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Role that Professional Positioning and Professional Socialization Play in the Career Path of African American Women Superintendents

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ROLE THAT PROFESSIONAL POSITIONING AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION PLAY IN THE CAREER PATH OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS

by

Cheryl Celestin

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Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
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This dissertation examines the professional positioning and professional socialization of African American women school superintendents in the Mid-West area of the United States. Numerous studies revealed that there are very few African American women superintendents (Glass, 2000; Alston, 2000; Brunner, 1999; Ortiz, 1998; and Jackson, 1995). Women educators in general and African American women educators more specifically were not placed in professional paths that normally lead to the superintendency (Alston, 2000; Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan, 2000; and Shakeshaft, 1987). The ladder to the school superintendency had historically included male dominated line positions such as athletic coaching and band directing with appointments coming from the middle school and high school ranks (Glass, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987). The opportunities for networking, mentoring, and other professional contacts that assisted in upward mobility within an organization is known as professional socialization (Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan, 2000). For women and ethnic minorities, their career placements or professional positioning within schools along with the limited opportunities for professional socialization impeded their career mobility to the superintendency (Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987).
The significance of this study lies in its professional contribution to African American women who aspire for the superintendent's post. The African American women superintendents who participated in the study discussed their views pertaining to professional positioning and career path leading to the superintendency and the importance of professional socialization in reaching the level of school superintendent.

Women aspiring for the role of superintendent must have a clear picture of the role that professional positioning and professional socialization play in reaching the superintendency. Through the findings of this investigation relative to the role that professional positioning and professional socialization play for women who aspire for the superintendency, African American women may become knowledgeable in order to move into the highest position of school leadership. As the African American women school superintendents share their insights and experiences leading to educational leadership, aspiring women will hopefully have a concrete guidepost to aid them in successfully attaining the position of school administrators.
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Cheryl Celestin
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"One of the sad commentaries on the way women are viewed in our society is that we have to fit one category. I have never felt that I had to be in one category" - Faye Wattleton

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The complex issues for African American women educators who aspire for the superintendency lie within their professional positioning and professional socialization (Shakeshaft, 1987). The National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for 1993-1994 showed that African American women educators have the education, credentials and necessary preparation for the superintendency but there are few in the position of superintendent. Banks (1995) and Bjork (1999) in their studies supported the SASS findings that African American women educators are credentialed but the professional positioning and professional socialization opportunities are not there to support the movement of these women to the superintendency. Oritiz (1982) concluded that professional socialization for women and ethnic minorities was impeded by their placement or the positions held within schools. Women educators in general and African American women educators more specifically were not placed in professional paths that normally lead to the superintendency (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987).

The career placements and positioning of African American women in staff positions or line positions will be examined.
Thomas Glass (2000) posed the question, “Where are all the women superintendents?” Glass further offered a response to that question that women educators were poorly positioned within schools. The ladder to the school superintendency has historically included line positions such as athletic coaching and band directing with appointments coming from the middle school and high school ranks (Glass, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987). African American women have not been afforded easy access to those positions.

Nearly 75 percent of elementary classroom teachers are women. However, over three-quarters of the country’s superintendents did not teach at the elementary school level prior to serving as central office administrators or superintendents (Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987). Logan (1999) contended that the majority of superintendents held positions as building principals or assistant principals at the secondary school level. Whereas elementary schools make up approximately two-thirds of all schools in the country, Logan further stated that most leadership administrative positions within these schools are limited to principalships.

Professional socialization is defined as a continuous process of adaptation to and personalization of one’s environment (Stark, 1987). More simply stated, professional socialization is the ongoing opportunities for professional growth and development afforded educators resulting from professional grooming, formal and informal relationships, and social and professional affiliations (Curry, 2000). Curry acknowledged that professional socialization brings with it definite schools of thought, philosophies and values.
The career path of many African American women educators is often embedded within their professional socialization (Grogan, 1996). Like Curry, Grogan believed that professional socialization is acquired through formal and informal linkages. The professional socialization interactions are organizational, community and personal, and are imparted through formal policies, networking and mentoring (Brunner, 1999).

Those African American women educators with certain types of professional positioning and who had access to professional socialization chose the career paths that led to superintendency (Brunner, 1999). Since the numbers of African American women superintendents are few and studies of these women leaders are limited (Shakeshaft, 1987; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000), this study will hopefully provide a valuable career perspective for African American women superintendents on the role that professional positioning and professional socialization played in their career path to the superintendency.

Statement of the Problem

There are very few African American women superintendents (Young & McLeod, 2001). Glass (2000) supported Young and McLeod in his study that revealed there is limited support and professional socialization opportunities for African American women who aspire to become school superintendents. Ortiz (1998) and Alston (2000) stated that women in general and African American women specifically have low representation in building level administrative positions as well
as at the superintendent’s level. “One of the areas in school leadership most obviously neglected is minority women’s leadership” (Ortiz, 1998). Ortiz went on to explain the career succession in education that begins with the classroom teacher position and has an orderly mobility to school site administrator, central office official, and moves upward to the superintendency. However, for women and ethnic minorities Ortiz explained, “there is no adherence to the orderly succession.”

Young and McLeod (2001) and Logan and Scollay (1999) noted that women who have the education, certifications and credentials required for the superintendency have received limited opportunities to attain the superintendent’s position. In her study of the selection process of school superintendents, Tallerico (2000) learned that in a given recruitment situation, all things being equal, a woman’s chances are low for becoming a school superintendent as compared to the entire candidate pool. Tallerico (1999) observed that women of color are at a distinct disadvantage for the superintendency because they are not afforded the ideal career path opportunity afforded to other candidates.

Current view of Professional Positioning and Professional Socialization of African American Women Educators

Presently there is an overwhelming number of African American women, who are trained, qualified and desire administrative positions in education (Grogan, 1996; Glass, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001). These women of the 21st century are standing on the shoulders of early educators who committed themselves to educational
excellence, continuous growth of the educational system, training and preparing future leaders (Jackson, 1995).

Nationwide, women and ethnic minorities represent less than 8 percent of school superintendents (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). Approximately 4 percent of superintendents are African Americans and other non-whites. Women however made up 70 percent of the teachers nationwide (Jackson, 1995; Glass, 2000). Clearly women teachers were not positioned professionally for leadership as frequently as their male counterparts.

The Council of the Great City Schools (2000) reported that women educators are documented as well qualified, but there is still a lack of professional positioning that results in upward mobility. Curry (2000) described a longitudinal study that was conducted over a ten-year period of 142 females seeking the principalship. After 10 years, 42 percent became principals. Interestingly, the women in the study held leadership roles within their elementary schools but were not selected as principals to fill vacancies (Curry 2000).

Moody and Moody (1995) identified 45 African American women superintendents in the United States during the 1995 school year. This number represented 2 percent of the total number of superintendents. Some would argue that the imbalance in sex among school administrators provides a grave disservice to children (Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987).

A growing body of research affirmed the outstanding leadership potential of women in all administrative positions (Brunner, 1999; Keller, 1999; Curry, 2000).
Although an increasing number of women hold administrative certifications and degrees to qualify them for administrative positions, explanations cited in the literature for women's under-representation in executive position in education include lack of qualifications and training (Gupton & Slick, 1998).

The aforementioned data illustrated how women in general and African American women specifically were not in positions that navigated their career paths to educational administrative positions. The dearth of African American women educators serving as administrators and the lack of professional positioning and professional socialization could discourage women educators who aspire for the superintendency (Glass, 2000).

Throughout this country, women and ethnic minorities do not have adequate entry into the educational leadership positions (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). Women and ethnic minorities are becoming certified as school administrators and receiving the necessary professional development at a rate that is not comparable to the administrative positions they hold (Grogan, 1996). Glass (2000) reported that of the 13,728 superintendents in the country, 1,984 are women. However, nationwide data indicates that women makeup more than 50 percent of the students enrolled in educational administration programs (Glass 2000).

