; however, after having substantial leadership roles, they embarked on the journey. The superintendents also reported participating in professional academies, mentoring programs, and being at the right place at the right time led to their journey to the superintendency. The description of these African-American superintendents provided insight on demographic information and the career paths these women took as they became superintendents. While these women took different paths, they each found themselves in the highest position in public education.

Nancy Arnez depicted a mini-biographical sketch of two African American female superintendents. According to Arnez, there had not been an adequate amount of progress made since the inception of affirmative action with women attaining administrative positions. The women in her study broke down barriers. Three African-American women in the mid 1970's were superintendents in urban school districts; the number increased to 11 in 1981.[106] A questionnaire to all 11 African-American female superintendents at the time was sent, but only two responded in time to meet the deadline. Two African American female superintendents who managed large urban school systems with budgets ranging from $150 million to over $1 billion annually were participants in the study.[107]

The mini-biographical sketches of these women conveyed major similarities, but there were major differences between the two as well. Participant 1 started her career in education as a substitute teacher because at the time only people who matriculated

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[106] Nancy L. Arnez, "Selected Black Female Superintendents of Public School Systems," Ibid.,51, no. 3 (1982).
[107] Ibid.,

through the Chicago Teachers College were allowed to go straight into the teaching profession. After completing the necessary requirements, she received her first teaching assignment at an elementary level. She received her principal's certification and secured her first principalship at the high school level. She would later obtain her doctorate degree and become a district director. Participant 1 became an associate secretary for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and, after that position, she was asked to apply for her first superintendent position. She would become the first African-American superintendent of a large urban school district. The student population was over 136,000 and her budget was approximately $150 million.[108]

Participant 2 began her career as a teacher. She taught abroad through the Fulbright Exchange teacher program in England. Upon return, she became a counselor and then moved to Ghana to serve as a project director. She returned to the United States and served as an adult education teacher and later became a consultant. Participant 2 became a chief of the Department of Education in Sacramento, California, and after that position, she finally obtained her first superintendency. She was responsible for 450,000 students with a budget of $1.3 billion. She was the first African-American female superintendent of the Chicago school system.[109]

These two women came from different backgrounds and experienced different paths that led them to the superintendent position. They both began their careers as teachers and obtained their doctorate degrees in education. The results from this study contributed to the growing body of research that existed on African- American female

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[108] Arnez, "Selected Black Female Superintendents of Public School Systems."
[109] Ibid.,

superintendents. While some may attempt to categorize these women in the same light, there are more differences, specifically on their career paths to the superintendency, that make each of these women unique.

Limited research on African-American females has been scattered and inconsistencies exist regarding data. Due to anonymity, pseudo names have been traditionally utilized to protect participants from being identified.   Barbara Jackson added to the body of research on African-American female superintendents by investigating former and current African-American superintendents who responded to a survey and participated in interviews during 1993-1994. Her analysis introduced more details regarding educational preparation, experience, membership in organizations, years in the position and school district demographics.[110] Forty-nine women participated in this study. Superior levels of education were important to these participants. A total of 31 participants held a doctorate degree and three participants indicated they completed the coursework, but had not written their dissertation. All the participants started as teachers and most served in the capacity of an elementary school principal. While there were similarities among the participants, diversity existed with experience. Some participants worked in central office, served as assistant and associate superintendents, worked at the U.S. Department of Education or deputy superintendent. The participants were involved with professional and community based organizations. The districts ranged in size. The student population ranged from 1,300 to 409, 730.[111] The numbers

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[110] Jackson, "Getting inside History-against All Odds: African-American Women Becoming Female
       Superintendents."
[111] Ibid.,

did not align with other research that suggested African-American superintendents typically led smaller districts.

Data analysis revealed various themes: family, church, teacher/mentor, leadership/style, role of superintendent, school board relationships, politics and power and gender and race. The participants' families provided experiences to provide the foundation of becoming a leader. Families set high expectations and encouraged success either explicitly or implicitly. Attending church in many African-American households is a part of the family routine.[112] It is not unusual for someone in an African-American family to recognize a non- related church member as being a part of the family. The participants in the study indicated experiences in the church assisted with their development as a leader. As children, they were involved with the church choir and plays which aided in building confidence. The participants' leadership styles were inclusive. The participants agreed that the working relationship with the board was pivotal to their future success as superintendent.[113] The participants in the study contradicted most research that suggested race and gender had an impact on the careers of African-American female superintendents. Participants exuded confidence. Gender and race were woven into how they viewed themselves as human beings. The participants found it challenging to identify race and gender as impeding factors in their careers. The participants suggested, that occasionally, gender was more of a barrier than race.[114]

Margaret Grogan conducted a qualitative study of an African-American female superintendent who had risen through the educational ranks and eventually became a

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[112] Ibid.,
[113] Ibid.,
[114] Ibid.,

superintendent. The participant shared her journey and provided insight regarding how

she and others perceived her in position of superintendent during the interviews. The

participant was taught at a young age to pursue a career in education, "cause that's what

colored folks could get a job at" and would instill "middle class values."[115]   The

participant conveyed as a teacher, she always dressed for success. She wore three-piece

suits and at times received ridicule from her colleagues. She would have to field the

comments including, "What role you playing today---assistant principal?"[116] The

participant, determined she wanted to become a continuous learner, received her Ph. D.

Although she was asked to accept a position at central office, the participant was

concerned with how it would be perceived that she bypassed the position as a building

administrator. She did not want to give the appearance that she lacked knowledge or

preparation. Instead she took a position as an assistant principal. "So, I worked a

glorious year as assistant principal."[117] After one year as an assistant principal, the

participant moved and became the first and only African-American principal in the

district. The participant was asked to apply for an assistant superintendent position. She

experienced apprehension because she did not want to lose the close connection with

students. The participant accepted the position and again served as one of the only

African-Americans in a high ranking administrative position. The participant continued

her journey up the ranks and held positions including executive assistant to the

superintendent, assistant-county superintendent, and ultimately superintendent. The

participant did not receive a superintendency during her first attempt and came in at

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[115] Grogan, "A Black Woman Superintendent Tells." 597
[116] Ibid., 598
[117] Ibid., 598

number six. She applied for another superintendent position in the county and hoped she

would not be offered the job.[118] To her dismay, the board of education hired her for the

position. In her reflection, she was going to be successful at the position regardless of

perceptions of others.

> The State thinks I'm retarded and backward. But if the teachers don't see me,
>
> They think I'm sitting here on my behind. If they do see me, I'm serving. They
>
> are not comfortable with anyone acting the Way I act—with swiftness. But I'm
>
> going to make it here because I like the people.[119]

The examination of this African-American female superintendent provided a

detailed account of her unique journey.[120] Her experiences echoed the successes,

challenges and oppression African-American females were exposed to on their journey of

becoming visible. The participant was aware through her knowledge of collective

understanding how the world perceived her in a leadership position. On her journey to

the superintendency, she did not cut corners but rather received the highest level of

education and credentials. When presented with the opportunity of bypassing a position

and accepting a higher level leadership position, she declined. She did not want to be

perceived as not having the necessary experience first. While this participant

experienced challenges along the way to the superintendency she persevered.

When superintendents assume their positions, various tasks are presented the first

day on the job. Traditional areas of interest include student achievement, financial

stability, community building and creating a positive culture. A superintendent should be

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[118] Ibid.,
[119] Ibid., 602
[120] Ibid.,

knowledgeable regarding the diverse background and history of the community. African-American female superintendents are typically charting new territory when they assume the position. For most African-American female superintendents, they were the first women of color to lead their school districts. These women in some cases served as the catalyst for providing diversity to the district and started the dialogue about sensitive topics. Susan Katz was interested in examining how female superintendents promoted and supported social justice and community building in their school district. Six females participated in this study: three African-American, one American Indian and two White.[121] Delia, an African-American female, accepted the position as a superintendent in a community that was, "…not far from her old district in miles but miles apart in population, ideology, and community values."[122] Prior to becoming a superintendent, Delia served as a teacher, administrator, assistant superintendent and interim superintendent twice. Delia experienced working in a larger suburban district, rich with diversity, compared to her current small suburban district with less than 1,000 students. Delia served as superintendent of the district for five years at the time of the study.[123]

Two lengthy personal interviews with each participant were conducted to provide extensive data.[124] Delia was eager to answer the questions and had prepared in advance for the interview questions. Delia held a firm belief that there should be equality and fairness. She recognized individual differences but made it a priority to initiate equality. Delia stated her role was "no more different than the custodian's role, it's just different"

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[121] Susan J. skatz roosevelt edu Katz, "Border Crossing: A Black Woman Superintendent Builds Democratic Community in Unfamiliar Territory," *Journal of School Leadership* 22, no. 4 (2012).
[122] Ibid., 771
[123] Ibid.,
[124] Ibid.,

and believed "children are truly the future," which grounded her in continuing her efforts in social justice.[125] Delia's motto was "we can agree to disagree but we must not be disagreeable."[126] Delia focused on reaching out to others and changing updated practices to build community. Listening, respecting, and being visible were factors associated with building community. At the time of the study, the Korean population was growing. Parents exhibited a lack of interest with regard to events and functions related to school. The Korean parents did not attend conferences or school events regularly. One of her goals was to engage all parents, especially the Korean population. Delia established partnerships with those in the community and held meetings with the Korean parents. Partnerships and networking opportunities were established and levels of engagement increased.[127] Family traditions passed down from generation to generation were hard to break. The same held true for traditions in education. Delia realized practices and customs implemented in the district were not inclusive to all families. Cultural awareness and acknowledgement of all cultures was not consistently practiced. Delia worked at implementing events that were inclusive of the cultures and customs of the population of students the district served.

Katz's study suggested when given the opportunity, African-American female superintendents could be perceived by their constituents as being agents of change and positively affecting the community. Delia walked into a position of being in unfamiliar territory. She was the first African-American female superintendent for a small suburban school district that was experiencing a cultural shift in the community. She implemented

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[125] Ibid., 778
[126] Ibid., 779
[127] Ibid.,

strategies acquired through years of experience and built a sense of quality and community to her district.

According to the mentioned studies, most African-American female superintendents possessed a doctoral degree, and all had at minimum a master's degree. They first began their careers as teachers and ultimately became superintendents. Most of these women became administrators in their mid-thirties and became a superintendent in their late forties. African-American female superintendents traveled down different roads to her career path and worked for districts with various budgets and student populations. The majority of these women served as leaders in urban school districts. These descriptions give insight to some of the African- American female superintendents.

Challenges and Successes of the Superintendency

Richard Hunter and Sarah Donahoo reported African-American superintendents faced more challenges, primarily because they tended to lead urban school districts that have been plagued with various problems ranging from densely populated schools to lower per pupil expenditures.[128] A lack of trust existed for African-American superintendents.

> More often than not, neither school board members nor politicians trust African-American superintendents to lead their school districts. Even before they assume their position, some elected and appointed officials have already cast African-American superintendents in the role of puppet or scapegoat.[129]

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[128] Richard C. Hunter and Saran Donahoo, "All Things to All People: Special Circumstances Influencing the Performance of African American Superintendents," *Education & Urban Society* 37, no. 4 (2005).

[129] Ibid., 423

Other challenges included the image that African American superintendents were super human. They were supposed to alleviate all the mounting issues that permeated the district. These superintendents additionally faced the tasks of resolving racial issues, in addition to many other responsibilities.

A growing body of research existed on describing African- American female superintendents. Other areas of interest included the challenges these women faced and the successes of these women. It has been documented that attaining the position of superintendent of schools is daunting for women of color, so one can only presume, once in the position, challenges continue to develop. Issues and challenges African-American female superintendents faced were reported.[130] In this study, the women of Color and White female participants were asked to rate the importance of 30 challenges they faced as a superintendent. Nine major challenges were reported:

> Strategic planning and mission statements. Developing and funding programs for children at risk. Caliber of persons assigned to/removed from local boards. Parent apathy and irresponsibility. Changing priorities in the curriculum. Changing demographics. School-based decision-making. Student discipline, gangs. Affirmative action programs.[131]

Women of Color rated eight of the nine challenges higher than White superintendents. White female superintendents rated changing priorities in the curriculum higher than women of Color. In the same study, women of Color answered the open-ended question: "If you are a woman of color, how do you feel your experience as a woman of color in a

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[130] Brunner, Grogan, and American Association of School Administrators, *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*.

[131] Ibid., 123

leadership position has differed from others; experiences?"[132] The superintendents'

answers focused on overcoming perceptions, institutionalized racism, sexism and being

viewed as different by the community. They felt they had to prove themselves more than

others who had these positions and were questioned more on their decisions. "Women of

color superintendents felt they were operating on an unequal playing field with white

men and women."[133]

The position of superintendent of schools is one that requires the ability to

manage multiple tasks. Superintendents are placed under enormous pressure. African-

American women experience intensified pressure. Challenges of the superintendency

have been explored, but successes to the position have been documented as well. Success

was defined as a continuous journey of advancement towards goals that brought a sense

of satisfaction. Six key factors African American female superintendents attributed to

their success were documented.[134]

- *Competence-* the superintendents felt they possessed the necessary

  skills to perform the job. They possessed good organization skills,

  risk-taking propensity, high energy, verve, and knowledge of all facets

  of administrative functions, including finance and public relations.

- *Industry-* the superintendents were diligent toward putting forth

  careful effort to realize their goals. They were resourceful individuals

  who were exemplars of the work ethic.

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[132] Ibid., 124
[133] Ibid., 125
[134] Revere, "Black Women Superintendents in the United States: 1984-85."

- *Self-esteem-* These women were confident in their abilities to direct their school system.

- *Strength-*All the women acknowledged their tenaciousness and strong willed qualities in order to withstand the rigorous job demands.

- *Interpersonal relationships-* Each respondent indicated her ability to get along with others as the keystone of her success.

- *Productivity-* The respondents in this study exercised their authority in order to enhance their power base effectively. They were not power phobic.[135]

African-American female superintendents confronted and overcame several challenges they endured as the educational leaders of schools. Challenges ranged from strategic planning to student discipline. While African-American female superintendents reported various challenges, the major challenge they faced was overcoming negative perceptions individuals had of female superintendents. Even though various challenges have been reported, successes of African-American female superintendents surfaced as well.[136]

Recruitment and Retention

School boards of education across the country have the arduous and crucial task of hiring a superintendent of schools for their district. Several districts follow the practice of hiring a search firm to research and narrow down the talent pool for viable candidates. These candidates are presented to the board and the interviewing process

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[135] Ibid., 518
[136] Ibid.,

commences. One major but simplistic question regarding the process of seeking

candidates for the position of superintendent for an African-American female might be,

"Will I even be considered?" A large number of African-American female educators have

more experience and in many cases have reached a higher level of education than their

Caucasian male counterparts. While experience and advanced levels of education are

traditionally sought after skills for the position of superintendent, African-American

females continue to be outnumbered. Caucasian men remain at the helm of securing the

position of superintendent.

What process is used when recruiting African-American females for the

superintendent position? Does race and gender play a factor during the interview

process? How can districts attract African-American females to actively pursue this

position? Once a district offers the position to an African-American female as a

superintendent, how do they retain her in the position? Anitra Brown examined issues

related to recruitment and retention of African-American female superintendents. Eight

African-American women, who recently served or who were currently serving as

superintendents, were participants. The primary research question in the study was: "How

do race, gender, and social politics affect the recruitment and retention of African-

American women to the public school superintendency?"[137] All the superintendents

"agreed that race, gender and social politics has great bearing on whether African

American women are recruited and retained in the superintendency."[138] There is always

the question regarding which attribute plays the most crucial role, gender or race, when

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[137] Anita R. Brown, "The Recruitment and Retention of African American Women as Public School
        Superintendents," *Journal of Black Studies* 45, no. 6 (2014).
[138] Ibid., 576

African-American superintendents are or not offered the position of superintendent. Participants suggested race held the upper hand when comparing the two in relation to recruitment and retention. One participant reflected on a conversation she had with a board member, "He told me, he said you were the best candidate and I couldn't in good conscious not vote for you, but others did not and they did not because of the color of your skin."[139] This reflection suggested, even when African-American female candidates are the most qualified for the position, because of the color of their skin, they are not given the opportunity to grow as a leader.

While race was perceived to be the most crucial when compared to gender, gender was not minimized. One participant reported, "The major barrier for the first position I held was that there were White males on the board who could not get beyond a Black and then secondly a female."[140] Another participant explained,

> I still have the issues of White men who want to challenge me and they never do it overtly but challenge is always there. They would rather see a White man in front of them talking than a Black woman and I understand that and I'm not going to make it a problem[141]

The reflections of the participants speak volumes to the struggle African- American women continue to have as they aspire to the superintendency. A perception continued to abide that African-American females were inferior when it came to positions of leadership in education.

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[139] Ibid., 578
[140] Ibid., 579
[141] Ibid., 580

Another factor impacting the recruitment and retention of African-American female superintendents was social politics. There is the commonly held belief that the position of superintendent is nothing short of a pseudo politician. The superintendent has various stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, media outlets, business owners and other community leaders, etc.) at the table who play important roles with either the success or failure of the superintendent. The superintendent has to please several constituents who have their own personal agendas while keeping at the forefront student achievement. The interconnections of social politics add an additional layer to the already multi-layered position. The interaction of social politics and recruitment and retention suggested social politics played a crucial role.

> The difficulty is the politics…it turned me off that superintendents can be turned out of their jobs not they didn't do their jobs but because somebody gets a grudge against them or somebody in the community decides they don't like the superintendent and they get to a board member and then the next thing you know the superintendent's contract is not being renewed and they are being bought out. That's the thing that we can't control and it is the thing that keeps Black females from seeking the position.[142]

The importance of knowing the culture of not only the school district but community is critical to learning the different political layers that exists in a community.

> …people are going to bring differences to the table and there are going to be some people who I don't care how long you live they are never going to want anything to do with you. That's an issue depending on what the community looks like and

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[142] Ibid., 581

what their values are. You know there are just some places that we (African-American women) just can't go.[143]

The school board of education ultimately exerts the most influence with relation to the retention of a superintendent. The board of education is responsible for extending and terminating contracts. The board of education creates policy and serves as the supervisor of the superintendent. The working relationship a superintendent creates with the board of education will have an impact on his or her future retaining the position. Brown suggested the most important relationship a superintendent can have is with the board of education with relation to retention.[144]

Summary

Caucasian men have traditionally filled the position of superintendent of schools; however, women over the years have gradually gained entry into the position. Historically, women are underrepresented as chief administrators of districts, especially African-American women. Factors related to gender and race in the superintendency, a description of African American female superintendents, and challenges and successes along the way for African-American female superintendents were cited in the literature. The pivotal role mentors and sponsors served to aspiring African-American female superintendents and strategies to recruit and retain African-American female superintendents were documented.

African-American female superintendent literature is fractured; however, after analyzing the content, the researcher identified various themes. The literature suggested

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[143] Ibid., 582
[144] Ibid.,

gender was a contributing factor for women who pursued the superintendency. The number of female superintendents as a collective group was considerably lower than men, and that number declined significantly for African-American females. African-American female superintendents have increased in number; however, African-American females continue to have the lowest percent of women serving in the position.

It was suggested African-American females aspiring to the superintendency experienced various obstacles in their journey. Obstacles identified included oppression, racism and sexism, lack of networking opportunities, and the absence of mentors and sponsors. The literature suggested the number of African-American female mentors and sponsors available to aspiring superintendents was limited. Most aspiring African-American female superintendents sought mentoring and sponsorship from men.

The literature provided a description of African-American female superintendents. These women typically gained entry to the position of superintendent of schools much later in their career. One explanation is that African-American females felt they needed to already have their doctorate degree or be enrolled in a doctorate program. Most African-American superintendents began their career in the classroom and had served in the capacity of elementary school administrator.

The review of literature suggested African-American female superintendents experienced successes and challenges. Various challenges included marginalization and not being taken seriously, the relationship with the board, student discipline, and funding. Successes to the position included strength, competence, industry, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and productivity. The African-American female superintendents indicated these characteristics assisted with their success in the position.