Professional Positioning

Professional positioning is the assignment of a series of career opportunities that may allow for upward mobility (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The placement
and movement through the ranks within the educational arena is synonymous with professional positioning according to Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000). The ultimate goal of professional positioning to be examined in this research is that which leads to school superintendency. Ortiz (1982) and Jackson (1995) observed that career direction given to women and ethnic minorities focused on staff positions rather than line positions. Staff positions were defined as elementary principals, specialists and coordinators, while line positions were secondary principals and assistant superintendent positions (Glass, 2000; Jackson, 1995; Ortiz, 1982).

Professional Socialization

Professional socialization is a continuous process of adaptation to and personalization of one's environment (Davis, 1997). Davis further stated that it is a process that continues throughout one's professional career and it occurs through internships, networking, and mentoring.

One form of professional socialization is internships. Internships offer practical experience to candidates in administrator preparatory programs. LaCost (1987) outlined three stages to an internship. (1) Reactive: Candidate observes a practicing administrator and responds in a seminar with questions, analysis, and reflection on potential to grow into a similar role. (2) Interactive: After a candidate decides to pursue training, the trainee works in concert with administrators on specific self-selected projects designed to coordinate formal knowledge development, and to develop the areas targeted for improvement. (3) Active: In this stage of
internship, candidates assume almost complete responsibility for an administrative role. This phase is accompanied by one or more seminars where interns and professors continue active dialogue on the interrelationship of theory and practice.

Women who become successful school superintendents had mentors and role models, the second form of professional socialization (Grogan, 1996). The lack of mentoring opportunities for women has been listed as a barrier in several research studies on sex inequities in education administration (Grogan, 1996; Glass, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1993). Business organizations have experimented with informal mentoring for the development of future leaders. Many schools are currently establishing mentoring programs to promote aspiring teacher leaders into administration (Borja, 2001).

The third effective tool for professional socialization may be peer networking. Networking, the process of consulting with knowledgeable and empathetic peers, can lead to reflection, questioning, and problem resolution in a structured setting (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000).

Professional socialization, through mentoring, internships and networking, can be a useful technique toward overcoming barriers to African American women who aspire for the superintendency (Grogan, 1996; Brunner, 1999). In a study of African American superintendents, the respondents mentioned the provision of a mentor as a facilitator rather than a constraint in a person’s career success (Brunner, 1999).
The Double Barriers to Educational Leadership: Race and Sex

Data on women administrators are sparse, and the data on African American women in school administration are practically nonexistent. Information known about African American women administrators indicated that they are at the bottom of the administrative heap and are likely to hold either staff positions or deal with minority concerns (Shakeshaft, 1987). African American women administrators generally assumed their first administrative position after having taught 12-20 years (Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993).

Current literature speaks of a new paradigm of leadership developing in modern organizations, due partly to the strengths that women realized they bring to the educational leadership environment (Grogan, 1996). Whereas this new prototype had been there for some time, there is an accumulation of women in formal organizations including school administration from which this change can be felt (Bancroft, 1995; Lee, 1994). The appearance of women in studies of educational leadership is relatively recent (Ah-Nee Benham & Cooper, 1998; Fennell, 1999; Brown & Irby, 1998) and is beginning to counteract the long-embraced view of educational administration as a male activity (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Even though the numbers of female administrators in education were greater than they had ever been, they remained significantly underrepresented as a sex, especially when they made up more than 70 percent of the profession (Gupton & Slick, 1998). Women and minorities did not have access to professional
socialization, the networks and sponsors that frequently help teachers gain entry into
the educational administration culture (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). With
more women holding certification and degrees to qualify them for administrative
positions, the concern shifted to the quality of their preparation and their aspirations
for advancement (Gupton & Slick, 1998).

In numerous studies on the skills needed in order for women leaders to be
successful, communication was listed as an obvious skill (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995;
Brunner, 1999). However, the surprising revelation is that embedded in
communication is sex bias. Women studied recognized that in order to succeed they
had to embrace a communication that was shaped and defined by men (Brunner 1999,
2000). Tallerico (2000) reported that headhunters for school districts seeking a
superintendent used a screening criterion that was developed by male dominated
boards. The headhunters reported looking for key phrases, jargon and experiences
that were established by men and that often pertained to male applicants. In some
instances in order to gain audiences and to be heard, women superintendents had to
use male spokespersons (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

Several authors described the barriers experienced by women as the
invisible barrier to advancement into leadership called a glass ceiling
(Shakeshaft, 1993). This barrier is called a glass ceiling because women can
see the opportunities but the path is blocked by sex, racial and systemic biases
(Morgan, 1997). However, for African American women these barriers have
become more likened to a slippery mountain or a concrete wall. Yet there are
African American women in the Mid-Western states who have managed to attain the position of school superintendent. These women in spite of the restrictions and other barriers could serve as a model for many women who aspire for administrative leadership positions within education (Brunner, 1999).

Conceptual Hypothesis Framework

Schreiber (1998) described the person-environment theory of career development stated that when an individual becomes aware of his or her interests and abilities, explores options and opportunities in the world of work, then he or she makes a reasonable match between the two. Schreiber explored the person-environment theory by observing the extent to which the opportunities support the work lives of women. As a basis for a conceptual framework, this study will explore the role that professional positioning and professional socialization play for African American women educators who aspire for the superintendency.

There are varying degrees of job placements associated with professional positioning on education. They include teaching assignments, placement within staff positions or line positions and leadership tasks assigned within those positions (Glass, 2000; Thelen & Richardson, 1997). Professional socialization can include professional affiliations such as memberships in educational organization, formal and informal networks or relationships within the educational arena, social affiliation such as memberships within community organizations, sororities, and other volunteerism,
and mentoring relationships (Ehrich, 1995). This study will examine the role that the professional positioning and professional socialization played in the career path of the African American women superintendents (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptualized Study Hypothesis
The Proposed Study

The proposed qualitative study will explore the professional positioning, and the professional socialization of five Midwestern African American women superintendents. These African American women superintendents will respond to interview questions, share scenarios, stories and verbal illustrations of their professional positioning toward leadership, and background information on the professional and social relationships that were key in attaining the position of school superintendent. The superintendents will discuss their views pertaining to professional positioning and career paths leading to the superintendency and the importance of professional socialization to the superintendency.

Research Questions

As a result of the above-stated purpose, the following questions will guide the study that will hopefully provide a clear picture of the role of professional positioning and professional socialization for five African American women superintendents.

1. What staff positions or line positions did the African American women superintendents hold?
2. What served as valuable conduits in the career paths of the African American superintendents?
3. What perspectives do African American women superintendents share on the importance of professional positioning in their careers?
4. What type of professional socialization experiences did the African American women superintendents have in their career?

5. What perspectives do African American women superintendents share on the importance of professional socialization in their careers?

Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) stated that women nurture learners but are not viewed as school leaders, and the prospect for change looks bleak. However, through data collected in this investigation, it is hoped that more African American women will become knowledgeable and equipped to move into the role of school superintendent. As the African American women school superintendents share their insights and experiences leading to educational leadership, aspiring women will hopefully have a concrete guidepost to aid them in becoming successful school leaders.

Rationale for the Study

There are African American women educators who aspire for the superintendency. The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data for 1993-94 showed an increase in the number of women and ethnic minorities who participate in the professional development for educational leadership. The data further showed that women and ethnic minorities were receiving the necessary educational credentials and certifications for administrative positions (Logan & Scollay, 1999). However, women were under-represented in school administration (Bell & Chase, 1993;
Gupton & Slick, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1987). More women were hired as elementary school principals than high school principals (Shakeshaft, 1987; Jackson, 1995; Grogan, 1996). Still, elementary school principals rarely moved into the superintendent positions.

Women educators in general and African American women educators more specifically are not placed in professional paths that normally lead to the superintendency (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987). This study will examine the professional positioning and professional socialization of African American women superintendents in the Mid-West area of the United States. The professional assignment of these women to staff positions or line positions will be reviewed. The intent of this qualitative study is to provide African American women who aspire for the superintendency with a candid view of the professional positioning that occurs in education, the professional paths that current superintendents have taken to reach their administrative posts, and the professional socialization they received in their quest for the superintendency. This study will hopefully bridge a long-standing gap for women who dominate the field of education, possess the educational credentials for the superintendency and yet are under-represented in that school administrative post (Glass, 2000).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited due the population chosen to study, African American women superintendents in the Midwest. The exclusion of other ethnic minority
women superintendents would have provided an enhanced view of the concerns around professional positioning and professional socialization limits the research. The study is further limited by the exclusion of African American and other ethnic males who have low representation in educational administration positions.

Definition of Terms

Professional positioning: Professional positioning is the assignment of a series of career opportunities that may allow for upward mobility (Glass, 2000).

Staff positions: Staff positions are professional appointments within the field of education such as elementary principals, specialists and coordinators. Though these positions have leadership responsibilities, data shows that superintendents were not historically chosen from these positions (Shakeshaft, 1987; Glass, 2000; Jackson, 1995; Ortiz, 1982).

Line positions: Line positions are the professional appointments in the field of education that are directly associated to the path leading to superintendent positions. Studies revealed that school superintendents have historically been chosen from line positions (Shakeshaft, 1987; Glass, 2000; Jackson, 1995; Ortiz, 1982). The ladder to the school superintendency has historically included line positions such as athletic coaching and band directing with appointments coming from the middle school and high school ranks.

Professional socialization: Professional socialization is a continuous process of adaptation to and personalization of one’s environment (Davis, 1997). More simply
stated, professional socialization is the ongoing opportunities for professional growth and development afforded educators resulting from professional grooming, formal and informal relationships, and social and professional affiliations (Curry, 2000).

Networking: Networking is an information giving and receiving system. It is the process of developing and using contacts for information, advice, and support (Duvall, 1980).

Sex: The biological classification of an individual into either "male" or "female" (Unger & Crawford, 1996).

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter I presents an introduction to the study. It provides an overview of the investigation and a discussion from a historical perspective of women in general and African American women specifically in educational leadership. The professional preparation, positions held and the professional socialization received by women superintendents in the field of education administration will give a rationale for this study. In this chapter the barriers African American women educators face while aspiring for the superintendency are discussed.

Chapter II presents a review of literature relevant to the study. Included are discussions from researchers on the description of the women superintendents, the uniqueness of the African American educational leader, issues that impact professional positioning and professional socialization of women in general and African American women more specifically who aspire for the superintendency. The
literature reviewed in this chapter also speaks of the systemic barriers faced by African American women who aspire for the superintendency.

Chapter III outlines the methodology of the study. The discussion includes a description of the population, the instrument, the methodology and the analysis of the data.

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. The research questions will be answered from the interviews conducted with the African American women superintendents.

Chapter V summarizes the research. Conclusions are presented relative to the participants and the research. Finally this chapter presents recommendations for additional research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide African American women who aspire for the superintendency a candid view of the professional positioning that occurs in education, the professional paths that current superintendents have taken to reach their administrative posts, and the professional socialization they received in their quest for the superintendency. Literature from experts in the area of educational leadership, women in educational leadership, and sex and racial equity in the field of educational leadership was gathered and reviewed. The literature provided information on where are the women superintendents or the representation of women superintendents in the field of education and the uniqueness of African American women educational leaders. The career paths of African American women educational leaders were examined by looking at the positions held within schools and their mobility patterns. The professional socialization of African American women educational leaders was explored in order to identify the successful role it played in advancing the careers of these superintendents. Finally, studies on the systemic issues that affect the professional positioning and professional socialization of African American women who aspire for the superintendency will be discussed.
Where are the Women Superintendents?

Women have low representation in building level administrative positions as well as at the superintendent level. Shakeshaft (1993) observed an over-representation of women teachers within the educational arena and an under-representation of women in school leadership positions. Young and McLeod (2001) noted that women have received limited opportunities to the superintendent’s position. Chase and Bell (1994) surveyed all state departments of education and learned that only 6 percent of state level superintendents were female. This study further noted that female teachers make up 70 percent of the educator population. Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) revealed that approximately 13 percent of school superintendents are women and more than half of the students in educational administration classes were women.

To further emphasize the small numbers of African American women superintendents, The Council of the Great City Schools surveyed 57 member cities in 1999 to determine the characteristics of superintendents in urban schools in America. The study revealed that of the 48 responding urban school districts 42.1 percent of the superintendents were African American and 14 percent were Hispanic. Approximately 21 percent of the superintendents were women and 17.3 percent of African American women (Council of the Great City Schools, 2000).

Similarly, Young and McLeod (2001) noted that although women currently occupy more leadership positions than they have in the past, the estimated number of women school superintendents is 13.2 percent. However, to tease out the numbers of
African American superintendents is difficult. Most superintendent demographics provided data based on sex and based on ethnic background (Shakeshaft, 1987). Therefore, data on women of African American ethnicity was not readily available.

The most current data source on African American women superintendents was found in a study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (2000). Of the 2,262 superintendents who responded to the survey, 15 or 5.1 percent were African American women.

Describing the culture of education administration, Kempner (1989) stated that women and ethnic minorities who do not share the physical, social and cultural attributes of those who predominate the administrative ranks in education do not find easy access to the “castle” of administration. Although women have historically been successful teachers and administrators, the institutionalization of education continued to ignore the numerous accomplishments of women educators (Shakeshaft, 1987; Jackson, 1995).

Finding ways to identify, hire, and support black women superintendents as well as other underrepresented groups presented a challenge for women who aspire for the superintendency (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) and Jackson (1995) noted that examining the issues in recruitment and retention of black women superintendents, revealed that informational contact or professional socialization was the primary means by which the superintendents learned of their jobs. Unfortunately, according to Jackson, for women and ethnic
minorities the informational contacts were restricted to geographical areas and in most instances the school districts in which they were employed.

African American women have continued to occupy staff positions. Tillman and Cochran (2000) revealed in their study on desegregating school leadership, that the perception of African American women based on the positions they hold within schools, continued to restrict their upward mobility to administrative positions. Likewise, Tallerico (2000) noted in her study of the impact of sex and color on recruitment in educational administration, that in the selection of superintendents higher percentages of female and ethnic minority principals were found at the elementary level rather than the secondary levels. Tallerico pointed out that women also tended to hold staff coordinator and director positions that are not in line or building base administrative levels. The study by Tallerico concluded that the strongest and best candidates were identified by positions that have direct passage to the superintendency. And further, this study revealed that these positions were unlikely to be held by women and ethnic minorities.

The literature offered several concerns about the scarcity of information on the African American woman superintendent and the omission of Black women in the educational administration profession (Shakeshaft, 1987; Brunner, 1999; Vail, 1999). Tallerico (1999) provided three general observations. First, women of color are not afforded the ideal career path opportunity that “traditional” candidates are allowed. For example, women of color often taught longer than their non-minority counterparts. Secondly, a higher percentage of women of color were experienced at
the elementary level rather than high school. This became a disadvantage because they were not in high visibility positions and therefore were not seen as superintendent’s material. According to Tallerico, women of color “...may be overly immersed in the ‘norm of teaching’ that, by implications are somewhat inferior to or less than the norms of administration”(p.112). Finally, ethnic minorities often didn’t make the initial cut of the recruiters or gatekeepers in the search and selection process. The recruiters or gatekeepers made the initial selection of candidates and often the ten to twelve chosen to be forwarded to the board resembled the school board members or looked like the “ideal” or “model” superintendent of the past (Tallerico, 1999).