The literature further identified the importance of recruiting and retaining African-American female superintendents. School boards claimed an instrumental role with both recruiting and retaining superintendents. Most boards are responsible for offering and terminating the contract of a superintendent. It was suggested African-American female superintendents had the most experience and highest level of credentials, yet they still were not recruited for the position of superintendent. Social politics, gender, and race were factors when it came to recruiting and retaining African-American female superintendents. The relationships the superintendent has with the board of education impacted the longevity of the superintendent.

This review explored African-American female superintendents. Continued research and dialogue should continue in order to provide a complete picture that builds on existing sporadic research. The literature suggested the journey to the position of superintendent of schools was arduous and differed from one African-American female superintendent to the other. One can ascertain the road to the superintendency for African American females is one that can take various twists and turns, but those who make it to the finish line are trailblazers who are paving the way for aspiring African American female superintendents.

The following chapter discusses the methodology, research design, sample size and data collection and analysis used in the study.

Chapter 3

Methods

      This study uncovered experiences of former and current African-American women who led, and are currently leading schools, in the position of superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. The researcher was interested in the participants' individual stories, perceptions of their experiences of being a superintendent and factors that contributed to their ascent to the position. Additionally, the researcher examined the participants' career paths, mentors, education, leadership styles, as well as other contributing factors that have fueled their desires to become a superintendent. This study identified motivations, career paths, descriptions of Africans-American female superintendents, and successes and barriers experienced along the path and during the tenure of being a superintendent of schools. The narrative of each African-American female superintendent was unique and this research documented their individual journey.

Design

      A historical qualitative research design was selected for this study. Bruce Berg defined historical research as an examination of events that discovers events of the past.[145] The researcher revealed untold stories of African-American female of superintendents of schools. The researcher examined past events and experiences these women perceived as influential in leading them to the zenith position of superintendent of schools. According to Sharan Merriam, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed,

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[145] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Boston:Allyn and Bacon, 1998).

that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."[146] A research method considered, but not selected for this design, was a narrative analysis. Researchers who use a narrative analysis are typically interested in a particular life story of the participant. Stories used in narrative designs should follow a sequence of events. The researcher was not interested exclusively in the life stories of participants, but rather on the personal experiences that led to their ascent to becoming a superintendent of schools.

Other research designs considered included ethnography and grounded theory. An ethnography study has a strong emphasis on the culture of participants and attempts to understand the interaction of "individuals not just with others."[147] A critical element to ethnographies involves researchers immersing themselves in the culture and the lives of the participants. The purpose and focus of this study did not lend itself to an ethnography. Even though the participants of this study were all African-American women, the cultural background of these women were not synonymous.

Grounded theory is a qualitative research design introduced by Glaser and Strauss.[148] The aim of grounded theory is to have a theory emerge from the data. Assertions are not made prior to the study. Generalizations are derived after a thorough data analysis.[149] While this research involved some of procedures

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[146] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research : A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

[147] Ibid., 23

[148] Ibid.,

[149] Donna M. Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Method* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005).

associated to grounded theory, the total design of the study did not qualify as grounded theory. The theory-building framework associated with grounded theory was not be employed for this research.

Sample

The non-probability, criterion base sampling strategy was employed for this study. There are various forms of purposeful sampling researchers can utilize when conducting a study. According to Patton, 15 purposeful strategies exist.[150] A few purposeful strategies included: snowball or chain sampling, critical case, extreme or deviant case, and convenience sampling. The snowball technique involved asking participants questions such as: "Who knows a lot about _____? Whom should I talk to?"[151] The researcher was able to identify other participants for the study by asking participants these questions. A critical case sampling technique involves using a sample that can make a dramatic point. Examples of statements used to test if a case is critical were: "If it happened there, then it will happen anywhere" or "If it doesn't happen there, than it won't happen anywhere."[152] These critical cases allow the researcher to make various logical generalizations. Extreme or deviant sampling involves selecting cases that are information rich due to the sample being unique in some way. With deviant cases, there appears to be an outlier and the researchers are interested in those cases.

[150] Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods (2nd Ed.)*.
[151] Ibid., 237
[152] Ibid., 236

Convenience sampling is "doing what's fast and convenient."[153] This technique typically saves time, money and effort.

The researcher selected a purposeful sample to gain insight specifically on current and former African-American women who were superintendents of schools in the state of Missouri. The state of Missouri had multiple African-American women who have served and are serving as superintendents concurrently. The researcher investigated the stories of these women. The participants' experiences of being a superintendent and the factors that contributed to their ascent to the position served as a focus. The researcher identified sixteen African-American women who are former or current superintendent of schools in a Midwestern state. The researcher identified these women by gaining access to the state educational department records and using the snowballing technique.

Table I		African-American Female Superintendents (past/current) in the state of Missouri	
	Name	School District	Years
1	Queen Fowler	Wellston	1979-1984
2	Rosie Doughty	University City	1982-1984
3	Phyllis Chase	Kansas City Missouri School District (Acting Superintendent)	1998-2000
4	Marjorie Williams	Hickman Mills C-1	2000-2012
-	Phyllis Chase	Colombia 93	2003-2008
5	Connie Calloway	Normandy	2004-2007
6	Pamela Randall-Hughes	St. Louis Public (Interim)	2004-2005
7	Kay Royster	Jennings	2006-2008

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[153] Ibid., 241

8	Rhonda Key	Riverview Gardens	2007-2010
9	Joylynn Pruitt	University City	2008-2016
10	Tiffany Anderson	Jennings	2012-2016
11	Karen Hall	Maplewood-Richmond Heights	2012-present
12	Sharmon Wilkinson	Clayton	2012-2016
13	Everyln Williams	Hickman Mills C-1 (Interim)	2012-2012
14	Barbara Tate	Hickman Mills C-1 (Acting)	2012-2013
15	Tondelayo "Toni" Westbrooks-Taylor	St. Elizabeth R-IV	2013-present
16	Ingrid Clark-Jackson	Hazelwood (Interim)	2015-2016
17	*Sharonica Hardin	University City	2016-
18	*Nettie Collins Hart	Hazelwood	2016

Will assume the position July 1, 2016

Data Collection

Qualitative research is comprised of various characteristics. One major characteristic that defines qualitative research is the premise that the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.[154] I, the researcher, was responsible for the data collection of this study. Personal interviewed served as the primary source of data collection. Personal interviews were used to ascertain more in-depth information from the participants. Oral evidence expressed authentic first-hand recollections of past events.

Older people hold a gamut of facts and memories, and this information may be unavailable anywhere else. There may have been no reason for

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[154] Merriam, *Qualitative Research : A Guide to Design and Implementation.*

anyone to have recorded these treasures of knowledge or explanations.

Were it not for the memories of people, these nuggets of information

might vanish.[155]

The purpose of interviewing is to, "allow researchers to enter the

participant's perspective because we cannot observe feelings, thoughts and

intentions."[156] We are not always able to gain understanding by means of

observation, so for this study, the questions from the interview served as the

primary instrument for data collection. The researcher used an interview guide

during the interview. An interview guide is a list of questions a researcher intends

to ask during an interview (see appendix).[157] The researcher utilized a semi-

structured interview schedule for the study because it allowed opportunities for

flexibility.[158] The participants' responses to the questions guided the interviews.

A structured interview schedule was not selected for this study because the

researcher wanted the flexibility to probe participants during the interviews to

gain a deeper understanding of the experiences. The researcher did not want to

limit or inhibit the participants' responses to the questions. "The problem with

using a highly structured interview in qualitative research is that rigidly adhering

to predetermined questions may not allow you to access participants' perspectives

and understanding of the words."[159] The interview questions were developed by

the researcher (see appendix). The interview schedule consisted of questions

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[155] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences.*208
[156] Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods (2nd Ed.). 341*
[157] Merriam, *Qualitative Research : A Guide to Design and Implementation.*
[158] Ibid.,
[159] Ibid., 90

reflecting experiences, backgrounds, and other characteristics that literature

suggested were common amongst African-American female superintendents of

schools.

Data Analysis

The researcher digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews. Both

the questions and answers were typed using Microsoft word. The researcher used

the manual method of playing back the interview during the transcriptions. The

researcher transcribed, analyzed and reviewed archival data relevant to the study.

Black feminist thought was the theoretical lens used to investigate the

participant's perception of race and gender. The researcher edited and rearranged

interviews to provide clarity while keeping the integrity of the original meaning.

Additionally, the researcher conducted a member check with participants to

ensure the data were accurately represented.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher previously acknowledged the influence racial background

and gender had on the study. The researcher's experience as a credentialed and

practicing African-American female educator, could directly or indirectly impact

data. Participants chose to divulge more candid responses and some replied

selectively to the interview questions based on the shared and overt backgrounds

with the researcher. Participants' recorded interview data and the researcher's

interpretations constructed from the data may be biased.

Historians openly acknowledge their own biases in a way few other

scholars do. Whether the historian is liberal or conservative, black or

white, male or female matters a great deal in the account of the historical

being investigated and the interpretation of the facts and incidents

surrounding that event.[160]

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[160] Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen, *Educational Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches,* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000).

Chapter 4

Black women could hardly strive for weakness; they had to become strong, for their families and their communities needed their strength to survive. Evidence of the accumulated strengths Black women have forged through work, work and more work can be discovered in the contributions of the many outstanding female leaders who have emerged within the Black community.[161]

This research documented the history of African-American females who served in the position of superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. The researcher identified 16 women who served in the position of superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. The researcher made contact with ten African-American female superintendents. A total of seven participants participated in this research. Two of the ten African-American female superintendents contacted declined to participate, and one superintendent was out of the office for an extended period of time due to medical leave. The researcher exhausted all avenues during an extensive search to locate the contact information for the remaining six African-American female superintendents. The researcher retrieved an email address for one of the superintendents; however, the researcher did not receive a response. It was revealed to the researcher that another former superintendent was in declining health. Seventy percent of the African-American female superintendents contacted participated in this research.

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[161] Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 231.

The first section of this chapter provided a mini biographical synopsis of each participant. Traditionally, participants in a sensitive research topic, such as this research, focused on African-American female superintendents have remained anonymous and were identified by pseudonyms. However, the bold and courageous African-American women who participated in this study agreed to reveal their true identity to allow for authentic documentation. The second section of this chapter focused on the participants' responses to the questions. The researcher made the decision to keep the responses anonymous because some of the participants were practicing superintendents and the researcher wanted to protect their identity.

The researcher used a semi structured interview guide during the interviews. The questions were designed to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of their individual journey to becoming a superintendent. The researcher wanted to document the factors and experiences the participants perceived as being influential in their ascent to the position of superintendent of schools. The researcher also wanted to explore the role race, gender and oppression may have played during their ascent to becoming a superintendent.

Mini Biographical Sketch

Dr. Ingrid Clark Jackson

INTERIM

S U P E R I N T E N D E N T

- Associate Superintendent of HR
- Assistant Superintendent of HR
- Principal (Secondary)
- Assistant Principal (Secondary)
- Teacher (Secondary)
- Corporate America
- Teacher (Secondary)
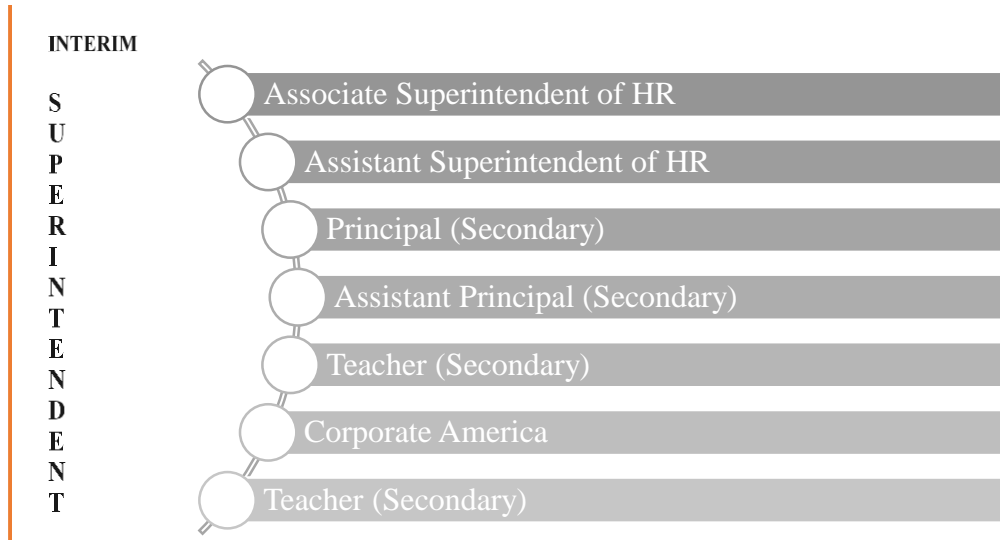
Dr. Clark-Jackson was born and grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. She was raised by a single mother and has one brother. Dr. Clark-Jackson's mother attended college and instilled the importance of education in the household. Dr. Clark-Jackson and her brother received advanced degrees, both working in the field of education. Dr. Clark-Jackson attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through her high school graduation. She attended private school because her mother believed in a Catholic education. According to Dr. Clark-Jackson, it didn't matter if her family resided in the most affluent neighborhood or not, her mother was going to have her attend a Catholic school, even if they were poor.

> ...she is a staunch Catholic and she believed no matter where. I could live in
> Ladue...I would not have gone to Ladue High School, I would have gone private
> because she believed in that education, and of all her siblings, she is one of nine,
> and out of all the grandchildren she is the only one. The one who could least
> afford it.

Growing up, Dr. Clark-Jackson dreamed of being a lawyer. Her idea of becoming a

lawyer was shattered when she felt her family finances could not support that degree, "I

wanted to be a lawyer, but I was too poor to be a lawyer. I choose English as a minor, so

I got a degree in education." Dr. Clark Jackson attended college at North East Missouri

State, which is now called Truman University. She received a master's degree in

business administration from Maryville University, Ed. Specialist degree from St Louis

University and a doctorate degree from Maryville University.

Dr. Clark-Jackson began her career as a teacher at a junior high school. She left

education for a few years to work in corporate America. Dr. Clark-Jackson was called

back to education and taught at the high school level. She served as an assistant

principal, associate principal, and principal at the secondary level. Dr. Clark-Jackson

would later accept a position at central office. While at central office, she would serve as

an assistant superintendent, associate superintendent and is currently an interim

superintendent for the Hazelwood School District. She became an interim superintendent

in 2015, and this is her first superintendency. Dr. Clark-Jackson is married and has two

children who are both college graduates.

Dr. Phyllis Chase

SUPERINTENDENT

- Acting Superintendent
- Chief Administrator
- Assistant Superintendent
- Director of Student Services/ Director of Curriculum
- Director of Guidance
- Guidance
- Classroom Teacher (secondary)
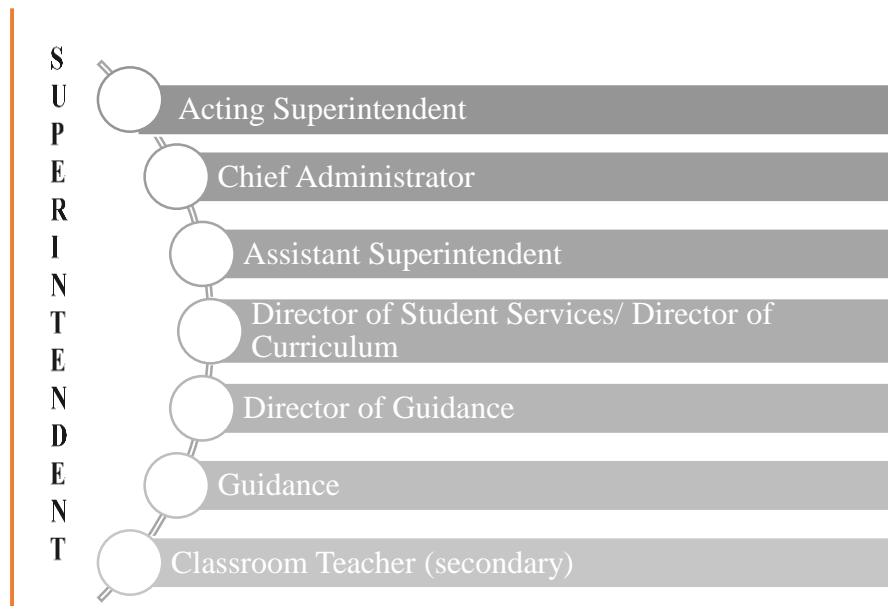
Dr. Phyllis Chase was born in Springfield, Missouri. She was raised by her mother and father. Her parents did not attend college but provided for the family. Dr. Chase's father owned a successful business. Dr. Chase attended schools in Missouri and graduated from the University of Kansas with a bachelor's degree in English and speech communication. She received her master's degree in guidance and counseling at Creighton University. Dr. Chase completed her doctoral degree in education with an emphasis in curriculum and instruction at the University of Kansas with her husband's insistence and support.

> My husband served as my greatest advocate and encouraged me to complete my
>
> doctorate. I remember considering the degree when I was 33, but telling my
>
> husband such a degree would take at least 5 years and by then I'd be 38 and it
>
> would be too late in my career. He responded with, 'Well in five years you'll be
>
> 38 with a degree or without one.' I enrolled the next day.

Dr. Chase began her career as a middle school classroom teacher. She would move up the educational ladder and serve in positions of guidance counselor, director of guidance, director of curriculum, assistant superintendent and acting superintendent before accepting the superintendent position in Columbia School District in 2003. Dr. Chase served as superintendent for two districts, either as an acting superintendent or superintendent. She served as acting superintendent for the Kansas City School District and superintendent of the Columbia School District. Dr. Chase and her husband David (deceased) have three adult children.

Dr. Pamela Randall-Garner
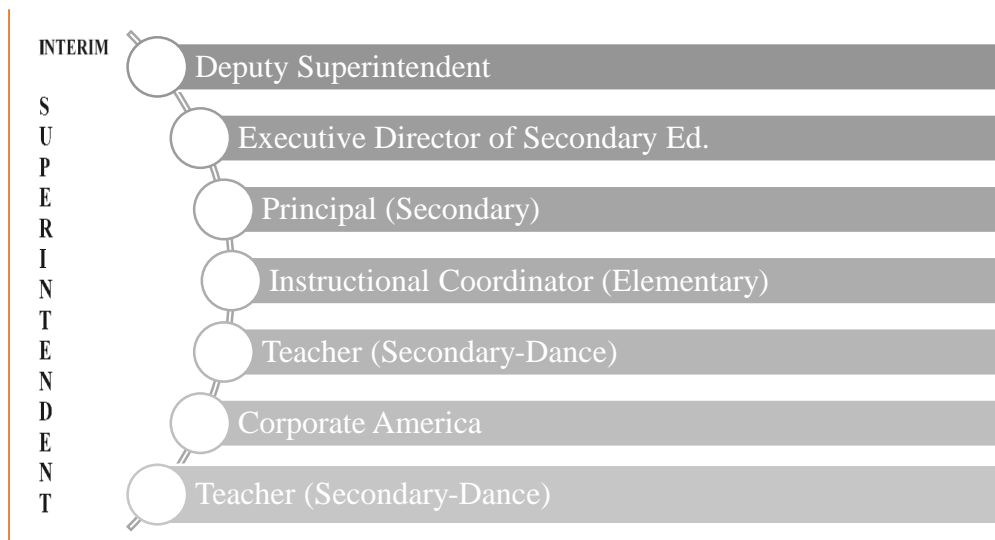
Dr. Pamela Randall-Garner was born and grew up in University City, Missouri. Her mother was from Mississippi and both parents came from poor backgrounds. Dr. Randall-Garner's parents received a high school education. Dr. Randall-Garner is the youngest of four girls. Dr. Randall-Garner received her education through the School District of University City. She graduated from the School District of University City one year early in 1977. After graduation, Dr. Randall-Garner attended Washington

University on a part-time basis as a dance major while trying to get accepted into the full

program. She attended night school with the expectation of boosting her grades so that

she would be accepted into the undergraduate program.

> I was in the night school because I didn't have the grades to actually get into the
>
> undergrad program at Wash U. But the dance department head was really
>
> impressed with my talent and she was trying to push me to taking classes at night.
>
> I did really well academically ironically in the night school and I really wanted to
>
> get into a true program. So I auditioned for the University of Illinois Urbana-
>
> Champaign, got into that program and actually got a talented student tuition
>
> waver for two years.

Dr. Randall-Garner graduated with honors from the University of Urbana-Champaign

with a Bachelors of Arts in dance education.

Dr. Randall-Garner began her career in education as a dance teacher at her high

school alma mater. "This is the truth, as I was leaving out, like on the last days before

graduation I looked upon the dance board and it said, needed dance teacher at University

City High School [laughter]." After five and a half years, Randall-Garner decided to

leave the field of education and venture out into corporate America. This opportunity

gave her the experience of traveling around the world and meeting executives from

fortune 500 companies. After two years in corporate American, Randall-Garner went

back to education as a dance teacher at a performing arts high school. She joined an Ed.

Leadership Program and earned her Ed.D. Randall-Garner would transition to becoming

an instructional coordinator at an elementary school. She held that position for a short

period of time and decided to interview for a principal position at one of the premier high

schools in the district and the state. Randall-Garner was hired as the administrator in charge of the school, because she had not yet taken the administrators license exam. After successfully completing the assessment, she was officially named principal. Randall-Garner would serve in the position of executive director of secondary education, deputy superintendent and interim superintendent. She became interim superintendent of St. Louis Public Schools in December 2004 and this was her first superintendency. Dr. Pamela Randall-Garner was Dr. Pamela Randall-Hughes during her superintendency. She does not have any children and was remarried.

Dr. Rhonda Key

CO-SUPERINTENDENT

- Director of Secondary Education
- Principal (Secondary)
- Assistant Principal (Secondary)
- Teacher-In School Suspension Supervisor
- Classroom Teacher (Secondary)
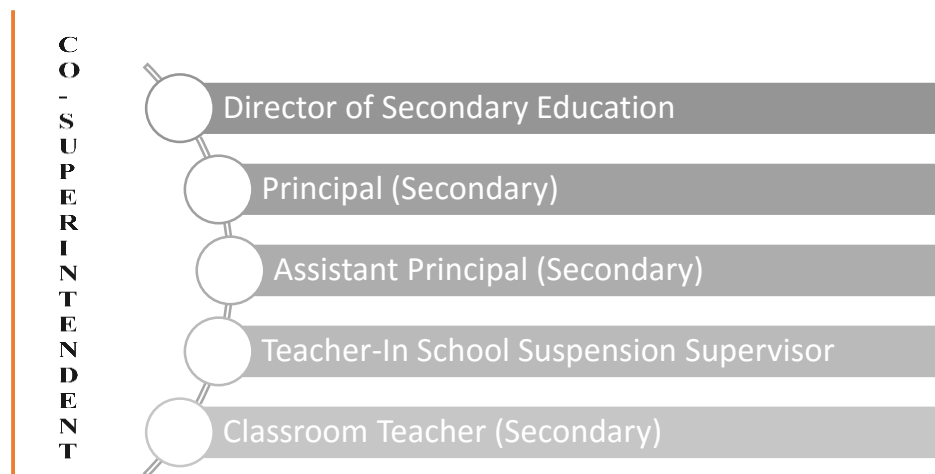
Dr. Rhonda Key was born and raised in East Saint Louis, Illinois. She received all of her education in East Saint Louis and graduated from Assumption Catholic High School. Education served as the foundation in Dr. Key's family. Both her parents attended Lincoln University and became educators. Her father retired as a counselor after approximately 30 years in education and her mother was in education for 39 years. Dr. Key and her brother followed in their parent's footsteps and graduated from Lincoln University. Dr. Key received her Bachelors of Science degree in Biology in 1988 and

Master's degree in 1992 from Lincoln University. She received her Ed. Specialist

Degree and Doctorate degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1995 and

2005 respectfully.

Dr. Key began her career in education as a substitute teacher while she was

waiting to get admitted into medical school. "I was waiting to get into medical school

because I had a degree in biology. I started subbing and I said, hey, I like this, I like

teaching. So I never went to medical school and I stayed in education." Dr. Key accepted

a position as a classroom science teacher at Blewett Middle School. She served in that

capacity for a year and went back to Lincoln University to complete her master's degree.

While in Jefferson City, Dr. Key took a position as a biology teacher and in school

suspension supervisor. On Dr. Key's path to becoming a superintendent, she served in

the capacity of an assistant principal, a principal, central office administrator, and co-

superintendent. Dr. Key became a co-superintendent of the Riverview Gardens School

District in 2007 and this was her first superintendency. Ms. Key does not have any

children and has not been married.

Ms. Karen Hall
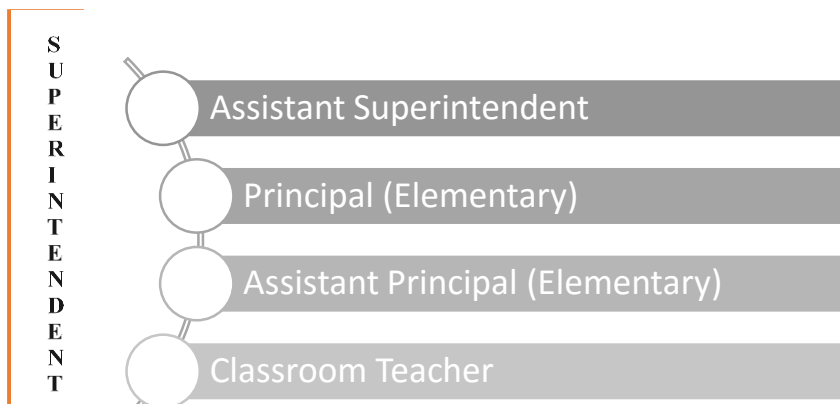
Ms. Karen Hall is originally from St. Louis, Missouri and grew up in the North Webster Groves community. Ms. Hall attended schools in the Webster Groves School District and graduated from Webster Groves High School. She received all of her education in the state of Missouri. Ms. Hall graduated and received her Bachelor's Degree from Fontbonne University, Master's Degree from St. Louis University, and Educational Specialist Degree from Lindenwood University. She is currently completing her doctorate degree at Lindenwood University. Ms. Hall comes from a family of educators on both her mother and father's side of the family. She had aunts and uncles who were teachers, librarians and administrators. Her mother attended college and was pursuing a degree in early childhood; however, she was not able to finish because Karen was born. Ms. Hall's mother used her background in early childhood and operated a home daycare.

Ms. Hall began her career as an elementary school teacher. She quickly moved up the ranks in education and became an assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent.

> I was always passionate about educating young people. I knew early on that's what I wanted to do and I love teaching. I love it, love it, love it. I decided I wanted to go into administration. I was a young teacher. I only taught for five years, but I wanted to make a bigger difference. I saw that being a principal was truly the best of both worlds because you were teaching adults with professional development and creating curriculum and having a mission and vision for the building. You still had the opportunity to interact with students on a daily basis. Perfect balance.

Ms. Hall was forty years old when she became superintendent at Maplewood-Richmond Heights School District. Ms. Hall was recently divorced and has one son.

Dr. Joylynn Pruitt
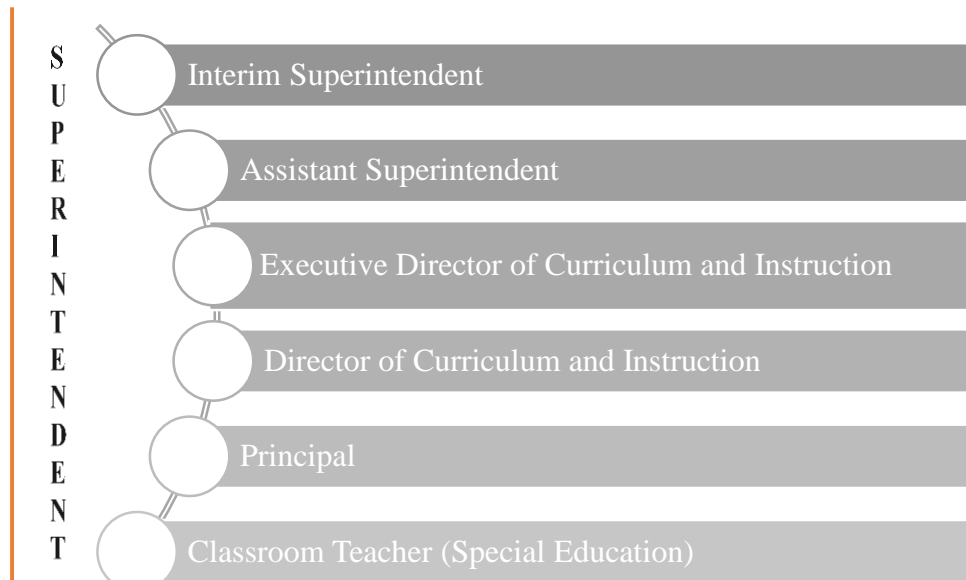
Dr. Joylynn Pruitt is the youngest of four children and is her mother's only daughter. Her two older brothers were from her mother's first marriage. The oldest brother, now deceased, received a Master's degree in Theology and was a minister and her second oldest brother went to the military. Dr. Pruitt's mother and father had two children. Her brother, attended college but did not finish. Dr. Pruitt also has two half-sisters and a half-brother from her father's side. Her father did not finish high school and her mother completed high school and attended nursing school and became a nurse. Dr. Pruitt was born in St. Louis, Missouri and received all of her education in Missouri.

Dr. Pruitt received her Bachelor's degree from Harris Stowe Teachers College, now University, and is a distinguished alum. Her Master's and Doctorate degree are both from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Dr. Pruitt has certification in multiple areas of special education including learning disabilities, orthopedically handicapped, behavior

disordered, mentally handicapped, and severe development disabled. Prior to becoming an administrator at different districts, Dr. Pruitt was a special education teacher. She has served in the capacity of Director, executive director, and assistant superintendent of instruction, interim superintendent and superintendent. Dr. Joylynn Pruitt became superintendent of the school district of University City in 2008 and this was her first superintendency.

> In six years I was the director, executive director, and assistant superintendent. It was encompassed in six years. Then from there I became the interim superintendent for nine months. In December they took the interim off, so I have been serving in the role of superintendent for nine years.

Dr. Pruitt has two children. Her daughter attended college and her son attended trade school. Her son currently works in the maintenance and custodial department at the school District of University City, and has been employed at the district as long as she has been at the district. Dr. Pruitt is in a very committed relationship. After serving nine years as the superintendent of the School District of University City, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt announced she was retiring at the end of the 2016 school year.

Mrs. Tondelayo "Toni" Westbrooks-Taylor
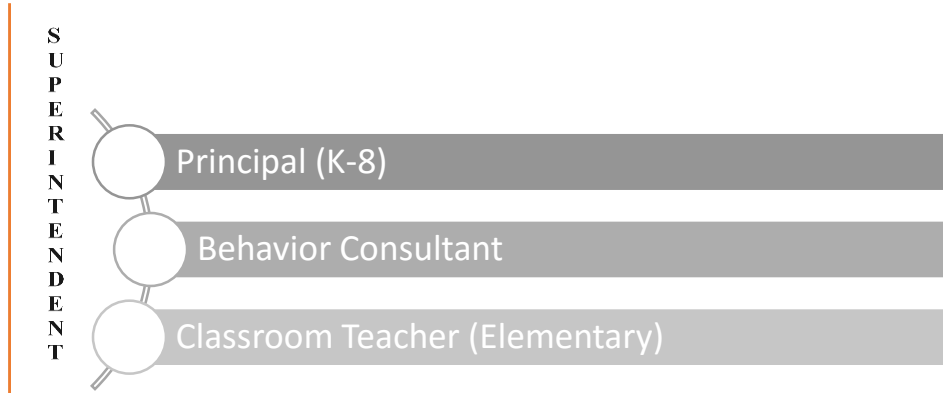
Mrs. Toni Westbrooks-Taylor was born in East Saint Louis, Illinois and is the youngest of seven children. She has two brothers and four sisters. Her mother was primarily a single parent, although she was married at times. Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor's mother instilled in her children the importance of receiving an education. All of her siblings have degrees with the exception of one brother who is currently completing his bachelor's degree.

> Let's see, all of my sisters and brothers with the exception of one have degrees starting from a bachelor's all the way up to a doctorate. My brother who does not have a degree is currently in college to finish his degree. So that says something about my mother. She is a non-graduate from high school. She had to drop out and take care of her sisters and brothers. So she made it her business to make sure that all of her children went to college.

Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor's primary years were spent moving from school to school. Her family lived in East St. Louis until she was about six years old and then became very transient. Her family would move away due to an abusive, on again off again, relationship. By third grade, Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor's family settled in

Mississippi where she attended approximately seven schools. She could not read, write, or speak proper English. "This is true. It was an East St. Louis, Ebonics and Mississippi accent." Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor was retained in third grade and this was when her life changed. Her third grade teacher told her mother to stop moving or she would not be able to learn. Her mother listened. "Once in Mississippi, and that teacher if I could find her, I would hug her because she saved my life. She made me cry because she told me that I was going to repeat third grade, and she saved my life because she told my mom to stop moving." Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor's family would still move a couple more times, but it was not as frequent.

From Mississippi, Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor's family moved to Jefferson City, Missouri. Once she was enrolled in school, her mother requested that she receive help after she came home crying. Although Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor's siblings experienced some frequent moves, because it was during her formative years, they affected her ability to learn the foundations necessary for continued educational growth. Once in a stable environment, she received three years of special education and then qualified for the gifted program from sixth grade through graduation.

> I remember this very vividly. Two teachers were sitting beside me and they asked me to do something and I said, "I fint to" and they said you are what? And I said, "I'm fint to" and they looked at each other and said "do you know what she is saying?" And the other one said, "I don't know what she is saying half the time she is speaking!" It hurt my soul to hear that.

Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor was tested and received special services support. She was taught how to read and speak English. One day she told her special support teachers she

wanted to be an astronaut because she wanted to be just like, Uhura, on her favorite television show, Star Trek. Her teachers started preparing her to become an astronaut. She would later apply for the National Space program, by the fourth time, she was accepted, only to find out it was too expensive for her to attend.

On the final move, Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor lived and graduated from a high school in Illinois, but her time in Minnesota taught her to be an over achiever. I had Asian friends, African-American friends, and friends from Africa. Minnesota is truly the melting pot of the United States and back then I knew there were some issues, but they didn't care how black you were. So I'm sitting in the   high school and I'm an average student with the drive to be above average. I'm sitting at the table with my Asian friends and my friends from Africa. They are all doing their homework. I'm a sophomore, my Asian   friends are like in trigonometry and a couple of them are in calculus. One of my African friends was in a higher level math than me, I'm like in Algebra 1A (laughter). They were so far ahead of me and it was just because of where they started. But we would sit there and do our homework at lunch. So I became this student of average intelligence to becoming someone who overachieved in everything. I worked my tail end off, and continued that way.

Mrs. Westbrook's-Taylor obtained a bachelor's, masters and specialist degree from Lincoln University. She started a doctoral program and will complete it when her daughters are in better health. "My children have died on me at least twice. Where they have sent for us to say goodbye, you know that kind of thing. My perspective is so different from other people. I just don't stay mad very long." Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor

began her career as a special education teacher. She would later become a behavior

consultant, principal and is currently the superintendent at St. Elizabeth School District.

Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor not only became the first African-American female

superintendent, but an instructor to her knowledge, at St. Elizabeth School District in

2013.

Mrs. Westbrooks-Taylor was 41 years old when she became superintendent. She

was married 16 years to her former husband and they have two children.   Mrs.

Westbrooks-Taylor is remarried and has four step children.

Table 2.   Personal Profiles of African American Female Superintendents

Name	Ethnicity	Age of 1st Superintendency	Years as Superintendent	Highest Level of Education	Children	Marital Status
Phyllis	African American	49	2 & 5	Ed.D	3	Widowed
Pamela	African American	44	5 months	Ed.D	0	Divorced/ Remarried
Rhonda	African American		3	Ed.D	0	Single
Joylynn	African American	53	9	Ed.D	2	Committed Relationship
Karen	African American	40	4	Educational Specialist	1	Divorced
Toni	African American	41	3	Educational Specialist	2	Divorced Remarried
Ingrid	African American	57	9 months	Ed.D	2	Married

Table 3.   Pathway to Superintendency

Name	1st Educational Assignment	Assignment Level	Assistant Principal	Principal	Central Office
Phyllis	English/Speech	Secondary			X
Pamela	Dance Teacher	Secondary	X	X	X
Rhonda	Long Term Sub/ In School Suspension	Secondary	X	X	X
Joylynn	Special Education	Secondary		X	X
Karen	Teacher	Elementary	X	X	
Toni	Special Education	Elementary		X	X
Ingrid	Teacher	Secondary	X	X	X

Responses to Questions

You have been identified as a former or current African-American female superintendent in the state of Missouri. Would you tell me about the experiences you feel contributed to your ascent to the position?

> I think the experience of having all the roles of being a teacher, going on in management in corporate America, then coming back and being an assistant principal, associate principal…I think those helped me. And the HR job, I think was the most compelling to me. You get to see everything. How a district runs, I think was the most beneficial of everything.

> The experience at ---with the principal pushing me out there. I will tell you, that's the one where I said the principal pushed me to go into administration and had me do the presentation before the staff when they ripped me up. Out of that building

there were at least eight of us who became principals under his guidance, and two of us went to central office.

The teachers. They would come into my room and ask me for advice about my students. Within a matter of a few years, I had teachers coming to me and principals coming to me asking what do we do with this kid? How do we fix this kid? I was very successful at that. Then a number of teachers just said, 'why don't you be a principal? Like we come to you anyway. You might as well get paid for it.' So I thought, well I'll see. So I went back and pursued my master's degree. Then low and behold, I interviewed for positions, and was offered two positions at once.

Having served under a number of superintendents in my career, I became very aware of the tone and climate a leader can set for his/her district. This climate can be on of inspiration and willingness to take the risk, or one of retribution and fear. These experiences with a number of superintendents showed me the power of the positions to influence a district right down to the core of operations: the classroom. I decided I wanted to have the opportunity to inspire others and set a positive tone in a district that supported innovation and excellence.

Well, it was haphazard. I mean I had gotten hired at --- because I worked in ----as a principal in education. There were some issues and challenges there with the

previous superintendent that caused the previous superintendent to be removed.

The board asked me to take the position of superintendent.

Well the thing is Broad. Once I passed the principal assessment and got my

principalship. Once I accepted, even though I was recommended, I still had to

apply and go through all the interviews and beat out all the other folks to get in. I

think in my class of Broad, I want to say maybe they had literally hundreds of

people apply for Broad, but only 14 of 15 of us that got through. The expectation

is that you will become a superintendent. We are going to provide you with this

excellent training where we are going to fly you to every city where the top notch

superintendents are currently sitting in those positions and you are going to learn

from them.

The quality of education. Brown vs. the Board of education was prevalent and

there was a sense of rising out of poverty. There were feelings of hope. My

husband encouraged me to pursue my degree and superintendency.

I decided I wanted to go into administration. I was a young teacher. I only taught

for five years, but I wanted to make a bigger difference. I saw that being a

principal was truly the best of both worlds because you were teaching adults with

professional development and creating curriculum and having a mission and

vision for the building and still you had the opportunity to interact with students

on a regular basis. Perfect balance. I finished all the degrees and had some

aspirations of possibly moving to central office. I was always intrigued with

> human resources because that was the one department that I know resonated with
> me. Working with staff and helping staff, and the gentlemen I worked with in ---
> really was a good man. I just thought, I could possibly do this if I make a change.
> An opportunity came…

The seven participants communicated various factors that contributed to their ascent to the position of superintendent of schools. The experiences ranged from classroom experience, managerial experiences outside of education, to colleagues and mentors encouraging them to pursue administration. While the experiences ranged in description, one commonality among these African-American female superintendents was apparent. Several of the participants made it clear that initially, they never aspired to become a superintendent.