To answer Glass’s question “where are the women superintendents” the literature is clear that the majority of women are within the teaching positions but not in the superintendent posts. The literature examined provided information that illustrated the under-representation of women superintendents with less representation of women superintendents of African American descent (Bjork, 2000; Brunner, 1999; Jackson, 1995). Women educators dominated the field of education, they had the professional credentials for the superintendency, and yet they were not in positions that had direct passage to the superintendency (Tallerico 2000).

Historical View of Professional Positioning and Professional Socialization of African American Women Educators

During the period from 1854-1862, African American women teachers served as classroom, church, and community educators. Their roles also included managing
the facilities, recruitment of teachers and fundraising (Hoffman, 1981). In essence, these women served as teachers and administrators. As these early African American women educators received their education and training from traditional schools they were accompanied and mentored by their white female counterparts in rural southern states. The early African American women educators received hands on training in the areas of school teaching and administration (Hoffman, 1981). Prior to the 1920’s, many African American women, once trained as teachers, were either promoted quickly to school principal or went on to establish their own schools (Daniel, 1931).

History illustrated the value of professional positioning and professional socialization as former slaves and their children were inspired through the teaching and modeling of early African American women educators (Daniel, 1931). The examples of early African American women educators made an indelible impression on future educators to move forward and to reach back. The early African American women educators moved forward in the pursuit of education and after accomplishing the goal of teacher, these women reached back to help other women who desired to teach (Revere, 1989). These early educators demonstrated the power of professional socialization as they trained and groomed their students to become future teachers and school leaders (Daniel, 1931).

Early African American educators were driven by community needs and a strong commitment to independence through education (Brunner, 1999). As young teachers worked side by side with more seasoned educational leaders, they eventually branched off into other communities to organize more schools. Though the
leadership responsibility emanated from a one-room schoolhouse, the early African American women educators became capable leaders as a result of professional positioning and professional socialization (Hoffman, 1981).

According to Daniel (1931) in the period prior to 1890, teachers in public schools were responsible for classroom instruction and administration. Also during this time period, Daniel wrote that women dominated the field of teaching. African American women educated as teachers are said to have reached 25,000 by the early 1900’s (Shakeshaft, 1987). However, Daniel and Shakeshaft reported, as education became more institutionalized and bureaucratized, the role of teacher-administrator became more distinct and separate professions. A dual level system was instituted in schools with the teacher role being filled primarily by women and the administrative role being assumed by men (Daniel, 1931; Shakeshaft, 1987).

Though predicted in the early 1900s, by Ella Flagg Young the first woman superintendent in the city of Chicago, that more women than men would be in charge of the vast educational system, this prediction has not become a reality (Mertz & McNeely, 1988; Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000). According to Biklen and Brannigan (1980) after 1928, the presence of women in educational administrative positions decreased while the prominence of men in those positions increased. Biklen and Brannigan noted that with the industrialization of American society, women became segregated to lower level positions in education. The women were kindergarten and elementary classroom teachers and the men were assigned the high level administrative positions (Revere, 1989). Based on Revere’s findings, this illustrated
the beginning of the limitations placed on the professional positioning and professional socialization of women educators. Though more than capable, educated, and skilled as leaders, society dictated the positions women educators would hold thus restricting their career paths (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980).

During the mid-1940s there was a shortage of male superintendents. The National Alliance of Black School Educators identified four male African Americans who served as predecessors to present day school superintendents (Scott, 1980). However, Revere (1989) identified an early African American woman superintendent, Velma Dolphin Ashley who served as superintendent in Boley, Oklahoma from 1944-1956. Prior to 1956, African Americans served as superintendents but their work was not recorded (Revere, 1989). Velma Dolphin Ashley was selected as superintendent of schools primarily because of her educational preparation, a Master of Arts degree (Moore, 1964). Ms. Ashley utilized professional socialization through a mentor to gain the necessary administrative training. Her mentor was a county superintendent responsible for a boys' correctional school (Revere, 1989).

With the desegregation of schools, the numbers of African American school administrators were reduced (Kowalski, 1995). From 1956 until the 1970's there was little information recorded about the African American women superintendents. By 1978, the ranks of African American superintendents included 5 women. In 1982 there were 11 African American school superintendents. By 1985 the ranks of African American women school superintendents had grown to 25 (Amez, 1986;
Revere, 1989). However almost 20 years later, the American Association of School Administrators reports a reduction of African American women superintendents to approximately 15 (Glass, 2000). The number of African American women superintendents has never reached 50 in any given year (Jackson, 1999). Alston (2000) suggested that the professional gains of African American women have been small and slow though they are academically prepared and are a dominant force in the broader educational arena.

The Uniqueness of African American Women Educational Leaders

Grogan (1996) and Glass (2000) found a tremendous number of African American women trained and qualified who desired administrative positions in education. Women and ethnic minorities represented less than 8 percent of school superintendents (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). Approximately 4 percent of superintendents were African Americans and other non-whites. Women however made up 70 percent of the teachers nationwide (Jackson, 1995; Glass, 2000).

During the 1995 school year Moody and Moody (1995) identified 45 African American women superintendents in the United States. This number represented 2 percent of the total number of African American women superintendents. The impact of this racial and sex inequity on the education of children came into question (Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987).

Women and ethnic minorities were becoming certified as school administrators and receiving the necessary professional development at a rate that is
disproportionate to the administrative positions they held (Grogan, 1996). As early as the 1980's, women comprised over half of the enrollments in educational administration programs (Epp, 1995). Schools and Staffing Survey Data 1993-94 reported that women and ethnic minority educators received degrees beyond the bachelor level more often than white males. Ironically, although women and ethnic minorities were attaining the high-level degrees and certifications for educational administration, they still faced barriers to the superintendency (Shepherd, 1998).

The Chase and Bell (1994) study explored the perpetuation and challenges for females where there was male dominance in the superintendency. The sample included 27 K-12 school districts headed by women. The schools were located in rural, small town, urban, and suburban areas and in a variety of regions around the country. The interviews with the women revealed that systemic barriers such as sex bias, cultural bias, general unwillingness to view women as leaders and an association of power with men rather than women existed (Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1995). When African American women entered educational administration positions, they experienced barriers that included lack of resources, exclusions from collaborative projects and general isolation (Gregory, 1999).

School boards have the responsibility to recruit and select superintendents (Tallerico, 2000; Ortiz, 2000). In the study conducted by Glass (2000) sex biases were revealed as search consultants were made aware the school board’s general view of women in educational leadership. The study concluded that the American society must place greater emphasis on removing the systemic barriers to positions of power
for women in education. Similarly, a study conducted by Shepherd (1998) asked if there had been any changes in perceptions regarding employment characteristics of women in educational leadership since 1978. The perception of women in leadership changed slightly over the 20-year period. Unfortunately, the African American women’s contributions to education throughout history and their status at its highest level presented a very conflicting image (Keller, 1999).

In summary, African American women were in a unique position, though they had the qualifications for the superintendency, they were often overlooked because they do not have the physical characteristics of the preconceived superintendent (Ortiz, 2000). Though African American women educators were readily accepted in the role of teacher, they were unique in that they shared the challenges to reaching the superintendency because of their sex and their skin color (Tallerico, 2000; Jackson, 1995). Finally, Tallerico stated that African American women educators were in a unique position because they were not placed in high visibility positions where they could be seen as prime candidates for educational administration.