> To the principal who told me to go into administration, I just said give me my
> classroom, that's all I want is to be with my kids. Then I got that administrative
> bug. Dr. ---told me I was the only outside district candidate he interviewed because
> my superintendent spoke so highly of me. He said, 'why didn't you apply for
> central office?' I don't want to be central office. I will never be central office. Let
> me do what I need to do, and he said to me, 'when you become superintendent of
> schools we will revisit this conversation.' I said, I will never become
> superintendent. I don't want it. There is nothing about it that appears attractive to
> me. And he said, surround yourself with people who know their job, and you'll
> know just enough about their job to know if they are doing it correctly. So he said
> when you become superintendent…

For me it was just one of those things where people said, why don't you do this, and I said okay. You know, and I'm like yea, alright. And there was the why don't you go ahead and get your superintendency, you are doing it anyway, and I'm like, alright then, and I went back to school and did that.

When I went from the principalship,---asked me to come up to central office, or in some cases people will say down (laughter), but he specifically requested that I leave. Oh, wow, it was kind of like the beginning of the end…but anyway (laughter)…

No, I never desired to be a superintendent. I still don't desire to be a superintendent. I have other things I want to do. I teach classes, and I own my own company. They are still related to education, but it is time for someone else who is going to make a commitment to being a superintendent. Superintendency was not ever my desire, because I wanted to work with people who worked closest to kids.

I had literally just got off a plane, where I had been sitting with another group of administrators to attend a conference, when I got a phone call from---stating that I need to get back to St. Louis. I was going to be named tomorrow…So I got on another plane back, and that's how it all happened.

No, it was not an aspiration to become a superintendent, but the opportunity

presented itself, and I embraced it and I have enjoyed it. It is really different, but

I have enjoyed it.

I never really aspired and like oh, it is without a doubt working non-stop. It is a

24 hour job, on the weekends and on holidays. I just commend those young

ladies for doing it, because you are in a sense stating that I am going to hand over

my life to this district. I understand the need to want to effect positive change for

children, and ultimately that's why we do it. But it is a hard haul without a doubt.

The African-American female superintendents in this research resoundingly

agreed that their first passion was working closely with students and teachers in the

position of either classroom teacher or principal. Initially, there was never the desire to

pursue the position of superintendent of schools. The participants were content in their

former roles and felt successful. If these women felt successful in their current roles,

what made them decide to become superintendents? The majority of the superintendents

communicated that either a mentor encouraged them or an opportunity became available.

Were there any mentors who inspired you to follow this path? How did they

provide leadership and guidance?

I started working with this guy named ---. He was my mentor and principal at the

time and he said, 'you ought to be an administrator.' So he helped me get my

first administrative job. I worked there for three years. There were not any

African-American administrators, especially Black females." He was the person

that believed in letting teachers lead. He laid the foundation for things I still do today, and I realize that. When I walked with him through his building and saw him picking things up, he said, 'people walk through your building and see it's filthy, what are they going to think is happening in the classroom?'

Dr. --- ,to this day, is the calming force. In all of the craziness, that was going on, but not only the craziness, but in the celebrations of wow you got the position, what are you   going to do? Now you are in the principal role. Those two people, whether its good news or bad news what are you going to do about it? Should we apply for the international baccalaureate? How do I get the board members on board to fund this super expensive program? I've seen this in the news about me what should I do? So he was always the calming voice, the voice of wisdom and I don't want to say most importantly, but definitely high up there, the voice of just being political. Mrs. --- would also be someone I would call, and sometimes she would call me and say, Hey, I'm just checking up on   you. Even once I went to ---. She was like, I haven't heard from you, keep me up to speed. What's going on?"

Oh, yea. I've had two mentors who inspired me. Dr. --- was one of them. Then I had a mentor ---. She was the mentor that taught me tolerance, to think and do what's right for kids. Dr.--- on the other hand had me thinking of the big picture of why or why not I should do this and --- would say, try it and see what happens. Dr.--- would say, no you don't want to do it. She would be the one I would say...

She wasn't the optimist. Because I had applied for a job at a previous district and the superintendent was not ready for anybody who looked like me to run his district. So in talking to…I called both mentors when it happened to me because he said I am the superintendent and I can do what I want. And I said, that you can. I called Dr.--- and she said, "Why in the hell did you apply for that? I could have told you blah, blah, blah, blah. And --- was like oh, I'm so sorry what can I do to help you. So there was a difference in between having two mentors who were different. Solely different, but both were both great leaders.

It helped me to understand. I would say you have to navigate through the system but it helped me to understand why it consisted of all white men. And I understood how --- had to play the game to get where she got in a world of all white men. She was one of the few when she became a superintendent. There were probably two or three, if that many. While I never aspired to be a superintendent, she taught me how to understand the systemic change that was out there.

I would say Dr. --- was a mentor because he kind of mentored me along the way. From the time I first met him in --- public school, he pushed me to complete my doctorate. He pushed me to seek out central office positions. He is the one who planted the superintendent seed. One of the things he asked me to do was to always give back because that's what he wanted to do; and he asked me to

promise him that I would always give back. So that is the promise I intend to

keep to him.

As a teacher in ---, one of the kindest men I would ever meet was also one of the

best administrators to me. I've tried to model as much of my principalship off of

what he did. I've had some bad principals, and I've modeled what not to do. I've

had some superintendent friends that were amazing, and I still have

superintendent mentors who I call for anything. Anything not mental instability.

Like I'm going to throw myself off the school bus and they are like, don't. It

won't be covered by your insurance. Put the glass down, don't become an

alcoholic or that kind of a thing. So we still have these mentors. I don't have any

African-American mentors.

No…and I'm not saying no one is worthy; but I can't say that there was someone

out there that I saw as the individual I wanted to be just like. I do believe, along

the way, I learned things from individuals and picked things up. I know when I

was in --- and the former superintendent passed away. That was hard, the last

year, that summer. You know, he always had sage advice to share, especially the

last year when he was sick. Some of the things that he shared with me have

always helped guide me through my career. Some of the central office people I

worked with in ---really have had a huge impact. You know, sometimes I refer to

those years in ---as when I grew up. I learned so much. It was a great time to

be a principal in the 90's, when I was there. It was really good. I really

enjoyed being an administrator.

While I never had a designated mentor in my career, I did enjoy the sponsorship

of several superintendents. One, in particular, encouraged me to apply for the

positions that I felt I had the credentials for, and, he provided me strategies by

which to have a successful interview. These sponsorships were provided by my

male supervisors as, at the time, there were no female supervisors.

True mentors were the ones I would pick up the phone and call. That mentor has

been the same one for thirteen years. He is a former superintendent.   He is now

retired, and I will call him. Most of the time he is like, I'm so glad I'm not doing

this. What do you think should happen? And then I will tell him, and he would

say okay, let's talk through this.

I do have one female mentor. Yes, I do have one, and she came into my life. She

was hired in the district…and she is in my cohort of superintendents. I do call her

or I will shoot an email with everyone's name on it and say, what do you think?

Or they will shoot me an email and say, hey what do you think about this? That's

the nature of the beast, it's just what you do.

Yea, they were male you know and that's…Yea, they were males and they were

White males. Yea, now that I think about it, yea. I've never thought about it like

that and it is so interesting. I've never really even…and one thing that I've said to folks who want mentors. It's great to have a mentor, but you need a sponsor. To understand the difference, it's wonderful to have a mentor who you can relate to and can understand what you are going through. But you need a sponsor who can open up doors. This is like therapy. I never thought about that…And here I talk about it, but I've had sponsors that could open doors. Or, and I may not even say that I was cognizant of it but, they may have opened doors for me that I wasn't aware of. They gave me insight on things about myself and also the field that I would never even thought of.

...Someone charted my path, and it was like I was a pawn or checker. And when I finish this, it was like okay, move it here. Move her here, move her there. And so when I had that person in my life doing the movement for me and even when the superintendent position came open six years ago they took me out to dinner and said you should take this job and I said no I should not. I told this person that you have charted my path all the way... and so if you have a strong mentor you will see more people of color…women   specifically moving   into this role because we have an opportunity. We have to have good support and we have to have a good opportunity, because if we don't an opportunity and people are not open to it, you will never see a lot of us out there.

I had an African-American female to save me, to restore faith in me. When I was in ---she hired me. She was a savior at that time… Having someone to believe in

you and bounce ideas off of, makes a big difference. I do understand and I also felt a loss because when you are superintendent, you have to realize, you have no friends. There is no such thing. People live within their situation. You may make a decision today that I am going to support you 100%, but to a decision you make tomorrow, I might say no. Uh, un. I might turn 360 degrees on you. So if you don't have the peace and someone to bounce ideas off and cry on their shoulders with, you will feel lost. The mentors keep you afloat. They keep you sane.

The participants in this study voiced the significant roles of mentors. Along their journey of becoming superintendents, mentors offered advice and a shoulder to cry and lean on, provided a voice of reason, and prepared these women to become politically savvy. Mentors additionally encouraged these superintendents to think beyond the realm of a principalship, and inspired them to seek the superintendency. During conversations with these superintendents, it was revealed that only two of the superintendents could identify with one of their mentors being an African-American female. Overwhelmingly the mentors were male, with the majority being Caucasian. One superintendent stated she had two Caucasian females who provided mentorship. The mentors, whether they knew it or not, helped to shape the superintendency of these women.

While the superintendents climbed the educational ladder, they received support from their mentors and persevered. The participants' paths to the superintendency took various twist and turns along the way. Each participant's journey involved experiences that were both similar and different. These similarities and differences made each

participant's journey special and unique. The participant's communicated their

perceptions of what made their journey uniquely theirs.

Compared to others, how is your path to the position of superintendent unique?

You can't get any more unique (laughter). I was first in a k-8 starting back in

2001. In a K-8 you are the principal and the superintendent. Yes, but I did not

have my superintendency certification completed until 2006 and I didn't see to

have it approved by DESE because it didn't really matter at the time. So in theory

or in practice rather, I have been a superintendent since 2001.

It's unique because I started medical school and was waiting to get into medical

school because I had a degree in biology and I started subbing and said, Hey I

like this. I like teaching...so I never went to medical school and I stayed in

education.

I think my path to the position of superintendent is unique as I am the only

African-American superintendent in Missouri that I know of who served in a

predominately Caucasian, middle/upper class community.

I have worked with klansmen, I have worked with witches. I have worked with

Republicans, I have worked with Democrats. I have worked with Baptist,

Catholics, and Pentecostals. Truth be told, I'm not really working with them. I

am working with their students. It's for the betterment of their students.

So as long as I can show them that it is for the betterments of their students, we are going to get along together just fine.

I can't say that I'm unique, honestly. When you say others? Just anybody. I don't feel that unique in any way in my path. I don't. I know one of the trends in St. Louis County has been more internal moves. So I don't think the fact that I was the assistant superintendent and became superintendent is unique in any way. Yea, I don't think so.

Well, I would say that they probably don't have the corporate America experience I had and the managerial experience I received from corporate America. So I would say that's why it is pretty unique because you see sometimes my mindset is watching, you know   even though this is educational. I can see the business aspect of it and stand back and take a look at it. I think this is why it is unique for me. I don't know many superintendents who have been in corporate America as a manager doing what they are   doing and then come back into education. It is very rare. I don't know anybody who has done that around here.

Yea, it's pretty unique because I remember distinctly saying that I'm not really interested in becoming a superintendent and I ironically said that about the principalship. Quite honestly, I loved being a principal. It's been very eye opening, and it's very political.

> Well I am a Black female, that is one. I was taught I had to work harder, work
>
> longer, and constantly prove myself.

The participants' perceptions of their unique journeys ranged from working in

corporate America, interacting with klansmen and witches, to not feeling that their

journeys were any more unique than other colleagues. There had been a recent trend to

hire from within the district and several superintendents followed that trajectory of being

an internal hire. One superintendent communicated her experience outside of education

contributed to making her journey more unique. She was able to view the

superintendency position through the lens of corporate America and base some her

decisions from a business perspective. One superintendent simply stated the obvious, that

she was Black.

Black feminist thought explores the relationship race and gender plays in the

oppression of Black women. These African-American female superintendents were able

to resist some forms of oppression because they were able to ascend to the position of

superintendent of schools. The participants communicated forms of oppression and

barriers they faced along their journey.

Research suggests African-American female superintendents have experienced

forms of oppression, would you share some experiences of oppression you have

faced in your career?

> I think there was a gender issue, I think there was a racial issue. I know that there
>
> were personal issues of some board members who I will not name…that impacted
>
> how I was treated. I remember a quick story…A friend of mine who was a

professor at ---University. I need to tell you that this board member just called me

and...There was no dirt to dredge up.

In my career yes. Like I told you there was the one time I worked with a

superintendent who did not look like me to lead their building. He didn't even

want anyone like me. When a board member approached me to apply to a job at

the central office level, he did not want me to even apply for the job

because of me being so vocal. Some people find that intimidating. I feel it's

not my problem, it's theirs. So yes, because of the color of my skin I was

discriminated against.

My very first board meeting. My very first board meeting was a hot and heated

one. It was about the playground and the person who built the playground was

coming. He wanted to be insured for the playground and our insurance

company was like…uhhhh, no. So I am trying to explain to him how we could

get this and he said to the board, and I'm sitting there, he said to the board, 'that

girl doesn't know what she is talking about.' And he kept saying, that girl, that

girl, that girl… So after I got him calm, finished my job, he bought into how

we could legally make this okay. I calmed him down enough to listen to me. He

left. Well, the board erupted, I'm so sorry… Well, here's the deal. I was

concentrating not on what he was saying, but it was in the manner in which

he was saying it. My job was not to become offended by the words he was using

towards me, but to come to a conclusion so that we could be stable in our decision

and move forward in a manner that would be beneficial to the district. All that

my girl stuff, I have been called worse. Okay. Fast forward within a three

month period, he was my best(est) friend. Fast forward three years, his wife had

been on the board with me and was just one of the best board members ever. So

it's one of those things where you have to as a superintendent, as a business

women, you have to remove. Like a woman told me back in the day, you have to

remove all that nonsense. You have to remember the title in which you wear.

That is your sword and shield. You don't need anything else. Go home and

reassemble.

Ah sure… you can't go out there and when you are in the room with them, [male

superintendents] you cannot be quiet. If you are quiet you should be listening,

and then when it is your turn, you ought to be very, very outspoken in order to

compete. Because as a women you sometimes feel that some people might

think women don't know anything, because they are a female. No, we do know.

We have brains. We know more. We know enough, if not more. We know as

much as you do, if not more. And so sometimes we can do it a better way, but I

think it should be open. You allow everyone to value your opinion.

Out of the University--- I did four different proposals. Initially I was told that I

could not talk about that and that the University was not ready. Yes, and then they

said pick something that is real easy. Something that you are doing in your

district. They kept telling me no. No you can't, no we aren't ready. No, no, no, no.

I had an advisor at --- when I said I wanted to enter the doctorate program, he asked me 'why?' He was a White male, and said why, aren't you satisfied where you are? You have a master's degree. Why would you want to work on your doctorate? Yes, he did. He was the one who would, in class, look at those of us who were African-American and say, does that make sense?

It took me seven years to get my dissertation. I stuck with it. Proving them wrong (laughter). You are going to let me walk. If I have to come through here for 10 years.   One of us is going to give up and it's not going to be me. Perseverance helped me to get through those times.

Past experiences. I think when I left they wanted a male. There was a female at the time and I was less threating. Maybe in their mind they thought that they could control me, especially after what they had just went through. But then when they hired me they realized that was not what you were getting [Laughter]. You know any administrative position principal, superintendent, any administrator, especially with Black women, if you are stern and hard, what are you? That five letter word. Now if you are very feminine and petite, they don't take you seriously. Then, what are you…I would say what they portray on television of Black women, yea there is intersection. When you wear your heels,

I can't take you seriously. When you are firm and you don't wear the heels and

the stockings, you are a 5 letter word or, are you married?

There were just times when I was just asked to do things. Like, I was asked by a

board   member, where was the finger bowl so he could clean his fingers. You

know. And so when I went to the board president and said that I felt it was a

racist statement --- asked me why, I said because back in the day of slavery,

the house slave would come around with a bowl and there would be a towel over

their arms so that people could clean their hands and dry their hands. I said the

same person also asked me…after snapping his fingers, how do I get a drink?

Told me that umm, he wanted to know if I had bars on my doors. I said no,

do you have bars on yours? So those are questions that would not be asked of a

Black male, nor would they ask a White male or female. I felt I was subjected to

those things because of my gender and my race.

Oppression…oh, oppression within the framework of the job or within the

framework of life? …in the job [thinking] oppression. No. No, because I wear

the hat. See, she who holds the pen controls the world. So it's hard pressed to be

oppressed when you hold the paycheck, the calendar, someone's income and a

decision that is being made. If I don't feel like you treated me with respect,

I feel like you are not going to treat my district with respect so I'm just not going

to hire you. Tradesmen come in and if I feel like I'm getting the oke doke,

it's like by Felicia [reference to a line from a movie]. I don't tolerate that. I don't

stomach that well. I never place it, maybe not never, but I try not to place it in the angle that they just don't like Black folks. No they just don't like my district. I am the face of my district. If you can't treat me with respect, you aren't going to treat my plumbing with respect. You aren't going to treat my teachers with respect, and you aren't going to get my money. I don't do business with people that don't respect my district. I don't care who your cousin is. I don't care if your dad is on the student board; it doesn't matter to me. You know the building itself is what matters to me. So you will treat all of my staff, including myself, with the same dignity that you would want to be treated. The person who holds the pen, doesn't have to be me, it's whoever sits in the position to control what comes in and out…If you are not relatable, cordial, and respectful to the person who sits at the head of the table, you are not going to get the best part of the meat.

I cannot speak of oppressive situations as I think I always expected this to be a difficult struggle and I prepared myself for it. I had once been told that while you may hear 99 no's, it only takes one yes to begin your journey.

When I became a superintendent. I made less than my three male predecessors... I was asked to do things that they were not asked to do. I believe it was because I was a Black female. Female more so than Black, I say, because of my predecessors. I had been through different superintendents... They would close school for snow and nobody would say a word. I close school for snow and I had to put on the district's website, step by step the decision I used to decide to

close school. I thought, they didn't have to do this. I would get calls on Saturday

and Sunday, I still do. They didn't. I asked why my salary was not the same as

theirs or as the one who was leaving, and didn't get an answer.

I was even told by the board member that she had a concern that with me being

female…her main concern with me was that as a female, I would have a difficult

time making the hard decision. That I would have a difficult time non renewing

staff. I would have a difficult time doing several things. I have non-renewed

more certified administrative and support staff than my three predecessors

combined. But, that was a concern they had that I would not be able to do that,

and she said it was because I was female.

Oppression is the systematic control and unfair treatment a person in a position of

power has over an individual or group of people who have less authority. The position of

superintendent of schools is typically perceived as a position of power in education.

Ironically, for African-American females who hold this position, they possess the title but

are not necessarily given permission to perform their assigned duties and responsibilities.

The participants experienced forms of oppression ranging from gender and race to

unequal pay. These forms of oppression had a direct impact on barriers.

Describe any barriers you have faced as superintendent.

Having, nothing with which to compare, it's difficult to realistically surmise that I

faced barriers as a superintendent that other superintendents did not face.

Barriers… There is never enough time to get anything done, so you are always trying to figure out, at least I am, how to fix that and work smarter. Money is a concern and we need to go out for a tax levy, but nothing is impossible, I believe in that. I guess money, that is on my mind right now. It really is. I am going on tour and talking to the staff about the potential budget cuts if the tax levy doesn't pass. So, yea that's the biggest challenge right now. I'm hoping that our community will come out and support it. It is hard to pay more money but we have proven to be successful in the different way we have chosen to educate our kids. We are a destination district now. People are moving here because they believe in the educational system and the things we have done.

A man could come in and say, 'Do this, do that' and nobody would think anything about it. We have a male principal at one of our schools that prior to him was a female. The teacher said to me when he came, if this had been blank, who had been the previous principal, we would have filed a grievance against her. I said well why don't you file one   against him? Because he's a man. And I thought, really? They work hard for him. He said, well you don't have to come. It's not mandatory that you come to PTO, but I expect to see you there. So what is that? That means you need to come to the PTO meeting. Plain and simple.

Some barriers are you still have some good ole boys who are still hanging around who used to be in the superintendency who still feel that their way is the only way. So you have to be willing to change. So these are some of the barriers I

face, but I just have to move on. It's about what I do for my kids here in …and I don't have time to play. Like I said, the politics that are out there for some of the retired superintendents who still don't want to give up. I guess they don't want to give up their ways to new people who are coming aboard who have new ideas. And so, I'm not saying that their ideas are wrong, but what I am saying is that there are people who have more innovative ways and you have to listen to all people, not just a fraction of people. You listen and you try it because there is always someone out there who is smarter than you, and that doesn't frighten me at all. But I think some of the male superintendents who did not look like me struggled with people who were brighter, smarter, and more outspoken; and that doesn't bother me at all. I welcome that. When I built this team, I built this team on everybody's expertise. They don't have to come in and ask me what I think, that's what they are paid to do.

…In the old regime, I felt that in observing some of the superintendents and some of their assistants, they performed as managers. Some of them, I'm not saying all, had the mentality that I know it, and this is the right way. Well, it's not. There are all sorts of people who have…I tell the team all the time, you were chosen because you have a mouth and you have a brain, and you have an answer. I can't do this job by myself. But sometimes when you are dealing with the males, their egos get in the way. Whereas a woman, I can care less. Let's just get the job done. That's what makes me…those have been obstacles, but I feel that this is what has helped to make me and my team so successful.

As a community, I did at first. As a Black female, I had to build that sense of trust and openness. Sometimes, you know, you have to pull off those Band-Aids to get that done. But now, I would say that I have a really good relationship with people in the   community.

I probably have barriers that I'm not even aware of. You know, sometimes you don't. In this position for the first time ever I feel that my gender is an issue. And it was a little shocking. For most of my career it has been predominately female and you just don't notice it. But in this role you are not in that world and you represent an entire organization. So the way people interface with you is different than any other position. I guess this is what women deal with in corporate America and it's just like… I first noticed it when I went to a meeting early on when I got the position and I was the only female. I was the only Black female there and everyone else was there in khakis and a polo shirt. I was like, I have my dress on, coordinate jewelry and it's like ...it was just jarring. I normally don't pay attention and in a lot of situations I have been the only African-American in the room. But, that particular moment, the vibe in the room was different with all these other male superintendents. It was just surprising and shocking. When people meet me for the first time there is this just physical shock on their face.

Being a woman in administration is very difficult because the decision that you
make people are wanting them made with a smile. Let me give you an example.
A male superintendent can come in and say, I don't want anyone [expletive], I
don't want anybody [expletive] about anything this year, you are here to teach. If
you do not like where you are, then here is the door. You know what they will
say; man, he is a good administrator. He is tough. He doesn't take crap from
anybody. He is the boss. Now, let me walk in and say the same thing….she is a
[expletive] (laughter). So we run into this. I have a female principal who runs
into this. She was a principal like a man, and yet it was not well received at
all. She had to learn the game of being a principal figure, but in a mothering
way.   It's called other mothering. That is what it is called. Basically, you become
the matriarch of the place. People respond well to matriarchs, they are used to
matriarchs. So if you rule, you try to rule someplace like a man, they are not
going to like you. It is not fair, but that is how it is.   If you rule like a mother,
they will respect you and like you and treat you like a good figurehead. Maybe in
time that will change, but we do not live in those times.

I have worked with principals as females who came in and what I call them, I call
them principals that stick their high heel shoes in the back of your neck. They
want to make sure you know that they are in charge, and they don't last very
long. If you come in with a more nurturing model first and give them a chance,
then you can… Now, you are making me be this person because I have talked
with you, I've tried writing it up, I've tried giving you examples of what needs to

happen. You know I've tried giving you a mentor, and it didn't work. So now,

you are fired. It is what it is. It's just the way you approach everything. Being

a female in any district or any position of authority is tricky. It is very, very

tricky.

Oh, yea. They [former male superintendents] could walk out of the office at 4:30

and be done. We had one superintendent that went home for lunch every single

day. Every single day at the same time. There are times when I don't get lunch.

If there is an emergency and I am out of town, I come home. I've been

in Orlando and came home. We were at a conference in the fall and we had a kid

who was playing with a gun…I tried my best to get back to St. Louis. Train, I

didn't care how I got back.

The dynamics of the board. I was very heavily scrutinized. You had to defend

yourself. You were never on the offense, you are always on the defense. This is

why we are doing this. We had a lot of hands on…because why? We were

already burnt and we are not going to be burned again. So that was a challenge.

The finances were a challenge. You have to carry that cross with you when you

take peoples' livelihoods away…

I think when board members step out of the role of governing and step into

micromanaging outside what their role should be of governance of a school

district, then I think there are barriers. I experienced barriers that might have been

racially motivated, for sure.

[Pause then laughter] Being a woman, being a woman. I'm going to tell you.

Being an African-American not so much, they get over that really fast. Oh yea,

that is a hurdle. It truly is because there is still a good old boys club. Being so,

let me give you an example. If you have a roofing project that you want to work

on and you have a…board with two men sitting there, sometimes they want to

hear from a man. All it takes is to actually use it to my advantage. Once you

know the game, you know how to play it. There will be some decisions where I

have to give them a recommendation and then I will say, and I talked to Mr.

so and so and he thought it was a great idea as well and they will go, "well

okay ---, thanks, that's a good idea." It's the game. It's the nature of the game. It

doesn't make it right. It just makes it is…

I'm going to tell you the truth. Sometimes black women do it to each other. That

is very real. That's very real. I don't know why. Maybe it comes from that there

is very little pieces of pie so we have to…

I would say to you, prior to becoming superintendent any challenges that I had

were from Black women. Who did she sleep with? Nobody. What makes her so

special? You know, I work hard. Just horrible stuff and you would

think that Black women would be supportive of you, but they were the ones who

were stabbing me in the back. When I was at ---, I had one teacher who, well she

believed in voodoo, would just do all kinds of stuff. Finally, the staff not me,

called a meeting. There were three women, all Black women, who were fighting

everything that I tried to do. They told them they could either get on this train or

get off. I was like wow.

The good ole boys network continues to dominate in the field of education. The

participants in this study made several references to men still having the ultimate control,

even though they share the same title. The participants communicated how they learned

to navigate the system of male dominance by playing the game and simply moving

forward. The board of education served as another barrier. One participant stated the

dynamics of the board could either help or hinder progress. The board of educations'

perceptions of female leaders served as barriers because the participant felt she was

heavily scrutinized compared to her male predecessors. The interaction of oppression and

barriers working in unison serve as factors that can discourage African-American females

from pursing the positon of superintendent of schools. The participants stated why they

felt there was a lack of African-American females in the position of superintendent of

schools.

Why do you think there is an underrepresentation of African-American female

superintendents nationally? What impact does this underrepresentation have on

education?

You know it is all about that opportunity to know the right people that can open

the doors for you more than anything, and it will probably transcend into different

professions as well. Being able to connect with sponsors. Just as you would a

mentor. You know having someone who doesn't look like you believe in you for

the right reasons and say, this person is right for our states right now you know. I

think it is important to have leaders of color regardless of gender in spaces where

the majority of your population is you know diverse, but also we need more

diversity in spaces where you have predominantly White communities as well.

Sometimes there is a hidden quota, not sometimes; there is a hidden quota within

most districts of how many minorities they will hire, and we all know that this is

true. You know they can deny it but everybody knows that if you have nine

district buildings with no African-American principals, and you know of at least

five people who have applied for the position, you know there is a glass ceiling,

especially…You know you think, just put me in the black school…I'll do that.

There still is that glass ceiling and it's not female at that point. It really is about

color, race and perception. So that's why you don't have as many African-

American superintendents because you can't be a superintendent without being

a principal. If you can't be a principal you will never make it to the

superintendent. It is, what it is.

When you look across the country they are [African-American superintendents] in

communities where it's just about all poverty, and all children of color. We can do

more than that. It is important that we are there. Don't get me wrong, we need

those leaders and we need strong leaders in those spaces. But I would love to see

diversity in communities where people of color are working, and that's

lacking. I can speak, because it is so political. I don't know how familiar you are

with St. Louis…Yea, well the point that I was trying to make is if you look at

some of the communities, I will just say St. Louis and St. Louis County who are

incredibly segregated. The superintendents are the face of the district and school

districts like to have leaders that they are comfortable with to represent their

community. So if you look at the superintendents that are in St. Louis, you aren't

surprised by the way some of them look.

Well, I think that no one has said, yes you can to them. I think once they do, they

get the support. They need a good support system to push and help them while

they are in this role, because there are many obstacles they would have to face

people from the community who don't want to deal with a female. That don't

want to deal with a person of color. You know, so there are lots of things they

have to deal with, but they need to have that support to say yes you can. I will

be beside you and with you wherever you need me to be as you move forward

with this endeavor. That is why I think…if someone targets them and says yes

you can, move, move, move, I think you would see more of us because in my job.

I was comfortable being in the classroom.

I'm not really aware why there is an underrepresentation. I used to serve on

superintendent searches, but I haven't done that for a while, so I don't know how

many women are in the pipeline. I would need to see those figures, but not only

those that are being selected. How many are in the pipeline? How many are like you who are getting an exit degree? How has that changed over the years?

If you look at the percentage of African-American females with doctorates, it would make about one percent. That's one. The other is the same, sometimes we do it to ourselves. We have this perception that we have to stay local. We can't move. The family comes first. We sometimes put barriers for ourselves. The other reason it is hard is some of the perceptions I already told you about. Will we make the hard decisions right. There are school districts that believe that we should have all of the answers. That if we come we need to be able to say, this is going to change, this is going to change, and this is going to change. They want change tomorrow. It doesn't happen like that. We will always have to fight against women who don't look like us, men who do look like us and men who don't look like us. So we have, my mom always said to me that "I have to get a good education to take care of myself because I had two strikes. I came here with two strikes. One, I was female and other is that I was a Black female. I would always have to work longer and harder. Think about it.

I think as Black females, we know we have to be as twice as good and we can't make mistakes. True or not, but that's the perspective we have as a group and race. And because of that if we are going to be successful, we know that we have to go over and beyond. We are not in the mindset. When we get the job, we are trying to prove your thinking wrong. I'm working hard because I'm going to

prove to you that I was the best choice. As a Black female superintendent you are

not walking in the door with an A, you are walking in the door with an F and you

have to work up to an A. Were as for White male or even a Black male, he

already had that A. Knowing that whether it is true or not. You want to know

that you have to achieve. As well as, now don't get me wrong. It's not just

why we are doing it, but that is in the back of our minds (laughter).

It has a huge impact on education. It's a different perspective. You know I don't

have a problem talking about race, but I have to balance that because I don't want

to be the angry Black woman and I have to understand. But because I have that

comfort level I can bring it out and can facilitate these conversations, and I can

make sure that we are doing something about it. When you have people of color

you are missing out on that perspective. You know we are cheating our kids, we

are cheating our communities by not having more diversity on the upper level of

educational administration. You know we   are perpetuating a lot of the

dysfunction by not having that and having those individuals in those spaces.

I think that the impact is that for our parents and children to think it would still

be difficult to have faith that you have the best interest in their child's

welfare. I think that is what they see. Because when I go into the schools and see

the children as I see the girls on the ---side of the district, I tell them, I am a girl

just like you. You can be successful, look at me. I am a girl. I am a fifth grade

girl. And so I think that's what you see. You see the problem with parents with

distrust. Okay, and you have to get them on your side and you see kids just going

through the motions. You have to get into those schools. You have to let them see

you. And when they say, oh, you are the superintendent, and I say yea, and

you can be anything you want to be because when we say in liberty and justice for

all, that does mean something to children now. They can be it because I have

seen it. Because at one time I did not say that at all, because I did not feel there

was liberty and justice for all, because it was not. Now our kids can understand

and say it with good…pride and their parents can actually believe it.

I think not giving kids a valuable resource that can help them reach their full

potential because of the perception that people have about who we are, what we

are and what we are capable of doing. If they would allow us to really have the

freedom and the latitude to do what is necessary for kids, we can lead in a way

that people want to follow us.

Well, first you have to make it through the teaching college. I think that just like

in all aspects of life, our best and brightest don't necessarily go into teaching.

The reason being is there is money to be had in the medical field, there is money

to be had as a lawyer, there is money to be had as an astronaut. There is money

to be had in technology. Teaching is not a money making field. So if you are,

and this isn't necessarily saying that African-Americans…It's just like saying in

every   race of people you have to have a calling to teaching. And you have to be

able to eat (laugh). So if you have a person who is smart enough to be an

engineer and make engineering money unless they are called to teaching, they are

going to be an engineer. That's one. The second is the disproportionate amount

of people who are incarcerated that has to change. Of course, once you are

incarcerated,   it stays with you for life. They are trying to pass legislation to

make it not a life sentence, but it is what it is an in every teacher application

in the county, asks have you been arrested for anything higher than a

misdemeanor. Once they see that, your application is not even looked at. So you

have those and that aspect of it.

Absolutely, I think that…well let me see, how do I answer that? I don't want to

quote studies that I've read. How do I answer that honestly? Ask the question

again… I think it is. You know because I don't think we had the [role models]

like I had. We don't have the role models and I think that when we see those role

models we can absorb the fact that we can be that person. When you don't see

people, like people, like you…for example, my favorite tv character right now is

Cookie. Let's face it. I love Cookie. Cookie Lyon is amazing. But I would not

want my daughter's role model to be Cookie Lyon you know.

I think African-American girls aren't seeing people like them in their schools. I

think this goes and transcends beyond just superintendent. I think it also is the

case when you don't   have or have black and brown children and their teachers

are white. I think it is sending a clear message that you have a place and that

diminishes the confidence those kids have that yes, even I can be a superintendent

or even an associate superintendent or leadership role if you don't see people like you in those roles. It definitely has an impact on what you think you are going to be able to do once you become…It's just not in education.

I think because there is an underrepresentation of people to push and mentor. We go into education programs, where do your counselor, or where do your professors, or where do the university representatives, where do they push you? Probably they push you, ah, you can be an instructional leader. Do they actually say when you come in oh no, you are going to be a superintendent. Unless that female has someone in her corner or someone to say, this is who you are going to be. You have to have that, who you know. Black women work extra hard. I think that we go over. We have to be a person who is going to be passionate and dedicated to the cause of improving community relations if that what your role is to be.

…We are not mentored. I think there is some kind of racism about African-Americans being in a leadership role. I think we see that not only in African-American women, but across the board. I think there is a gender issue as well as a racial issue. There is going   to be that African-American woman. That double whammy. Not only are you a minority, but you are also a woman. So, I think you are having to combat against all of this   inaccurate thinking and you don't have the mentorship. You don't have the role models, quite frankly, to help support the pipeline for those folks to come up and through.

I think that there is a disadvantage to not seeing self. I think that there is a

disadvantage   to not having someone there who understands where you come

from and where you have been or where you are right now. I think it is a

disadvantage to not have a principal or superintendent that you know who was

from the projects and can say, hey, don't spin that with me brother because I lived

right over there, right where you live about two houses down.

The underrepresentation of African-American female superintendents is evident

nationally. The participants acknowledged that opportunity and having mentors played a

crucial role in their ascent to the position. The lack of opportunities and mentors

paradoxically served as factors that attributed to the underrepresentation of African-

American female superintendents. The participants agreed the absence of African-

American female superintendents had an impact on education. When students of color do

not have the opportunity to experience or observe African-Americans in leadership

positions, subtle messages are internalized that they are inferior. The women in this

study recognized the underrepresentation of African-American female superintendents

but they were able to defy the odds by becoming superintendents, particularly in a state

that is that is traditionally perceived as conservative.

Why do you think the state of Missouri has experienced multiple African-American

female superintendents?

The board understanding minority-majority board…they know the works of the

black female.

I have no idea. I cannot understand that and I'm from St. Louis, Missouri.

It is surprising, but as you notice that most of us are around the metropolitan area.

There is the one that's out in the rural area. It's surprising to me because

Missouri is predominately a rural state, so it is truly surprising. The African-

American female who are superintendents outside of --- who is leaving were all

internal. So we kind of worked our way up through the system. It is amazing to

me, but must of them are in the metropolitan St. Louis county area.

Probably St. Louis and Kansas City. I don't know why Missouri is special other

than Kansas City and St. Louis. You know we have two big cities with lots of

African-American in them and we are also right next door to East Saint Louis. It

would be interesting to me to see if you have a plot or diagram of what schools

and where these schools were located. Did most of these superintendents come

mostly from urban districts?

Well you know, we have two large urban areas, so maybe that is unique in some

way and also we are also goofy in how we organize our school districts. We have

50 million school districts, so you have more opportunities. I think that is unique.

People come to St. Louis and they are like "why are you a school district and ---is

a school district? We shouldn't be. I mean you know if you compare us to

different cities. So yea, so you have the East coast and the West coast, well not

coast, but side of the state that have large urban areas. Just in St. Louis alone, we

have so many school districts, so maybe that can contribute to, you know you

have more opportunities when you have more districts available.

I have not always been proud about Missouri's history in terms of where they

stand on progressive issues around race relations or gender relations and just the

whole conservative feel that Missouri and the positions that we typically take

politically. So I'm just really shocked. I have no idea and I cannot speak to that.

I'm hoping that those six women will be able to shed…We need to spread it

across the country. Whatever they are doing and whatever supports they got you

know.

There were some participants who felt it was a mystery, or the great unknown, as

to why the state of Missouri experienced multiple African-American female

superintendents.   Most superintendents were initially surprised, but acknowledged the

geographical location of where most African-American female superintendents served

provided an explanation. African-American females most frequently became

superintendents in the two most densely populated urban centers in Missouri. The

researcher identified 16 African-American female superintendents who served as

superintendents of schools in the state of Missouri. The participants suggested

explanations regarding how they felt the position and access to the position changed.

To date, I have identified 16 African-American female superintendents in the state

of Missouri from 1979-present. How do you think the position and access to the

position has changed for African-American females?

In the nation? In the state of Missouri? Okay…because I was about to say not

now… I think…I don't think anything has changed. I really don't. I think that as

a woman who is of color she has to be the 140%. She has to be over and above

everyone else. We don't have the same 100% as they do. We have to be more

and bring more to the table than Caucasian men. Because it is a given for them.

It's not a given for us. So we have to go in and show them that we can do the job

and say, this is how I can do the job. They can go in and say you know what… in

some districts you know what I think I can do the job and they do it on the fly.

We have to do it and be able to think on our feet and be and go over and above.

I think it is easier now, particularly if you are an internal candidate. I think the

role of superintendent has changed over time because as education has changed,

there are more accountability factors that have been put in place. I think that

more of us are willing now to step out there now and say, look at me. I am

capable and I can do this job. Where before I believe like me, were pushed into it

and didn't' realize the potential that I had when I was pushed into it. There are

now more who realize that they have the potential and they are seeking it out,

without someone saying to them, hey why don't you do this.

Very good. The position is more political. It relies a lot on can you reach those

Math and English scores. Can you increase academic scores? But it is all about

successes in those areas. When you apply for superintendent positions or

principal positions, the first thing they want to know is data. Can you show me

some data where you have increased achievement? It used to be when it was not

as much of a concern as raises. But now that's not what is important anymore.