The Professional Positioning of African American Women Educational Leaders

Professional positioning is the assignment of a series of career opportunities that may allow for upward mobility (Glass, 2000). The woman’s path to leadership starts as a teacher, and moves to various staff positions as specialist, supervisor and elementary school principal. The elementary school principalship was usually where the woman remained (Shakeshaft, 1987; Grogan, 1996; Glass, 2000). The woman
who moved into the secondary school leadership path, would more likely continue to
the superintendent’s rank. On the other hand the same individuals who started as
teacher and either advanced to line positions of coaching or band director, then to
assistant or principal status, to supervisor level and finally to superintendency
recruiters cited positions leading to the superintendent’s post that were viewed more
positively were those held by high school leaders and those with direct line
experiences.

In the study conducted for the American Association of School Administrators
(Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000), women superintendents spent more time as
classroom teachers than other educational leaders. Expressing their aspirations for
leadership for some women became a challenge to even becoming tenured teachers,
let alone, becoming an administrator (Jackson, 1995). The notion that women are not
suited for the position continued after the women have been appointed to the job
(Shakeshaft, 1987; Jackson, 1995).

A study by Logan (1999) examined sex equity in reaching educational
administration positions. The findings of this study concurred with the research
results conducted by Jackson (1995) and Curry (2000). Fifty-four department chairs
received the survey. There was a 52 percent response rate. The majority of the
respondents were women. Sixty eight percent of the department chairs responded yes
to the question of whether they found that women have more difficulty than men
obtaining employment as a principal. Seventy-eight percent agreed that women have more difficulty than men obtaining employment as a superintendent.

Being prepared, qualified, certified and competent was necessary for applying for administrative positions; however, attention must be given to the professional positioning of potential female administrators (Anderson, 2000). The studying of professional positioning of African American women superintendents will hopefully provide viable alternatives to arriving at the position that will benefit women who aspire for the role.

Regardless to the size of the school district, former secondary educators dominate the superintendency (AASA, 2000). In the study conducted by the American Association of School Superintendents (2000) nearly 50 percent of the superintendents indicated that their first administrative position was in the middle, junior or senior high school setting. Twenty-six percent of the superintendents indicated their experience was within the elementary schools. Women also reported serving in staff positions more than line positions prior to becoming superintendents. Thirty-eight percent of the women superintendents surveyed by AASA served as elementary school principals and 30 percent served as program coordinators. Another interesting result of the AASA (2000) survey, of the 1,879 males responding to questions about extracurricular activities 65.5 percent served as coaches, while 33 or 12.6% of the women served in coaching positions. African American women who aspire for the superintendency can benefit from knowing the career paths of
successful superintendents, and can decide the training and experiences that are necessary in order to be successful in achieving their goals (Anderson, 2000).

In considering professional positioning, background and training have to be considered. In research by Shakeshaft (1993) and Blanche (1996), women superintendents achieved higher levels of formal preparation. Many of the perceived barriers to women gaining a position of superintendent were sexist and unfounded (Logan, 1999). In addition respondents volunteered the following old paradigms: sex bias, “old boys’ network”, local cultural beliefs, and sexism by teachers, administrators and governing bodies. There is no surprise that the results of the study indicated that sex bias is still prevalent among department chairs (Glass, 2000; Colflesh, 2000). The presence of such barriers can greatly impact the professional positioning and professional socialization for women aspiring for administrative positions the field of education.

Studies of the career patterns of women administrators are rare due to the brevity of the educational career path for women. This path is usually from teacher, to elementary school principal, to central office (Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Vail, 1999; Brunner, 1999). Even fewer studies focus on the career movement of women superintendents. Since studies have shown that career patterns that lead to the superintendency generally come via the principalship route and most likely through the high school principalship, changes in who occupies principalship positions will affect the staffing of the superintendency post (Vail, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989).
In studies conducted by Stockard (1984), Brunner (1999) and Curry (2000), the career paths of women superintendents were found to have followed one of three lines. The first placement was from staff positions, to principal, to assistant superintendent, to the superintendent position. The second career path taken was through line position involved moving from central office administration, to assistant superintendent, to superintendent. Thirdly, in some instances the position of counselor was held after teaching, which led to administrative positions that eventually, landed the superintendent post. It is thought that the variety of tasks and high visibility of the counselor position may have contributed to those counselors who eventually received superintendent appointments. The staff position paths usually taken by women in general and African American women in particular, to attain the position of school superintendent were long and very involved (Stockard, 1984).

Women elementary school educators had less access than secondary teachers to activities, such as mentoring and internship programs that led to administrative positions (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The limitations placed on women in general and African American women specifically, excluded them from active networks of support and recognition (Clark and Caffarella, 1999). Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) and Tillman and Cochran (2000) agreed that because there are so few African American women in administrative positions, the probabilities for African American women educators finding avenues of professional socialization are low.
The incongruity in this trend was that women, holding staff positions of teacher, principals, and central office staff dominated the field of education (Glass, 2000). The numbers and roles of women superintendents in the state of Washington (Wolverton, 1999) were examined. The study revealed that 14 percent of the school superintendents in Washington and 35 percent of assistant superintendents were women. The study further revealed that women superintendents were assigned to the smaller districts (districts with less than 1,800 students). The study concluded that women did not hold the majority of the leadership positions. Women for the most part held teaching positions while the men held the principal and higher level positions (Wolverton, 1999).

General attitudes about women as leaders have been identified in numerous studies. The attitudes tended to be more discriminatory against women than supportive of women as educational leaders (Glass, 2000; Jackson, 1995; Shepherd, 1998). A longitudinal study was conducted over a fifteen-year period to assess the attitudes toward women educational leaders and to provide a comparison of the leadership styles by sex (Lougheed, 2000). Structured interviews were conducted to obtain attitudinal data. The perceptual data was separated by sex and the data was analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference in the perceptions of men and women. The total sample included 1,846 women and 1,803 men. The study concluded that there were differences in the attitudes of women and men. The attitudes that prevailed illustrated that there was discrimination against women leaders and the selection of women leaders (Lougheed, 2000). Aggressive
recruitment efforts were underway to identify ethnic minorities to fill administrative positions. Persons with at least a Masters degree held most administrative positions. Individuals with at least 11 years of service in education held most administrative positions (Milstein & Associates, 1993). In the case of women, the years of service were greater while the administrative positions were lower than their colleagues.

In looking more closely at the career paths to educational administration, women selected education as a primary option with high level of commitment to the profession. Women began working on their graduate degrees in their late 20’s and early 30’s (Shakeshaft, 1987). Women received their first administrative position later in their careers after leadership roles exceed 10 years. Women did not receive sponsorships for administrative positions (Glass, 2000). Studies showed that doors of opportunity for leadership for women, particularly African American women, were seldom opened (Shakeshaft, 1987; Gregory, 1999; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000).

The career path for women aspiring for the superintendency often included interruptions. Researchers suggested that the professional positioning of women for the superintendency is often delayed because of decisions to marry and parent (Shakeshaft, 1993; Jackson, 1999). Paddock (1981) stated that 49 percent (49%) of women administrators studied had taken maternity leave prior to and during their positions as administrators. This point practically suggested that a woman is penalized for doing what some would consider natural (Shakeshaft, 1987). This observation concurred with the early stereotype of “the teacher is a single woman
with no children” and had great impact on the professional positioning and professional socialization of women educators (Goodland, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990).

The Professional Socialization of African American Women Educational Leaders

Grogan (1996) stated that people of color needed mentors to help them get to the high level positions. Fifty-two and a half percent of superintendents surveyed by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 2000) felt that mentoring and other formal and informal professional networks existed. This same AASA (2000) study data found more ethnic minorities claimed membership in professional organizations than non-ethnic minorities. Fifty-nine percent of the ethnic minority superintendents had mentoring relationships and 89.8 percent of these superintendents considered themselves mentors (AASA, 2000). Women more often served as mentors and most women superintendents had mentors (Brunner, 1999). The inaccessibility of mentoring to women often reduced their chances of becoming school administrators (Fleming, 1991).

One argument used by school districts for having the low number of women administrators was that there are no qualified female candidates (Shakeshaft, 1987; Chase and Bell, 1994). However, a review of the 1993-1994 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data revealed that women and ethnic minorities participated more often in internship programs and yet, they held fewer administrative positions.

A major strategy for increasing the number of women administrators was to increase the number of women with administrative training (Glass, 2000). In order to give
women experience in actual administrative situations, internship experiences for women were recommended in studies conducted by Shakeshaft (1987) and Playko (1995).

Mentorships and internships were a critical link between academic preparation and practical expertise for the superintendency (AASA, 2000). The survey conducted by the AASA (2000) further revealed that 71 percent of the women superintendents reported having a mentor. Alston (2000) reported that mentoring not only facilitated the African American women in attaining the superintendency but also served to aid in maintaining and retaining that position.

Tillman and Cochran (2000) viewed professional socialization as critical to the success in attaining administrative level positions in education. Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) supported the Tillman and Cochran (2000) study, however they found that women who desired the superintendency were limited because mentoring relationship tend to evolve between people of similar backgrounds and characteristics. Bell and Chase (1993) believed that school boards which are dominated by males, select individuals that reflect their values, experiences, and language which curtails the career advancement of women. If mentors, who are traditionally White men believe that only those who look and think like them fit school administration, neither women nor ethnic minorities will be mentored (Tallerico 2000).

It has been said throughout this document that African American women represent a very low percentage of superintendents (Glass, 2000; Alston, 1999;
Brunner, 1999; Ortiz, 1998; Jackson, 1995). Therefore, African American women who aspire for the superintendency are placed at a disadvantage for gaining a mentor. Research supports the fact that the mentoring needs of women often differ from those of men (Hubbard & Robinson, 1998; Smulyan, 2000).

Riehl and Byrd (1997) supported Shakeshaft (1987) and Tillman and Cochran (2000) that professional socialization had a tremendous impact on women who aspired for the superintendency. As Young and McLeod (2001) studied women superintendents, role models and mentors were continuously mentioned as having an impact on their career path. Women who were mentored attained higher levels of professional development than those women who were not mentored according to a study conducted by Major (1988). A woman who was qualified to assume advanced leadership positions in education and was mentored was more likely to achieve her goals of educational administrator than women who did not receive mentoring (Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan, 2000). For African American women who aspired for the superintendency, professional socialization such as the mentoring provided exposure and networks that increase knowledge and opportunities for advancement within the profession (Scalon, 1997; Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan, 2000).

Research supported the fact that networking with other professionals was an attribute of a successful educational administrator (Hackney, 1999; Marcano, 1997). In a study of school administrators conducted by Holtkamp (2002), the respondents reported membership in professional organizations. Networking, professional growth and affiliations with professional organizations were identified as important by all
administrators in the Holtkamp study. The respondents considered networking as a powerful force for uniting for a greater voice over political and other systemic barriers.

Females were the majority group participation in internship programs according to 1993-94 SASS data. Aggressive recruitment efforts were underway to identify ethnic minorities to fill administrative positions. Persons with at least a Masters degree held most administrative positions. Individuals with at least 11 years of service in education held most administrative positions (Milstein & Associates, 1993). In the case of women, the years of service were greater while the administrative positions were lower than their colleagues.

The SASS data, 1993-94, showed that women and ethnic minorities were more likely to participate in the formal mentoring and professional development programs offered by their school districts and yet they held a small percentage of the administrative positions. Clearly professional socialization was not the only key for African American women who aspire for the superintendency. Hampton conducted a study in 1998 on the national disparity of women in educational leadership. The researcher provided an exposition on the barriers to change the problem of race and sex inequity among the nation's school superintendents. Winn (1993) discovered that women reported facing the lack of influential mentoring and networking opportunities as well as other barriers while actually participating in formal mentoring programs. The studies by Shakeshaft (1987) and Blanche (1996) revealed
that women believed it necessary to earn higher degrees, enlist a mentor, and understand the politics of the community in order to overcome barriers.

While professional socialization, such as mentoring, had been identified in studies as beneficial to women who aspire for the superintendency (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Brunner, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1987), in the study conducted by Winn (1993) African American women were underrepresented in the programs. According to Winn those women who participated in the mentoring programs identified systemic barriers within the actual mentoring programs.

Systemic Barriers for African American Women Superintendents

Clark and Caffarella (1999) identified the single greatest barrier to women who aspire to educational leadership as the systemic lack of appreciation of women in society. Morrison (1997) and Shakeshaft (1987) provided studies that expounded on what was termed as a “lop-sided” career model that had been established for educational administrators. According to Morrison and Shakeshaft, the model did not give way to women in general and African American women specifically, and had as its belief that women and ethnic minorities will adjust to the design. However, women had been noted entering the superintendency, although at low percentages and African American women were represented even lower percentages (AASA, 2000). “Scholars, practitioners, and gatekeepers (those who control entry into educational leadership) are socialized and participate in a society that makes cultural assumptions about women and people of color. Those cultural assumptions grow out of societal
norms and values that marginalize these two groups. Decisions about who is the focus of research, who is recruited and hired, and who does or does not get promotions are made within a social context in which women and people of color experience an inferior social status and are often objects of negative stereotypes” (Banks, 1995, p.67). In order to adjust the career model, those in power within educational, political and social power must recognize the disservice of current trends in professional positioning and professional socialization of women in general and African American women specifically (Vail, 1999; Whitaker & Lane, 1990).

Houston’s study (2001) described the career positioning in today’s school administration as an inverted pipeline. His observation characterized two types of professionals, the “wannabes” and the “oughtabes.” African American women who are prepared for the school superintendency would fit into the “oughtabes” category because not only have they prepared themselves academically and gained the experience at the staff level positions, currently two-thirds of district office staff are women. Many of these women had mastered the skills necessary to lead because of their positions and responsibilities as district level managers (Houston, 2001). The unavailability of support systems to facilitate the movement of these “oughtabes” into the superintendency was cited as the perpetuation of social injustice (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

In a series of articles on women superintendents in the Midwest, Keller (1999) addressed the patterns of career positioning and the limitations to reaching the superintendency due to the lack of professional socialization. Grogan (1996) and
Keller (1999) agreed that there were systemic challenges with cultural contradictions about the role and capabilities of women and ethnic minorities. One school of thought according to Grogan (1996) was that the superintendent’s job is powerful; therefore women and ethnic minorities were not competent for successfully leading at that level.

Shakeshaft (1987), Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000), and Tillman and Cochran (2000) identified a major systemic concern relative to professional positioning within colleges and universities educational administration programs. Grogan’s study (1996) revealed that educational administration programs within universities teach to a 50 percent female population while only 25 percent of the faculty members were women and even fewer were African American women. Further, the administrative coursework in educational administration programs was often silent on issues related to race and sex (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) suggested that university educational administration programs must cease in replicating themselves and apply different approaches to insure relevance by reflecting race and sex issues in course content and application.

In order to impact systemic issues relative to sex and racial inequity in educational administration, awareness must not be presented as a fact but as a problem that requires attention (Young & McLeod, 2001). The fact that traditional theories of educational leadership were the focus of most educational administration programs is a systemic problem. Educational administration students needed exposure to nontraditional leadership that can aid in the acceptance of women and
ethnic minorities in positions of superintendency (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987; Marshall, 1999). Therefore, it is critical that school-university collaborative relationship be established and maintained in preparing aspiring superintendents. The lack of political savvy has been identified as a systemic barrier in that the traditional role of the superintendent did not require the range of individual and groups with who the superintendent must collaborate and form relationships. In her study on the re-conception of the superintendent’s role, Grogan (2000) noted that there was a heightened need for superintendents to have human relations skills. That is, according to Grogan, the ability to meet with and work with diverse groups, to negotiate and re-negotiate, and the ability to forge ties among groups. Alston (2000) agreed with Grogan that the woman superintendents need these skills that were defined as political skills. Alston and Grogan further stated that educational administration programs have to make political skills for superintendents a high priority as a part of the core curriculum.