Wow! Well, I think of just in what we were talking about earlier the fact that

what Missouri right now has four or five sitting right now?... For real, six. When

I saw that I was like, I'm just wondering if that's the case in any other state. So it

makes me feel the door is opened and that there probably are more instances of

mentorship happening. I believe we lost a few through death and other…I'm

thinking about Arlene Ackerman who wasn't my mentor, but she was an

extraordinary leader. Of course we saw the Beverly Hall. We, of course, just saw

that fall of Barbara Byrd Bennett in Chicago. So I think every step that we take

forward and the doors opening, unfortunately I think we have also these instances

where… I think it kind of takes us a step back, and in confidence we can do this

work and maintain our ethical and moral value and still lead effectively. So that

said, I still think though there is something happening with the fact that folks are

starting to have and see the good works that African-American women are doing

and building the confidence that they can lead a school district. So I am

encouraged by that fact alone.

It is just not the superintendency, it is the classroom teacher. You know when I

came through school, for many teachers it was you either get it or you won't, but

it's your responsibility not the teachers. That paradigm totally flipped. Now, we

as adults are taking responsibility for student learning. What type of learner are

you? Now the focus is on accountability in education. Thirty years ago, there was

no focus on accountability. Education was really the only entity that had not gone

through accountability piece with the force from the outside. We were the only

game in town. So if you didn't like your neighborhood what were you going to

do about it? You didn't have many choices unless you could afford to go to

private or parochial school, or you could afford to move. You just had to accept

what was there.

It doesn't seem like it, but I'm sure there is probably more now than it was 20

years ago. Just off the top of my head. And that's supes and not assistant

superintendents. But you would think that there would be more now than what

this is, but you know. To speak to my point earlier, you know where are we

allowed to work? You know…

The window of opportunity for African-American female superintendents appears

to be opening slightly, but not without the diligent efforts of these women. The

participants were mixed in their thoughts about the position and access to the position

changing.   One participant stated that nothing really had changed because African-

American women still had to work harder and go above and beyond expectations. Other

participants felt that things were changing and accessing the position was easier, but at a

very slow pace. The participants stated the position had become more political in nature

and more accountably had been attached to the position.

Historically, in order to have a voice, African-American women established

organizations such as the National Council of Negro Women, sororities, etc… to

assist with representing their needs. How did you develop your voice as an African-American female superintendent?

    ---[name of a sorority] That was my voice in college. How I established my voice in America as an African-American female…I didn't. I had to establish my voice as a female. Truth be told...It may be terrible to say but I am going to tell you the truth. One of the things that I tell people when I am interviewing for a position is that I'm not there to change their culture. That's not my job to come in and change your culture. My job is to come in and enhance what you already have. So as I am coming into a German Catholic community, my job is to work with them in the framework of the German Catholic community.

    My voice has been very open. I used to get superintendent forums all the time. I knew the community. I gave forums. I put myself out there and listened and responded. I also used newsletters. I have to look at this district as a whole.

    I think…I was always a part of associations. I wasn't a part of the associations you just named but I was a part of Greater Council of City Schools and had that comradery. There had been a lot of African –American and Latinos, but mainly African-Americans. I was a member of the national association of secondary school principals and a member for a short time of NABSE. I was a member of that as well and would attend some meetings. The other critical piece because before I went into administration I was heavily involved in the teachers organization. That is how I got into leadership.

Organizations and working with people who become a community of support like the National Alliance of Black School Educators. Being able to network with organizations that were very supportive was important.

I don't need validation as an African-American woman when I am not being employed as an African-American woman. I'm being employed as a superintendent to hold true to the value of that community. Schools are designed by the community in which they serve and I am going to go in and figure out the value system of that school, and I'm going to emulate those values as long as it doesn't affect me mentally, I will emulate those values to the satisfaction of the board of education because that is my job. Being African-American is secondary, being a superintendent is what I am being paid,to do so that is what I do first. If I get tired of people, I just go home.

I haven't had an organizations to support me honestly. I wish that I did. And that's part of the mentorship and sisterhood. I think it would have been wonderful but honestly, I have been pretty isolated and that's challenging. At the same time, I just had so much going on in my personal life and you know what and I move pretty quickly in my career as well and it is very consuming. You just kind of dive in but in retrospect I would not recommend the way that I did it in that way because it has been very isolating. And to seek out more of that sisterhood support, I think that it is really healthy and helpful to have that.

Kind of after the fact I'm in the process of inquiring about pledging grad chapter just to be a part of that and even be there for someone else who has aspirations for educational administration because I think it is important to have those people you can go to. I know now anytime someone wants to have a conversation or they would like for me to me a mentor, I make myself available. I see the value of it because I never really had anyone myself. So mine is just the inverse. It is because I see the benefits and it just gives you a piece of mind.

Oh man…I developed my voice by always being up front. I try to lead with integrity with how I have voice. To know what the expectations are up front, and I guess I do it with modeling so they can see. The voices that are out there I tell them you know. I would tell them the expectations out front. I just put it out there on the table and it's like you can decide for yourself if you want to be on my team or not once I put everything out on the table. And I can say do you want to play or not. And you can say yes I want to be on the team or I don't and that's okay. It won't hurt my feelings but you will know up front what my expectations are and my expectations are, you know, you do the job you are paid to do a job and you are the expert. Parents are depending on us to develop their children and we need to do it to the best of our abilities. It's an investment.

Some more African-American females got on board and we started meeting as our own group. We serve as a support system for each other. We talk like every week. We have become friends. We bought, --- even though she is not in our

group of African-American female superintendents we have to support each

other. We have an agenda every time we meet.   We actually had an agenda and

that helped us get a voice. I sit on the board for.... That gives me a voice. I sit

on the board for ---which is an organization of Black women and that gives me a

voice in helping to mentor other black women. I reach out to, there are actually

quite a few of African-American female administrators who call me on a regular

basis who seek advice. I share my thoughts with them. I am there whenever they

need me.

African-American female voices traditionally have been silenced. Women have

depended on the collective voices of the group to assist with representing their needs.

The participants' voices were developed through organizations, leading with integrity and

being upfront, and starting their own support system. One participant stated she did not

have an organization to support her and wished she would have had the voices of other

women. Another participant stated she had to establish her voice as a female first and not

as an African-American. The collective voices of African-American female

superintendents added strength and power to the position. The participants voiced what

they brought to the position of superintendent of schools.

What do you bring to the role of superintendent?

It was six feet under, and I brought it up.

Umm. Well I guess I would say recently adding to the conversation around race

and just getting out there and talking about it. Many of my colleagues have shied

away from it, especially after the whole incident of Ferguson. What we have

done here as a district. Having a model. I'm not finished. I am at the beginning

stages and you have to scaffold it. I want it to sustain and I want to create an

environment where if my principals struggle and we have had some situations

with isms, not just with race. How are we going to work through these things? I

have played around with the idea of typing some of these situations up and having

a case student and use these and talk through them. Some of these have been

really hard. What I'm excited about is that they know they are having their own

personal struggles with this and we need to talk about it. People feel safe that

they can talk about this and we need to figure out how can I get you the training

you need and this is what you guys need to focus on. When you asked that

question and it is like wow. I'm just trying to work on little slice of the world

right here. I don't know if it is changing education, but I am going there.

What do I bring to the role of the superintendency…for our kids, for our girls that

yes we can! I think that is what I bring to the role. My thinking is not for the

adults. I believe I have opened the door for other African-American females to be

considered in --- school district. I believe I have done that. Just as I was

originally hired. I was hired to be a principal… and at the time it was a

predominately white district. I was called because I used to wear braids. I was

called to say "do you still wear braids?" Oh yea, I was the only principal in this

district who had to go and see all the [name of district] and the [city] officials so

that they could understand and see who I was and as I was told, 'once they see

you they will be interested and then once they talk with you they will love you.'

So I believe I have opened that door for others to do the job. So now that I can

think about it in this job and going around to the buildings and being close to my

administrators and my team out there, I believe that they know and that this board

understands that it can hire another female. African-American female I can see

now.

Years of experience now. Me personally, my ability to establish relationships.

My ability to treat people as I would want to be treated. Whether they are support

staff, certified staff or administrators. There are all individuals in the district that

in some way, shape, or fashion, impact the students that we serve. Because you

are a custodian doesn't lessen the impact that you have on students. Don't tell me

I'm just a teacher because you are not just a teacher. Don't tell me I'm just a

custodian. So this year on opening day we celebrated. One of the custodians

came up to me and said that it wasn't until today that I realized the fact that I

keep the buildings clean has an impact on student performance. I said, who wants

to go to a filthy building? Yes, you have an impact. You know, one of the

teachers said it was the best opening day because I had no clue of where we were

and how far we have come because I am doing it every day so I don't see it.

Experience, an open dialogue about race, and feelings of hope for African-

American females were qualities the participants felt they brought to the position of

superintendent of schools. The superintendent of schools position is dominated by

White males. One participant stated that creating an environment where discussions

about race relations is welcomed was a highlight. The experiences of building

relationships and communities of support for all stakeholders was a contribution that had a lasting impact. Not only opening the door for future African-American female leaders in education, but building confidence with boards of education that African-American females can be successful in the position was a contribution to position. The participants' perceived attributes and contributions to the superintendent position were integral to their successes as a leader.

Describe the successes you have experienced as a superintendent? How have these been perceived by the community?

> First and foremost, I was able to keep the strike at bay. Like I said, I was told in November that teachers weren't going to come back after Christmas break so there were lots and lots of negotiations. If you go…well you don't have to do it, but the Post-Dispatch had me I remember I was on the cover of the Post-Dispatch leaning down on the day the kids were coming back talking to this girl. She was so upset...she was like, I thought we were going to be off (laughter). She was really upset about coming to school. So anyway that definitely was one of the successes. If I have to say so myself, I felt like we were on our way to getting stable again during my leadership. It was kind of like okay we have a person that's not an outsider. She is from here and let's kind of get focused again.

> You know again as a part of the team. We were able to make adjustments. So in --- the demographic was comprised of fairly in lower.... I did come and empty out one school, folks had to go. We kept the children constant. Hired new adults to teach them. Increments showed that all kids can learn at a high level when they

are taught at a high level…desegregated data had some low income schools where

the kids would enter two or three years behind and those schools were making

progress. And as such the schools would be identified as low performing and yet

they doubled scores. These schools were doing a great job with kids. But under

that year's MAP assessment to recognize growth you either made the cut score or

you didn't. You were labeled as a non-achieving school or not. This was

penalizing for a number of my schools and staff and I just felt there had to be a

better way. So it was my luck that I just so happened to get in touch with an

economist at ---well now it is University. It was the University and I was working

with this economist when I told him we really have high achieving schools who

were taking all the credit for these high achieving schools. And their kids came

from wealthy families, had all the technology in the world and in the summer they

went to Europe. So you know these were kids that really did not need teachers to

do well in the classroom, but the teachers took all the credit for it. So when we ran

the statistical analyses on those schools, it showed they weren't even doing as

well as they should. You talk about gnashing of teeth and not being happy with

me. But you know… I had one school when I presented the data to them, they

took the information to heart and they said you know what we can do better. They

internalized the information and stopped playing the blame game.

Well, it's been exciting. A lot has happened in ---years. Some of the more public

things. We have a very high APR. We are at --- that's a big deal for our district.

Considering our demographics of have 50 percent poverty, I have an APR that's

as high as some of the more affluent districts. We've had a steady increase since I arrived in office with our APR, achievement, student achievement has increased in just about every content area. We score higher than the state with our state standardized scores. Our high schools, our ACT has steadily gone up in the past three years. We've received a lot of national recognition for our schools especially our high school and our band is a nationally recognized band that we have. It just has been a lot of accolades and I am very excited about that and all at the same time the state has increased all of their accountability standards.

I think the successes are the relationship building. Getting people to go the extra mile for you and doing the work. When you allow people the autonomy to do their work to get or do what they are paid to do and their expertise, I think you see better results. Allowing that to happen building my cabinet the way it was it allowed people to push and go even further and the result would be what you see in our test scores and in the building, the climate throughout the district. Those are my successes I think.

We passed two bond issues, one --- million bond issue and then on – million dollar bond issue. We have built two new green schools. They have been awarded silver level green. We have renovated every school, so that every school's media center is new. Most of their cafeterias in gyms are new in the buildings we did not rebuild. We are completing a new library …which I am excited about. Just the fact of passing those, we have continued to improve

academically. Sometimes not as fast as people want. I took out the entire high

school administration. I took out all of them and put in all new and since that

time science has gone, science has just sky rocketed. English Language Arts

(ELA) is going up. Act scores are going up…math is going up. This past year, I

replaced middle school administrators and it's already a different place. There

were some parents who were like, I'm not sending my kids to that middle school,

and I was afraid it was going to implode myself. I made the decision, once I

changed that entire…there were some parents who chose to keep their kids there

this year because of that. Those are some of the challenges and rewards. We

have continued to improve academically. We've increased accountability and

trust within our community.

As a superintendent, well right now at --- we were probably the top five and then

we moved to top three tied for first place last year and this year. We scored --- in

the years I've been there. I'm pretty proud of that, now don't ask what our scores

are going to be next year because of course classes change. We have a class that is

very good artistically. We have made gains as far as building improvements. So

as a superintendent to balance the budget and work with infrastructure, we have

had fires, and I had to take care of that and remodeling buildings. It's a different

hat than a principal wears, but I like it.

Oh, yes, like I said we left with a 20% fund balance. On a 14-point scale we

moved from 1 to --- APR points. Those points were in academics. They were

actually in Math and English. So that was a great accomplishment. The
community was very accepting. It was a good deal.

The participants identified several successful experiences that resulted during
their tenure as superintendent. The successes ranged from academic achievement to
financial stability of the district. One participant stated that under her leadership there
was an increase in students' scores as reflected on the annual performance report for state
testing. Another participant stated her district moved from the top five to a top tier
district based on student testing. Participants communicated the financial successes they
experienced as superintendents. Participants were successful at passing bond issues to
assist with renovating and building new buildings, having a fund balance, and averting a
costly strike. These successes served to define the superintendents' tenure.

**If there was one thing you could change on your journey to the superintendency
what would it be and why?**

I'm not sure I would change anything. I had the opportunity to be in districts in
great turmoil and even in those districts there was lots to learn. So there's not a lot
I would change because I had some really grand opportunities to work with
committed and smart people. I have just learned so much.

I don't think there is anything I would change. You know because when we were
raised as a women of color we go through the school of hard knocks. We know
how to maneuver and get through the messiness that's out there. You have to
stand on your beliefs when you are dealing with the messiness that is out there.

(sigh) I think if there was one thing I would change I would have received my

specialist and gone straight into my doctorate. I believe at that time in my life I

would have been able to do it successfully, without the…you know just bad

timing with this one. You know I would have already been in the mindset of

study and all of that so it would not have been a biggest transition as it has

appeared to be. I think that would have been the one thing I would change. I

think just learning to read the signs when it time to go it is time to go. Well that is

one of the things I did learn. You know my first position, I held it for so long the

building became mine and it became personal. I learned that in the job that I do,

it's what they pay me to do, it is a job and career. It is not mine. It saddens me to

say that but it was a real learning deal to me to keep that separate. You know

what, I think I've been good, so that's pretty much it. I don't think I would do

anything different.

Yea, you know each day I try to give it my best and it's like okay. You know

how to balance home with work, and home is also taking care of yourself and that

is huge. It is an extremely stressful job. You are responsible for everyone and

you are in between the outside. You know your external stake holders and your

internal stakeholders and you have to balance both needs. But if you don't take

care of yourself and take care of your spirit and your health. I know this sound

really hookie, but it you don't get enough sleep and don't eat it's going to have an

impact on you. You know a lot of my colleagues. Some of them suffer some

serious health issues. You know it is hard because you work a lot of hours and

you just have to take care of yourself so you can have a balanced spirit and you

are well, just over all well. People are looking to you for direction and if you

aren't feeling well and snapping at people, you can't because it is a stressful job.

So always…what would I do different…So I guess I am in pursuit for balance

always. I guess I don't know what. I'm cautious of it, and I can't say that I am

completely there but I try really hard. It wasn't always like that and it was that

moving really, really fast and what's really important and what's really important

is your family. You know. You just have to find that balance.

If it was one thing I could change... I did a news interview and I made a decision

to have middle school and high school principals to go out to a conference and to

learn how to do data teams at the time. At that time data teams were really new,

they studied data teams, the data team process, and learned how to do item

analysis. Because I knew that was a way for us to get our test scores up if we

knew. Well of course during that time with low finances…What, they are going

out of town. So the guy came in and for some reason I was just not going to play

games and I didn't. But I should have played the game. They said we were using

district funds. Well, no it was really federal funds it was for PD. I just didn't

play the game and I don't know what was on me that day, but I regret that. If I

could take anything back it would be that.

Oh, that's a good question. If I had decided at some point after going through ---

that I really do want to pursue the instability and unrest of my hometown. It was

pretty much my district but once you got on that road you couldn't jump off very

easily. So I would have preferred to come to that decision that I wanted to

without it being mired in the controversy. I think I would have preferred not to

engage relationships with board members in ---who were unethical and immoral

in my opinion. I would have preferred to have more professional and ethical

people to deal with on the board and I don't want to say all of them but some of

them were not ethical. I would have preferred to not deal with that.

I would have done it sooner.

In retrospect, participants commented on adjustments they would have made to

their journeys of becoming superintendents. The participants voiced ascending to the

position and obtaining a doctoral degree sooner, being more political savvy, and having a

more balanced life were factors they would change.   There were some participants who

stated they would not change anything. The experiences along their journeys served a

purpose and provided opportunities for growth.   The participants' experiences and

individual journeys allowed them build a collective knowledge and expertise about the

position.

What recommendations would you give to aspiring African-American females who

are interested in becoming a superintendent?

Go to the NABSE aspiring superintendent academy. It is one of the best ones that

is out there as it relates to preparing African-Americans to being superintendents.

Get a mentor, a mentor who has been there. You know some people try to mentor

and they have never been in those shoes. You should do this and you should do that. That would be it.

I would say find you an excellent mentor who has been in the superintendency before. If you want to be a successful superintendent, you want a calm board. You want a board in which you are on the same page and want the same thing and it is worth getting it. Also you want a board who knows their role and most importantly they know your role and respect your role. You have to know your community and know the history of the district. Know that a district that has had 10 superintendents in the last 15 years, you probably don't want to go there. Look at the board. If there is a lot of fighting, look at how many votes they all agreed upon. Was it four threes, or was it a lot of three fours. That's another district you might want to think twice about. Understand what the superintendent role is. Understand it could be a role for 5 years, or it could be a role for 3 years. Look at the community, the board, and the best thing is to have an excellent mentor. Someone who can teach you how to dance in politics. Dance in the ballroom of politics. That is the most important.

You know it's important and I tell this to anyone, even aspiring teachers. Be thoughtful about where you want to work. Make sure it is a good fit for you. Do your homework and learn the district. You know of course, go to school. Get all of your credentials. But put yourself in a trajectory where you get experience and you learn as much as you possibly can about the inner workings of the district, the

curriculum side, the instruction side and all the other auxiliary departments that run a district as an assistant superintendent. You will have to synthesize all that at some capacity if you want to go into the superintendency, you have to speak to that. The most important thing though is pay attention to what you want and believe in because the job is very consuming in a good way and so if you are going to spend 60 plus hours a week in a place you have to believe in the mission. You have to believe in the community in which you are serving because you are a servant. And regardless of where ever you are going to go, you want to take it to the next level. But you have to go in and respect the people who are there and you want to bring them along as much as possible so that you can make that change because you are there as part of the team. You want to build people up so they can have that strength to feel empowered to be a part of that collective vision. So that's not easy. The collaborative process is messy. But, I believe in it and I believe in having structures so people can function and they can have that sense of autonomy. You have to be in a place that you want to be in and you can see yourself working and doing that hard work. I don't believe in just getting a job, just to be getting a job. You need to really pay close attention and study and say, this is the community that I want to represent. I believe that I can bring about change in this community in this district. That's the big thing that I recommend. At the end of the day, like it may have just been one thing, and some days you might not even have that at all because you are really busy. But, I'm like yea, I believe in this. This is good. I am making a difference. I think in all educators, you want to make a difference and as superintendent it is very political and

complex, but you can make change. But you want to make sure it is in a place that you can really feel like, I fit in this and I know I can do it. I can bring about change.