In a changing economy the woman superintendent must be prepared to fill the role of educator and businessperson. This systemic barrier existed because again, the traditional educational administration programs emphasize the role of the superintendent as community education leader (Alston, 2000). However, the demands for specialized services and curricular offerings call for the woman superintendent to manage the school district costs effectively (Grogan, 2000). Alston concurred with Grogan that the position of superintendent had become more
associated with corporate leadership skills infused with political maneuvering than with fundamental educational knowledge and expertise.

Whitaker and Lane (1990) recommended that universities and schools enter into partnership to encourage women to enter school administration training programs. The authors further suggested that women professors in educational leadership and administration programs serve as mentors and role models for women who aspire for the superintendency. In addition Alston (2000) recommended that universities take the lead in collaborating with school districts in identifying qualified African American women to train for the superintendency.

Internships, field studies, practicum experiences, and other professional growth opportunities should expose aspiring leaders to models that represent sex and ethnic diversity (Young & McLeod 2001). According to the American Association of School Administrators (2000) women reported the importance of professional experiences that were meaningful and relevant. African American women reported receiving professional socialization more often from other African American women and provided professional socialization more often to the same (AASA, 2000).

Research by Young and McLeod (2001) indicated that the race and sex imbalance in educational leadership must be addressed through conscious raising and concerted efforts by political leaders, school boards, teacher education programs and professional organizations. Outside of the family, the role modeling that young people see in schools will provide the primary example about how society should be structured (Blount, 1997). As long as schools are structured in a sex dominated,
hierarchical system, a subtle and yet pungent lesson will be taught that children will embrace about their expectations for men and women (Shakeshaft, 1987; Blount, 1997).

Superintendents and school boards had great influence in the hiring processes within school districts. In the last twenty years the number of women enrolling in graduate programs, which prepare individuals to be educational administrators in public schools, was reported to have increased (Alston, 2000; Brunner, 1999; Ortiz, 1998). The numbers of African Americans with school administrator certifications had also risen (AASA, 2000). However, the number of women who had been employed in positions in educational administration was still far fewer than the number of men (AASA, 2000; Bushweller, 1997).

Ortiz (1998) observed a systemic barrier for ethnic minority women who aspire to the superintendency called sponsored mobility. Herein, the senior level administrators sponsored junior level staff with which there was skin color and sex identification. Ortiz noted that because these senior level positions were held by white males, sponsored mobility was not seen as a viable option for African American women who aspire to the school superintendency.

Continual systemic, cultural and sex barriers blocked the advancement of African American women into educational administration (Bell and Chase, 1995). While women prepared for the school leadership ranks continued to emerge, they were the most abundant and yet unused resource for the job of superintendency (Vail, 1999). Professional positioning and professional socialization is the key to unlocking
the door to the superintendency where African American women are underrepresented.

Collins (1991) in her review of African American women and social mobility, stated that while African American women have made some gains, they still face inequities because of their race, sex and socio-economic class. Collins asserted that school leaders, leaders of higher educational institutions, and politicians must recognize and acknowledge that the current professional positioning, professional socialization and other systemic barriers for African American women can not continue to be treated as though these educators are marginal and lack importance in the whole scheme of education. African American women educators who aspire for the position of superintendent have the credentials (SASS, 1994; AASA, 2000) and what remains to be seen is a realignment of the professional positioning, more opportunities for professional socialization, and banishment of the systemic barriers.
"What most successful blacks learn is that most everything can, in fact, be learned — how to talk how to dress, how to groom an image for success. The important thing is to recognize what is not known and then learn it." — Audrey Edwards and Craig K. Polite

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide African American women who aspire for the superintendency a candid view of the professional positioning that occurs in education, the professional paths that current superintendents have taken to reach their administrative posts, and the professional socialization they received in their quest for the superintendency. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claimed that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. Qualitative research reveals qualities of group experience in a way that other forms of research cannot (Myers, 1997). This research method can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Qualitative research provides detail and insights into participants’ experiences of the world, that may be cognitively in harmony with the reader’s experience and thus more meaningful (Stake, 1978). Alston (2000) believed that the study of small and slow professional gains of the African American women superintendents served
to enlighten women who aspire to high levels in education administration. Therefore this qualitative study will seek to understand facts, trends and events in a context-specific setting (Patton, 1990).

Marshall and Rossman (1995) agreed that quality research expands the range of knowledge and understanding. Qualitative research can reveal interrelationships among multifaceted dimensions among participants and provide a context for behaviors. This research can allow the qualitative researcher to identify reoccurring patterns of behaviors among the participants, according to Marshall and Rossman.

Jackson (1999) used the qualitative research approach when she interviewed and surveyed women superintendents from around the United States. In 1986, Dopp and Sloan conducted a study of the career paths and patterns of women superintendents. Like Jackson, Dopp and Sloan utilized a qualitative research approach including the conducting of interviews. Brunner (1999) utilized what she considered established methods of qualitative research in her study inequality among women superintendents. Through several conversations and interview sessions, qualitative data was obtained around sex bias and other barriers faced by the superintendents. Ah-Nee, Benham and Cooper (1998) utilized the qualitative research method in their study of nine women school leaders. The qualitative research method was considered valuable by these researchers because they gained a broad understanding of the world and the ideas held by the women superintendents in the study.
Through face-to-face interviews, this qualitative study will hopefully provide valuable insights from African American women currently serving as school superintendents and strategies for African American women who aspire for the role of superintendent. This research will attempt to make sense of the professional positioning and professional socialization experiences of 5 Midwestern African American women superintendents. In keeping with the description of qualitative research by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), this study will explore how the African American women’s experiences in professional positioning and professional socialization intersect or are connected. It is hoped that this study will provide encouragement for African American women to strive for educational leadership positions in spite of the systemic, institutional and bureaucratic barriers.

Selection and Participation Process

The participants for this study included African American women superintendents in the Midwest. Because, there are no strict criteria for sample size in qualitative studies (Patton, 1990), the sample size for this study was selected based on the number of participants who responded to the request to participate in the study.

The listing of Black Women School Superintendents was obtained from a professional organization with a primary membership coming from African American school administrators. From the list, eight women superintendents were identified. Letters of introduction were sent to the superintendents briefly describing the study and requesting an informational meeting to further discuss the study. A follow up
telephone call was placed to the superintendents within two weeks of the mailing of the letter. Five of the eight superintendents agreed to an informational meeting to discuss the study. Meetings were scheduled over a two-month time period.

During each of the informational meetings the superintendents agreed to participate in the interviews. The documents necessary to satisfy the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board protocol were read and signed by the superintendents. The superintendents were informed that their names, school districts and any other identifying descriptions would be excluded from the study. Certain other identifiable features, such as city of residence, names of mentors, etc., have been altered to protect the identity of the participants. The superintendents were informed that pseudonyms would be used. The names assigned to the five superintendents include Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda, and Zaporia. All participants responded to the interview questions (Appendix C).