Yes you can! You go for it! On paper you have to be sharp. So sharp that they want to come in and give you the opportunity and then you sell yourself once you get in front of them. You talk to them and have them, through your talking, feel that they are going to be sorry. That's what I think and I still say it in everything and still I rise. No matter what has been done to us as females…to where we are now, we have risen to that and so no matter what, me being a victim of racism at the previous district to where I am now in the comments that were on Facebook to say…Wow, she wasn't capable to run… and what people who were in that previous Facebook to send a message to the previous superintendent to say, shame on you. I put on Facebook and I always say, and still I rise. So not matter what you do because I am a Black women, shame on you. You can't take me all the way down. Because the only person who can bring me to my feet and knees is the good Lord, and you are man. So I'm still going to rise and this is my belief. If you are going to get out there and hang with the big boys, you better have that big boy mentality of survival and that a part of my survival skills. We as women, we are known to survive…all the way through slavery. They would humble our men through us and then they would have their way with us. But we would have to be strong enough to deal with that, even though they had their way with us. Even

though they would take out male child, we still had to be strong. So that is a part of our nature. That's who we are! We are survivors.

Go for it, just go for it! You know if you like building buildings, making decisions about textbooks and moving the district in a certain direction. Go for it. If you are able to be a politician and it is a political position truly, then truly go for it. If you don't like politics, then you are not going to like the job. If you can remember that you are a superintendent first go for it. Just go for it. The worst that could happen is that you get into the job and you hate it, you just hate it. Normally they give superintendents and 2-3 year contracts. That gives you a whole year to find something else. One more really important thing is, do not spend your money like you are a superintendent. Spend your money like you are a teacher. In that way, never change your salary in the way you spend your money. In that way, you are free. If you go and buy a house with a superintendent's income and it takes that superintendent income, you are locked in that job until you either sell that house, or find another job. If you buy that house on a teacher's income, guess what? If you don't like your job, you don't have to keep that job. You can go back into teaching and have human beings. Take your kids camping and go to the movies and get your hair done every week. That's what you can do. Don't buy into the fact that the more money you make, even if you can afford it, is the more money you can spend. That's Dave Ramsey right there you should look him up. Dave Ramsey says, "Spend like you are a teacher and never change, put the rest in the bank." That is called freedom.

Honestly, last night it was time for my evaluation, I smiled at them and told them good night, and then I went home and got in the bed. Honestly, if I lose my job tomorrow all I would have to do is find a smaller house. It is what it is; so that's what I'm going to tell you. Live like you are a teacher.

To be tenacious, committed, never accept anyone's evaluation of you, never lose hope, and set goals!

Make sure you have all the credentials is the same thing I tell all folks. Make sure you have all of your credentials in place. Get all of the substantive background experience. Preferably be a principal somewhere. Have all of your ducks in a row so that when the…but here is where I received my doctorate, here are all of my experiences. So you have to make sure that your house is in order both professionally and personally before you take that role. That would be my suggestion and just develop the toughest skin you can. You know stop using your Oil of Olay. You have to like just get some burlap skin ready (laughter).

Chapter 5

To know our audience, to know who listens, we must be in dialogue. We must be

speaking with and not just speaking to. In hearing responses, we come to understand

whether our words act to resist, to transform, to move.[162]

Discussion

This chapter reviews the research findings aligned to the research questions and to

previous research findings from other researchers. Then, it develops themes constructed

from the data.   Next, this chapter discusses the connections the identified themes have to

the tenets of Black feminist thought. Finally, I offer implications and provide

recommendations for future research.

The primary purpose of this historical qualitative study was to document the

history of African-American women who served in the position of superintendent of

schools in the state of Missouri. I documented 16 African-American females who served

as superintendents of schools in the state of Missouri.   Another purpose of this study was

to contribute to the growing body of research by documenting African-American female

superintendents' unique personal stories and experiences.   I sought to document the

factors and experiences the participants perceived as influential in their ascent to the

position. Using a Black feminist thought lens, the study revealed the participants'

perceptions of oppression and the interaction race and gender had on their journey of

becoming a superintendent.

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[162] bell hooks, Talking Back: *Thinking feminist thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 16.

The data collection process included seven semi-structured interviews. Each participant was either a current superintendent or former superintendent of a district in the state of Missouri. I was able to communicate with ten superintendents or their secretaries. Seven participants agreed to participate in this study. These research questions framed this study:

1. What are the stories of present and former African-American female superintendents?

2. What factors motivated present and former African-American female superintendents to aspire to the superintendency?

3. What successes and challenges did present and former African-American female superintendents encounter on their journeys and during their tenure as superintendent?

4. What specific experiences do present and former African-American female superintendents feel prepared and shaped their ascent to the superintendency?

5. Were there any specific factors that attracted these African-American women to pursue a superintendency in Missouri?

The researcher digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews. Each interview was analyzed to obtain significant information related to this study. The interviews were approximately 1.5 hours at length, and one interview continued for 2.5 hours. The transcriptions averaged 18 pages. The following themes were constructed based on the perceived perceptions of the participants:

1. Barriers: Good Ole Boys Network and Suppressed Sista Syndrome

2. Mentoring Relationships

3. Accountability

4. Conflicting Complacency: Superintendent, Yea Right!

Findings

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the stories of present and former African-American female superintendents?

The participants' perceptions of their stories being unique varied. While some participants felt there was not anything special or unique about their stories, unbeknownst to them, each experience was diverse and had a unique quality. The participants' entrance to the profession were diverse. Prior to entering the field of education, one superintendent was focused on entering medical school and another completed the LSAT and was prepared to begin law school. The first teaching position ranged from being a special education teacher to a dance teacher. One superintendent spent her entire career in rural Missouri, and two superintendents actually left the field of education for a brief period of time to pursue aspirations in the business realm. Due to the recent trend of boards hiring internally, one superintendent did not feel her transition was unique because she had not been the only internal appointment. While the individual experiences were unique, one common thread among the superintendents was they never really aspired to be a superintendent.

Research Question 2: What factors motivated present and former African-American female superintendents to aspire to the superintendency?

There was not one participant who stated she wanted to become a superintendent when she entered the field of education. This position was not really an aspiration for any of the superintendents, and they were content in their current leadership positions. The participants communicated that a support system of mentors, sponsors and opportunity played important roles in their ascent to becoming superintendents. The mentors served as coaches who planted seeds of thought and encouragement to pursue the position of superintendent of schools. Sponsors opened the doors of opportunity for participants. These were doors perceived to many as having the invisible do not disturb sign swaying from side to side. The participants followed the advice and leadership of their mentors and became confident. They gradually began to see themselves in the superintendent position and assumed the position when the opportunity became available.

Research Question 3: What successes and challenges did present and former African-American female superintendents encounter on their journeys and during their tenure as superintendent?

The participants' successes and challenges were diverse. The participants stated experiences of oppression, interactions with board members and other African-American females, and increased accountability pressure served as challenges. Forms of oppression included *isms,* racism, sexism, and ageism. The participants were intruding on the good ole boy's club and had to develop mechanisms for being accepted. The board of education, at times, served to present challenges. Board members would step outside of their duty of governing the district and impede the process of the superintendent. Some participants subtlety mentioned the unpleasant interactions they had with other African-American females who presented challenges. While the participants experienced various

challenges, successes played an important role and helped to define their

superintendency. The participants stated numerous successes they experienced during

their superintendency. Successes included balancing the budget, passing bond issues to

renovate and build new structures, strengthening community relationships, and increasing

student achievement.

Research Question 4: What specific experiences do present and former African-American

female superintendents feel prepared and shaped their ascent to the superintendency*?*

The specific experiences the participants felt prepared and shaped their ascent to

the superintendency were the relationships with their mentors and sponsors and the

individual experiences they gained in their different positions along the journey to the

superintendency. One superintendent mentioned that she felt she grew up when she spent

time in a district as an administrator. Another superintendent stated the experience of

being thrown out there by her principal at the time to lead a building initiative catapulted

her into leadership. The subtle and overt messages of continued leadership colleagues

communicated to the participants served as cornerstones that helped to shape their ascent.

Participants also stated having the credentials helped them to even consider the position.

Research Question 5: Were there any specific factors that attracted these African-

American women to pursue a superintendency in Missouri?

There were not any specific factors that attracted the participants to pursue a

superintendency in the state of Missouri. All of the participants were either born in

Missouri or in the neighboring states of Illinois or Kansas. Most of the superintendents

were internal hires. If anything, one major factor that attracted the participants to pursue

a superintendency in Missouri was, a preference for remaining close to home with family.

Connections to Previous Research

The literature review identified research focused on gender and the superintendeny, aspirations to the superintendency, the role of mentors and sponsors, descriptions of African-American female superintendents, and challenges and successes of the superintendency. The participants in this study confirmed data from previous studies and contributed new data to research. The following sections will focus on how the participants' data align, build, and contrast with previous data.

Gender and the Superintendency

Gender roles have traditionally been instrumental in determining the professional positions males and females pursue in their careers. Jackie Blount stated masculine roles traditionally fit the notion of men's work, whereas roles dominated by women or feminized roles were characterized as women's work.[163] The participants in this study were all in positions of leadership, authority and upper administration. Society has typically aligned masculine roles to leadership and administrative positions, while feminized roles have been aligned to positions that involve nurturing and hospitality. In education, elementary school teachers traditionally are perceived as nurturers and caretakers, while secondary teachers are perceived as being more authoritative. Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, and Ellerson reported a trend that female superintendents had more elementary school experience.[164] In this research, only two participants started their career in elementary education. The remaining five began their career in secondary education. These data contradicted current data. The average age of

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[163] J.M. Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency 1873-1995* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
[164] Kowalski et al., *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*.

the participants when they attained their first superintendency was forty-six. Four

participants became superintendents while they were in their forties. Previous data

suggested female superintendents attained their first superintenency later in their careers.

In this research, the age range of the first superintendency was forty to fifty-seven. At the

time of this study, the average length of years the participants served as superintendents

were four. Only two participants had contracts for the upcoming school year to serve as

Table 4. Comparison Data: AASA Superintendent Data and Invisibly Visible Data (Gender)			
	Male (AASA 2010 Decennial study-National)	Female (AASA 2010 Decennial Study-National)	African-American Female (Invisibly Visible- state of Missouri)
First Teaching position (Elementary)	17.6%	34.6%	28.6%
First Teaching position (Secondary)	72.2%	45.3%	71.4%
Age as a novice superintendent (36-40)	19.4%	9.1%	14% *(1 participant)*
Age as a novice superintendent (41-45)	20.5%	17.1%	29% *(2 participants)*
Age as a novice superintendent (46-50)	23.1%	28.6%	43% *(3 participants)*
Age as a novice superintendent (51 and above)	20.6%	40.8%	14% *(1 participant)*
Years as a superintendent (1 year or less)	5.7%	7%	29% *(2 participants)*
Years as a superintendent (2-4 years)	24.2%	36.2%	43% *(3 participants)*
Years as a superintendent (5-8 years)	26.2%	31.3%	14% *(1 participant)*
Years as a superintendent (9 or more years)	43.9%	25.5%	14% *(1 participant)*

superintendents. Two of the participants announced their retirement at the end of the

school year, and three participants were not practicing superintendents. The chart below

compares data from this research to data from the 2010 AASA Decennial study.

Prior research has examined factors associated with female superintendents

experiencing discrimination and having limited access to the position. Approximately 45

percent of the female superintendents reported encountering a form of discrimination,

while 13 percent of male superintendents reported discrimination.[165] The participants in this study discussed how they experienced forms of gender and racial discrimination. One participant stated, "I think there was a gender issue, I think there was a racial issue. I know that there were personal issues of some of the board members." The participants in this study spoke more to gender discrimination compared to racial discrimination, but acknowledged racial discrimination and oppression existed. One participants provided an example of how she was asked by a board member to locate the finger bowl so he could wash his fingers. This had a racial epithet that was associated to slavery. One participant discussed how a White male superintendent blatantly told her that he didn't even want anyone like her to apply for a position and she attributed it to the color of her skin. The participants experienced gender discrimination ranging from professors at the University not encouraging them to pursue higher degrees that could lead to higher level positions to being called a girl repeatedly during a board meeting by a patron.

Aspiring to the Superintendency

The position of superintendent of schools is regarded as a position of prestige and is traditionally male dominated. Caucasian males have the highest percent of individuals in this position while African-American female superintendents have one of the lowest percent of individuals serving in this capacity. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner reported in a 2000 study that only 5.1 percent of the superintendents were African-American female.[166] One explanation to explain the lack of African-American females aspiring to the position is the lack of published literature focused on African-American female superintendents.

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[165] Ibid.,

[166] Thomas E. Glass, Lars Bjork, and C. Cryss Brunner., "The Study of the American School Superintendency, 2000.

Research on African-American female superintendents can be perceived as risky for

professors.[167] The nonexistence of discussion, literature, and encouragement in higher

education perpetuates the notion that this position is reserved for men. Participants in

this study confirmed the challenges they experienced in higher education. Some of their

professors did not encourage them to pursue advanced degrees, and one participant was

even discouraged from pursuing an advanced degree. She stated, "I had an advisor at ---.

When I said I wanted to enter the doctorate program, he asked me why? He was a White

male, and said why, aren't you satisfied where you are? You have a master's degree."

Other participants discussed the challenges they experienced once they were accepted

into a doctoral program. "Out of the University I did four different proposals. Initially, I

was told that I could not talk about that and that the University was not ready. Then they

said pick something easy." Another participant discussed the length of time it took her to

complete the program. "It took me seven years to get my dissertation. I stuck with it.

Proving them wrong (laughter). You are going to let me walk. If I have to come through

here for 10 years. One of us is going to give up, and it's not going to be me." The lack

of encouragement and implied messages that you are not worthy can be internalized.

African-American women who are more than capable of being successful in upper

administration positons can become discouraged and choose not to pursue advanced

degrees or participate in superintendency preparation programs.

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[167] C.Cryss Brunner and Lisa Peyton-Claire, "Seeking Representation Supporting Black Female Graduate
Students Who Aspire to the Superintendency, "*Urban Education* 25, no. 5 (2000). 533

Angel, Killacky, and Johnson reported potential barriers that had an impact on participants applying for the position of superintendent of schools.[168] Participants identified oppression, selection, and lack of mentors as barriers that inhibited African-American women from pursuing the superintendent position. Participants additionally held the belief that in order to apply and access the superintendent position, their experience, credentials, and levels of education had to be superior, compared to other non African-American female applicants.[169] In this study, participants confirmed experiences of oppression, lack of African-American female mentors, and the belief that they had to be better. One participant stated,

> Being a woman in administration is very difficult because the decision that you make, people are wanting them made with a smile. Let me give you an example. A male superintendent can come in and say, I don't want anyone [expletive], I don't want anybody [expletive] about anything this year, you are here to teach…You know they would say; man, he is a good administrator. Now, let me Walk in and say the same thing…she is a [expletive].

Another participant communicated, "You know, any administrative position, principal, superintendent, any administration, especially with Black women, if you are stern and hard, what are you? That five letter word. Now if you are very feminine and petite, they don't take you seriously…When you are firm and you don't wear heels and the stockings, you are a five letter word or, are you married?" These overt and covert forms of oppression have an impact on women as they consider applying for superintendent

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[168] Angel, Killacky, and Patricia R. Johnson, "African American Women Aspiring to the Superintendency: Lived Experiences and Barriers, "Journal of School Leadership 23, no. 4 (2013: 592-614.
[169] Ibid.,

positions. Oppression is not a new experience for African-American women, but when women who aspire to superintendency observe the continuous unfair treatment of African-American female superintendents, they might decide to remain in their current positions.

One participant provided a different perspective regarding oppression. Her analysis was that she had not experienced oppression in her position as superintendent. She was in the position of ultimate leadership and therefore had the authority to make a decision that could have lasting impact on the organization. "No because I wear the hat. See, she who holds the pen controls the world. So it's hard pressed to be oppressed when you hold the paycheck, the calendar, someone's income and a decision that is being made." This participant had the autonomy to lead like several of her male colleagues. This autonomy to lead was not expressed by the other African-American female superintendents in the study.

The participants' beliefs aligned to existing research that suggested African-American females felt they needed to be more experienced and credentialed in order to be considered for a superintendent position.[170] Five of the participants in this study completed education of doctoral programs. Two of the participants' highest level of education were educational specialist degrees, but they were currently enrolled in doctoral programs. The participants in this study, whether it was implied or stated, felt it was necessary to continue their education and complete a doctoral program. Even though five of the participants were internal applicants, they still felt it was important to obtain

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[170] Ibid.,

their doctorate degree or enroll in a doctoral program. One participant provided a synopsis regarding internalized beliefs that have been entrenched in the Black family.

> We will always have to fight against women who don't look like us, men who do look like us, and men who don't look like us. So we have, mom always said to me that, 'I have to get a good education to take care of myself because I had two strikes. I came here with two strikes.' One, I was female and the other was that I was a Black female. I would always have to work longer and harder. Think about it.

Mentors and Sponsors

Mentors and sponsors served pivotal roles to the participants along their superintendent journey. The majority of the participants communicated the important role mentors played in their careers. "He was the person who believed in letting teachers lead. He laid the foundation for things I still do today, and I realize that." "From the time I met him…he pushed me to complete my doctorate. He pushed me to seek out central office positions. He is the one who planted the superintendent seed." "I had an African-American female to save me, to restore faith in me." "True mentors, like the one I would pick up the phone and call. That mentor has been the same for thirteen years." Enomoto, Gardiner, and Grogan suggested mentors were not always the same race and gender as the mentee, particularly for African-American females. The important factor of mentors was the genuine faith they had in the mentees abilities, rather than their race or gender.[171] Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey studied the important role mentors and sponsors played for African-American females in administration. Twenty-one

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[171] Enomoto t al., "Notes to Athene: Mentoring Relationships for Women of Color"

participants stated they had a mentor who provided support. Of the 21 mentors, only four participants stated their mentor was an African-American female.[172] The majority of the participants in this study communicated their mentor was a male, and in most instances, it was a Caucasian male. "As a teacher in---one of the kindest men…" "I started working with this guy named…" "Men were a mentor." "He is a former superintendent. He is now retired and I will call him" "Yea, they were male you know and that's…Yea, they were males and they were White males." Due to the lack of African-American female superintendents, it was difficult for an aspiring female to have a mentor of the same race and gender. "I didn't know one person of color who was a superintendent. I did not know one. Not until I got into the position of being in central office. I would say the last five years is when I started to see more superintendents who look like me." The irony of several mentors being White males is the reality that the participants stated the good ole boys club, dominated by White males, was the same system that provided resistance and barriers for them along their journey to becoming a superintendent.

One participant indicated she really did not have what she would define as a mentor, but rather a sponsor who was able to help her navigate the system and secure interviews. "I've said to folks who want mentors and young ladies, it's great to have a mentor, but you need a sponsor…It's wonderful to have a mentor and one you can relate to and can understand what you are going through. But you need a sponsor who can open up doors." A primary difference between mentors and sponsors is that the latter concentrates exclusively on opening the door of opportunity and gaining entry into positions. Mentors can offer this support as well, but traditionally they provide moral

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[172] Allen et al. "African American Women in Educational Administration."

support, advice, and encouragement to mentees. Both roles, mentor and sponsor, are

crucial in the development of African-American female superintendents. The more

support and opportunity an African-American female receives along her career path

towards upper administration, …

Descriptions of African-American Female Superintendents

Amie Revere pioneered a groundbreaking study focused on African-American

female superintendents.[173] In her study, 29 African-American female superintendents

were identified in 1984 and 22 participants participated in her study. The African-

American female descriptions documented in Revere's study revealed the mean age of

the first superintendency was 46. Sixty-four percent were married and 31.5 percent were

either divorced or widowed. Approximately 68 percent of the participants held doctorate

degrees and 86 percent were internal applicants.[174] In this study, 16 African-American

females who led Missouri schools were identified, seven participated in the research.

The mean age of the first superintendency was forty-six. A total of 43 percent were

married (including remarriages) and 43 percent had been divorced. Seventy-one percent

held doctorate degrees and 29 percent were enrolled in a doctoral program.

The data from this research supported several descriptions Revere identified

nationally over 30 years ago in 1985.[175] Participants in both studies began their career in

the classroom and perceived advanced degrees as paramount in their ascent to the

position. Another commonality between both studies was that participants did not

initially aspire to the superintendency. The career paths to the superintendency were

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[173] Amie Revers, "A Description of Black Female School Superintendents."
[174] Ibid.,
[175] Ibid.,

diverse but a major shift in this study was that over 50 percent of the participants began

their career in secondary education.   The results from this study confirmed there really

have not been many shifts in the descriptions of African-American female

superintendents. These data strengthen the argument that systemic change must occur in

order for progress to be made in education as it relates to African-American female

superintendents.

Table 5. Descriptions of African-American Female Superintendents (comparison)		
	Past study: '84-'85 Description of Black Female Superintendents	Invisibly Visible-Description of Black Female Superintendents
Mean Age of 1st superintendency	45	46
Marital Status: Married/ Widowed	64% (married) 4.5% (widowed, N=1)	14% (married, N=1) 14 % (widowed, N=1)
Marital Status: Divorced/Remarried	27% (divorced)	57% (divorced) 29% (remarried)
Doctoral Degree	68.2%	71%
Identified Superintendents	29 (Nationally)	16 (State of Missouri)
Internal Applicant	86.4%	71%

Challenges and Successes

Superintendents experience various challenges and successes regardless of race

and gender. For African-American women however, the challenges are typically

exploited, while the perceived successes are minimized and attributed to external factors

unrelated to their leadership. Richard Hunter and Sarah Donahoo reported African-

American superintendents faced more challenges, primarily because they led urban

districts plagued with deep rooted issues.[176] Brunner and Grogan reported challenges

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[176] Richard Hunter and Sarah Donahoo, "All Things to All People."

ranged from funding and working with the board to strategic planning.[177] The

participants in this study confirmed challenges of working collectively with the board of

education, lack of funding, achievement concerns, and the autonomy to strategically plan

and lead the school system. Participants stated, "I was even told by the board member

that she had a concern that with me being a female…I would have a hard difficult time

making the hard decisions." "The dynamics of the board. I was very heavily scrutinized.

You had to defend yourself." "Money is a concern and we need to go out for a tax levy,

but nothing is impossible…I am going on tour and talking to the staff about the potential

budget cuts if the tax levy doesn't pass." "At the time, the school district that I was at

was in a financial and academic crisis. It had a 1% fund balance and 1 APR."

While these challenges existed, the participants did not let them stifle their

progress, bold moves, or focus. The participants eagerly spoke to the successes they

experienced as superintendents. One participant spoke about how she was able to

transform her district by working collaboratively as a team to realign teaching

assignments. "You know again as a part of the team. We were able to make

adjustments…Increments showed that all kids can learn at a high level when they are

taught at a high level." She emptied out an entire teaching staff at one building and had

courageous conversations with teachers regarding data and what needed to be done in

order to continue to move students forward academically. Teachers internalized data and

took ownership of students' data. Another participant commented on the academic

success her district experienced under her leadership. "Considering our demographics of

50 percent poverty, I have an APR that's as high as some of the more affluent districts.

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[177] Brunner & Grogan, "Women Leading School Systems."

We've had a steady increase since I arrived in office with our APR…We score higher than the state with our state standardized scores." Another participant commented on how she was able to pass crucial multimillion dollar bond issues with the support of the community. "We passed two bond issues…We have built two new green schools…We have renovated every school, so that every school's media center is new."

Some of the same identified challenges also served as success stories for the superintendents. The challenge of having limited funding led superintendents to seek the support of the community by placing bond and levy increases on the ballot. The participants were able to renovate buildings, build new facilities, and offer competitive salaries to retain a quality teaching staff. The pressure of increasing student achievement is an ongoing challenge for most superintendents nationally. The participants in this study acknowledged this challenge, but also provided examples of how they were able to increase levels of student achievement under their leadership.

Themes

As the researcher analyzed the data, various themes surfaced. This study identified four themes related to the participants' perceptions of their experiences while they served in the position of superintendent of schools. The following themes emerged: (a) barriers: Good ole boy's club and Suppressed Sista Syndrome, (b) mentoring relationships, (c) accountability, and (d) conflicting complacency.

Theme 1: Barriers: Good Ole Boys Club and Suppressed Sista Syndrome

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The position of superintendent of schools is dominated by Caucasian males. The practices and ideology surrounding the position reflects the thoughts of the Caucasian male. Black female voices

have traditionally been silenced; so why would the practice change, even if they are in a position of influence such as the superintendency? The participants in this study stated that the good ole boys club was very prevalent and presented challenges in their position as superintendent. The participants stated they were asked to do things that their male predecessors were not asked to do. It is implied that female superintendents are less threatening. The perception was that the participants would be compliant and not voice their opinions, especially when hard decisions had to be made. It is expected that a male superintendent would make the hard decisions. They have the flexibility of not having their every word scrutinized by board members, staff and the community. The participants communicated that some of the ideology of the boy's club regime have lingered and they had to develop strategies for interrupting this thought.

The conversation on barriers focused immensely on male dominance and the practices associated with it, but some participants revealed a barrier was in their own back yard, African-American females. One superintendent stated, "I would say to you, prior to becoming superintendent, any challenges that I had prior to that were from Black women." Another superintendent stated in reference to Black women, "I'm going to tell you the truth. Sometimes Black women do it to each other, and that is for real…And I don't know why. Maybe it comes from there only being very little pieces of the pie, so we have to…" The researcher coined the term 'Suppressed Sista Syndrome' to explain this phenomenon. As an African-American female trying to climb the education ladder, I too have experienced conflict and have been marginalized by African-American women. Typically, from women who were in positions to mentor and provide guidance. Suppressed Sista Syndrome could be a consequence of internalized racism or oppression.

Tamba-Kuii Bailey, Y. Barry Chung, Wendi Williams, Anneliese Singh, and Heather

Terrell define internalized oppression as, "the process by which Black people internalize

and accept the dominant White culture's oppressive actions and beliefs toward Black

people…"[178] The researchers suggested, "Black people experiencing internalized racial

oppression will replicate this same internalized oppressiveness, through beliefs and

behaviors, toward people within their own racial classification or those individuals

perceived to be in that classification."[179] The consequence of Black women marginalizing

other Black women is that replicates the same oppressive behaviors they oppose when

experienced byWhite culture's actions. Suppressed sista syndrome focuses on women of

color intentionally suppressing and marginalizing other women from making progress,

even when they are in a position of influence.   Most of the support and mentorship the

participants received, coincidently, were from White males.

Theme 2: Mentoring Relationships

        A mentor is an experienced individual who is responsible for training and

providing guidance to a mentee. The participants in this study revealed that a mentor or

sponsor motivated them to actively pursue the superintendent position. Mentoring

relationships was also categorized as a collective group of support. Some participants

stated their association with organizations provided necessary support and resources that

assisted with their ascent to the superintendent position. Even a participant who stated

she really did not have mentor along her journey acknowledged the importance of having

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[178] Bailey, Tamba-Kuii M., Y. Barry Chung, Wendi S. Williams, Anneliese A. Singh, and Heather K. Terrell. 2011. "Development and validation of the Internalized Racial Oppression Scale for Black individuals." *Journal Of Counseling Psychology* 58, no. 4: 481-493. *PsycINFO*, EBSCO*host* (accessed June 20, 2016)

[179] Ibid.,

that system of support and guidance. She makes it a priority to be the mentor she never had to other aspiring females in education because she understands the value in mentoring relationships.

The participants acknowledged there would probably be more African-American female superintendents if more mentors were available to guide and support women in leadership positions. I did not use the term aspiring superintendents because none of the participants in this study were aspiring superintendents. The mentors saw something in them that they did not initially see in themselves. The mentors were instrumental in building confidence, providing support, and preparing the participants to be politically astute and knowledgeable. The relationships formed between the participants and mentors were respected. The participants' mentors were consistent. They did not jump from mentor to mentor. The mentors remained constant. "True mentors, like the one I would pick up the phone and call. That mentor has been the same for thirteen years."

Theme 3: Accountability

New policies have infiltrated educational systems causing increased accountability. Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and superintendents have been impacted by the increased accountability measures. The participants in this study stated the demands of increased student achievement have set new precedencies and redefined the superintendent position. The success or failure of meeting the accountability standards serves as a gauge to the superintendent in determining if their contract will be extended. The participants are held accountable to the board of education, as well as the community in which they serve. The participants stated the relationships with board

members were very important. The superintendent has to answer to each member of the

seven person board. Each member of the board usually has a separate agenda.

Theme 4: Conflicting Complacency

The participants in this study resounding stated they never really aspired to

become superintendents. They were content in their current positions and felt they were

positively affecting students. While the participants were complacent and content where

they were, there was an external conflict with how others perceived their abilities. The

participants in this study stated colleagues and mentors encouraged them to pursue

positions in upper administration. The external voices of others conflicted with the initial

internal aspirations of the participants. For example, participants' statements included:

"…Someone charted my path. It was like I was a pawn or checker. When I finished this,

it was like okay, move her here and move her there." "For me it was just one of those

things where people said, why don't you do this, and I said, okay…there was why don't

you go ahead and get your superintendency, you are doing it anyway; and I'm like,

alright. I went back to school and did that." "I don't want to be in central office. I will

never be in central office. Let me do what I need to do and he said to me, 'when you

become superintendent of schools, we will revisit this conversation.'" The competing

internal and external conflicts propelled the participants to step outside of their comfort

zone. The participants became superintendents and experienced success.

<div align="center">Themes and Black Feminist Thought</div>

Black Feminist Thought is grounded in six features. These features include: (a)

resisting oppression; (b) linking experiences and ideas; (c) connecting U.S. Black

women's experiences and collective knowledge and views; (d) acknowledging

contributions of African-American intellectuals; (e) recognizing change must occur and (f) defining the connectedness to other models and philosophies that support social justice.[180] There were some noticeable connections between the features of Black feminist thought and themes of this study. The participants experienced various forms of oppression. While these women experienced oppression, they did not let it become inhibitors of their success. The African-American females were able to resist oppression by becoming superintendents in an educational sphere dominated by males. The participants were asked to perform tasks their male counterparts were never expected to implement and were held to higher standards. Black feminist thought does not accept the status quo and these participants were able to challenge the ideologies of the good ole boys club.

The participants' experiences on their journey to becoming superintendents were unique and internalized through their personal lens. Black feminist thought acknowledges this variance of interpretation and seeks to make connections to experiences. The participants in this study did not need to know each other personally to understand they would experience some of the same forms of oppression that could be generalized to African-American female superintendents. They were confronted with similar challenges, but developed their own way of responding to individual situations. The participants were able to recognize and bring awareness to these experiences.

Connecting experiences to collective knowledge is an essential feature to Black feminist thought. The collective experiences of Black women contribute to and increases knowledge. Intelligence is acquired through experience. The more aware and

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[180] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

knowledgeable Black women are on topics and experiences that comprise the collective knowledge, the better they will become at responding to situations.

The participants in this study, whether they realized it or not, contributed to the intellectual compass of African-American women. African-American women traditionally have been marginalized in their pursuit to higher levels of education. Participants in this study stated in some instances educational advisors questioned their motivation to pursue advanced degrees, and it took several years to complete their degrees. "It took me seven years to get my dissertation. I stuck with it proving them wrong. One of us was going to give up, and it was not going to be me." The participants shaped their knowledge and contributed to society. The participants were in positions to affect positive changes in scholarship for African-American females, as well as to the students and staff in the communities in which they served.

Recognizing that change must occur is a Black feminist thought feature the participants lived daily. The participants recognized the ideologies of the past and advocated for change. One participant implemented a district wide systemic change in her district that involved substantive conversations about race. The participants also worked collectively and formed a group of support to develop strategies of being successful in a system that was not designed for them. The good ole boy's club was being challenged as the evolution of the African-American female superintendent was being defined.

Implications

The participants in this study did not enter the field of education with the aspiration of ever becoming a superintendent. An implication can be drawn that there is a

place in educational leadership for females, even if they do not initially aspire to become a superintendent. Females in education should enter the profession with an open mind. While female educators may see themselves as classroom teachers exclusively, they should be aware of future opportunities in leadership. Females should actively seek out mentors, colleagues and sponsors who can guide them along their journey. Female teachers should never underestimate their potential and contribution to education by limiting their opportunities.

Educational leadership preparation programs should evaluate their current curricula to ensure they are aligned to current practices in education, especially in relationship to diversity. Traditional programs were designed to meet the needs of the White male because they dominated upper positions in education. Questions educational leadership programs should ask include: Is our staff diverse? How is our program designed to encourage and support women and African-Americans to pursue the superintendent position? Does our program address current and relevant issues? The participants in this study stated the important role mentors played in their ascent to the position of superintendent of schools, but did not speak much about the programs that prepared them for the position. One participant stated she attended an ongoing superintendent program that provided real time experience of interacting with practicing superintendents. This program was a highly selective program that only accepted a small number of participants. Educational leadership programs should build a program to support, encourage and effectively prepare African-American women for leadership positions. Topics should include oppression, accountability, board relations, political

awareness, policy, community involvement, and funding (bond/levy initiatives, balancing budget, negotiations, etc...).

The board of education has the responsibility of setting policy and hiring/firing the superintendent. Boards of education should understand their defined roles and give the superintendent the opportunity to lead the district. The participants in this study stated that board relations were critical to their success as a superintendent. During the hiring process, boards typically hire a national search firm to select superintendent candidates. Boards should be familiar with the process these search firms use to attract superintendent prospects. There could potentially be several aspiring African-American female superintendents, but due to their inability to get recognized by the firms they are not given opportunity. Boards of education should also become more involved with the process of identifying internal candidates. They should work closely with administrators, professional organizations, and universities to build leadership and encourage African-American females to the position.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

A question that still needs to be investigated is, "Why in the 21st century is there still so few African-American female superintendents nationally?" This study added to the limited research focused on African-American female superintendents. It documented African-American women who served in the superintendent position in the state of Missouri. The participants in the research were courageous because they allowed the research to identify them by name to allow for authentic documentation. While this study provided different perspectives and experiences of the superintendency, research

needs to continue on this topic. This research makes the following recommendations for future research:

1. Continue to document the experiences of African-American women who have served as superintendents in states that have had multiple African-American female superintendents

2. Explore the frequency of African-American females serving as superintendents when the Commissioner of Education is female

3. Investigate experiences of Suppressed Sista Syndrome along the journey to becoming a superintendent

4. Examine Boards of Education and African-American female superintendents of districts whose predecessor was an African-American female

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

✖ You have been identified as a former or current African-American female superintendent in the state of Missouri. Would you tell me about the experiences you feel contributed to your ascent to the position?

✚ Childhood, family structure (married, children, siblings, education, career)

✚ What led you to pursue this degree path and position?

✖ How your path to the position of superintendent is unique compared to others? Black or White

✖ Were there any mentors who inspired you to follow this path? How did they provide leadership and guidance? Were any mentors African-American females?

✖ Describe your experience as you interviewed for the position? (how many interviews, board dynamics, how many districts did you apply to)

✖ Describe the successes you have experienced as a superintendent? How have these been perceived by the community as an African-American female superintendent?

✖ How has race and gender served as a barrier? Do you perceive any challenges you have experienced to be different from African-American male superintendents? White male or female superintendents?

✖ Research suggests African-American female superintendents have experienced forms of oppression, would you share some experiences of oppression you have faced in your career? How were you able to resist the oppression?

- ✖ Why do you think there is an underrepresentation of African-American female superintendents nationally? What impact does this underrepresentation have on education?

- ✖ Describe the leader you replaced? What was the condition of your district prior to becoming superintendent?

- ✖ Why do you think the state of Missouri has experienced multiple African-American female superintendents?

- ✖ What do you bring to the role of superintendent? Provide examples of how you feel you have contributed to the field of education.

- ✖ If there was one thing you could change on your journey to the superintendency what would it be and why?

- ✖ What recommendations would you give to aspiring African-American females who are interested in becoming a superintendent?

Appendix B

Formal Letter

Ms. XXXXX
Superintendent of XXX
Address
City, State Zip code

Dear Ms. XX,

I write this letter to request your participation in a research study I am conducting as part of my partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Currently, I am educator in the Missouri school system and I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.   This study is titled: Invisibly Visible: A Study of African-American Female Superintendents and their Ascent to the Superintendency.

There is a scarcity of research that exists on African-American female superintendents of schools. While there has been a renewed interest of this topic, several questions remain. The aim of this study is to contribute to the growing body of research focused on the unique personal stories and experiences of African-American women who have served and continue to serve in the position of superintendent of schools. Researchers have been able to create general descriptions and demographics of these unique women; however, more data are needed to document your journey and provide a clearer picture of how you and other African-American women assented into this position.

Your participation in this study will provide more in-depth information regarding the stories of African-American female superintendents. You will be able to be a part of the growing body of research that is emerging on the topic. I hope that you strongly

consider being a participant in this study. You are a trailblazer in the field of education

and your unique story will contribute greatly to the educational field.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tracy M. Hinds

Appendix C

Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
Telephone: 314-516-4971
E-mail: tmh324@umsl.edu

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities
Invisibly Visible: A Study of African-American Female Superintendents and their Ascent
to the Superintendency

Participant _____   HSC Approval Number

Principal Investigator: Tracy M. Hinds   PI's Phone Number (XXX) XXX-XXXX

_____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tracy M. Hinds under
    the supervision of Dr. Matthew Davis. The purpose of this research is to document
    the history of African-American females who have served in the position of
    superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. The researcher seeks to document
    the factors and experiences the participants perceive as influential in their ascent to
    the position. Research on the topic of African-American female superintendents is
    scarce. The aim of this study is to contribute to the growing body of research focused
    on the unique personal stories and experiences of African-American women who
    have served and continue to serve in the position of superintendent of schools.

2. a) Your participation will involve
    ➢ Being interviewed once by the researcher and having the opportunity to participate
      in a respondent validation meeting. The participant will have the opportunity to
      review the principal investigator's findings to ensure accuracy.
    ➢ Participating in a focus group session (if participants agree). All interviews will be
      digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
    ➢ Sharing documents you feel are relevant to your ascent to the superintendency.
    ➢ Receiving copies of transcripts and preliminary interpretations of your interview
      responses for your review, comments and corrections.

    Up to 15 current and or former African-American female superintendents may be
    involved in this research.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately one hour for the interview, two hours for a focus group (if you agree) and one to two hours (at your determination) to review transcripts and preliminary interpretations.

3. There may be certain risks or discomforts associated with this research. The participants in this historical research study will be identifiable and may experience uncomfortable feelings that may come from answering certain questions. In the state of Missouri, more than one African-American female has served as a superintendent of schools. The participants will remain identifiable because the researcher seeks to provide a record of history of African-American females who have become superintendent of schools in the state of Missouri. Documentation of the stories of African-American female superintendents is scare and the researcher's aim is to contribute to research on the topic.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about African-American female superintendents in the state of Missouri and contribute to the growing body of research on the study of African-American female superintendents.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. If you want to withdraw from the study, you can contact me at (314) 503-7160 or tmh324@umsl.edu. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. By agreeing to participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with other researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection). The digital recordings will be preserved and archived for historical purposes. That agency would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your data. In addition, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Tracy M. Hinds, 314-503-7160 or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Matthew Davis, 314-516-5953. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at 516-5897.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Participant's Printed Name
Date

_____
Signature of Investigator or Designee
Date

_____
Investigator/Designee Printed Name