Description of Participants

The participants were African American women superintendents serving in school districts in the Midwest. The women were between 45-59 years of age. The superintendents held at least a Master’s degree. Two of the superintendents were certified in secondary education, one was certified in K-12, one was certified in elementary education and the fifth superintendent holds a Master’s degree in post-secondary education. Four superintendents serve in major cities throughout the Midwest while one superintendent served in a small suburban community.
Amelia, Linda, and Zaporia held doctoral degrees. Sylvia was enrolled in a doctoral program and was writing her dissertation proposal. Linda held two Master's degrees and extensive post-Master’s training in the area of school superintendency. Amelia, Beatrice, Linda and Zaporia relocated when they accepted the position of school superintendent. These superintendents held between 1 and 7 years of experience in their current positions. All of the superintendents were members of a sorority and mentioned the importance of that membership to their careers.

Measures

This qualitative study examines the uniqueness and similarities of the Midwestern African American women superintendents through structured interviews and observations. During the interview the superintendents were asked to relay stories and experiences in professional positioning and professional socialization that helped them to reach the goal of school superintendent.

Structured Interview

A structured interview was the primary method of collecting data. Qualitative research uses the natural setting as the source of data (Patton, 1990). Within their school district setting, these African American women superintendents responded to interview questions, provided stories and background information to describe the motivating factors that allowed them to strive for the position of superintendent. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated that structured interviews might be used as a
primary strategy for data collection or in conjunction with observation, document analysis or other techniques. The superintendents responded to open-ended questions that allowed for their individual variations and the uniqueness of their experiences to be revealed. During these audiotape recorded interviews the superintendents provided their views on:

- Professional positions held by women in education
- Professional development and career path leading to the superintendency
- The importance of professional socialization to the superintendency
- Internal drive, motivation, resilience, and courage to aspire for the superintendency

The structured interview questions were categorized as professional positioning and professional socialization. Each category had a minimum of ten questions. The questions addressed the following:

Professional Positioning

- Influence in decision to pursue education as a career
- Student teaching placement and experience
- First teaching position
- Subsequent teaching positions
- First school leadership function
- Educational administrative positions held
- Personal observations on sex inequity in professional positioning in education
• Personal observations on systemic barriers in professional positioning in education

Professional Socialization

• Professional socialization experiences in high school and college
• Professional socialization experiences through affiliations with community organizations
• Professional socialization through educational organizations
• Internship and other professional growth opportunities
• Formal or informal mentoring experiences
• Personal observations on sex inequity in professional socialization in education
• Personal observations on systemic barriers in professional socialization in education

Participant Observation

Participant observation was the secondary method used in data collection. According to Hoepfl (1997) observational data are used for the purpose of description of settings, people and activities. Tochim (2001) states that participant observation is a common data collection method in qualitative research. He further states that it is important that the researcher establishes an acceptance by the person being interviewed in order to assure that the observations are of the natural phenomenon. During the interview process, the superintendents’ surroundings, presentation, affect,
and overall demeanor will be observed. Hand written notes were kept on the observations made of each superintendent. Observations deemed significant to this study were incorporated in Chapter 4.

Disadvantages of Qualitative Research

Research experts Connelly and Clandinin (1990) believed that qualitative research can bias the design, provide too little data that can lead to false assumptions, and lends itself to replicability. Given the small number of participants in qualitative studies, some researchers (Borman, LeCompte and Goetz, 1986) believed that false assumptions could be drawn about behavior patterns. Finally, Connelly and Clandinin suggested that the mere presence of the researcher alters the qualitative study to some degree.

Conclusion

The research results from the structured interviews were compiled and compared as provided by each superintendent. Commonalities among the African American women superintendents in Michigan were elaborated upon. The setting, affects, and general responsiveness when remarkable were recorded as participant observations. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide insights for African American women who aspire for the role of school superintendent. The professional positioning and professional socialization of these African American women superintendents emphasized the importance of the assignment of a series of career
opportunities that allowed for upward mobility and the ongoing formal and informal professional relationships in reaching the level of school superintendent.
CHAPTER IV
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS SPEAK

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide African American women who aspire for the superintendency a candid view of the professional positioning that occurs in education, the professional paths that current superintendents have taken to reach their administrative posts, and the professional socialization they received in their quest for the superintendency. This study examined whether professional positioning and professional socialization played a critical role in the career paths of five Mid-Western African American women superintendents. Through one on one interviews the women spoke candidly about their backgrounds, experiences, and paths that led to the position of chief administrator of schools, the superintendency, and responded to the questions regarding their professional positioning and professional socialization.

The five superintendents consented to an audio taped interview. Appendix A provides a list of the interview questions that were posed to each African American woman superintendent participating in the qualitative research. The questions were designed to reveal the career positioning that occurred, the professional paths taken to reach the administrative posts, and the professional socialization received in the quest
for the superintendency by each African American woman superintendent. These
interviews provided solid insights of African American women who reached the goal
of superintendent.

The interview questions helped shape and direct the discussion with the
superintendents and to answer the following research questions:

1. What staff positions or line positions did the African American women
   superintendents hold?
2. What served as valuable conduits in the career paths of the African American
   superintendents?
3. What perspectives do African American women superintendents share on the
   importance of professional positioning in their careers?
4. What type of professional socialization experiences did the African American
   women superintendents have in their career?
5. What perspectives do African American women superintendents share on the
   importance of professional socialization in their careers?

The Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in the superintendents’ offices. The walls of
the superintendents’ offices were decorated with awards and certificates of
recognition for their leadership and/or participation in community and professional
organizations. Their academic degrees were displayed in most of the
superintendents’ offices. The superintendents were cordial, appeared relaxed and
were very warm in their reception of the interview. The timeframe for each interview ranged from 1 ½ hour to 2 hours per superintendent.

District and Community Demographics

The school districts varied in size, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic makeup. The communities of each school district were similarly diverse. The sample used was contrary to what the literature suggests that African American women superintendents lead urban school districts with the majority of the population being African American (Shakeshaft, 1987). Some African American women superintendents interviewed were leading school districts within communities having less than 10% ethnic minority populations.

The superintendents’ administrative staff consisted of about 50 percent women. The ethnic background of the administrative staff was diverse. Each of the African American women superintendents talked about the scarceness of women in the educational administration positions. These women expressed their commitment to help mentor women who were seeking educational administration positions.

Research Questions Addressed by the African American Women Superintendents

Research Question 1: What did the African American women superintendents share in common in their professional backgrounds?

Interview Protocol Questions 1-4 and 8

1. What influenced your decision to pursue education as a career?
2. What was your undergraduate major when you entered college?

3. What other fields did you consider as a major?

4. How did you arrive at elementary (or secondary) education as your teaching preference?

8. How did your initial teaching experiences influence your decision to seek educational administration positions?

These African American women superintendents’ professional backgrounds were similar in the sense that all of them received undergraduate degrees in education. Though Zaporia chose a special educational field of study in the kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) curriculum, she states, “Well, my background is a K-12. In fact my administrative certificate is secondary, yes, so it is a certification for K-12 and it’s identified when I got my principal certification, as well as central office, everything was listed as secondary.” Amelia, Beatrice, and Linda selected secondary education major as their field of study. Only one superintendent, Sylvia, majored in elementary education. She recalls, “I arrived at elementary. I wanted to get the children while they were young and impressionable. I wanted to get them while I thought I could make a bigger difference. At that age, children are more receptive. They want to learn, they still have a lot of hope. They are still enthusiastic about life. They haven’t been scared by life experiences, so I wanted to get to children while they were young and impressionable.”

Each woman entered the field of education upon completing their bachelor’s degree; however, their first professional positions varied significantly. Two of the
women began their careers as classroom teachers within the K-12 settings, Sylvia in an elementary and Linda in a high school. The other three of the women superintendents began their educational careers as a business and industry professional, technical analyst for school districts, or alternative learning environment educator. Even though, Zaporia’s educational certification was in K-12, her first position was not within a tradition classroom. Clearly the differences are attributed to undergraduate majors selected by these women.

Those women who chose a K-12 curriculum or a secondary education field of study had greater professional opportunities available to them than those who majored in elementary education. After working in a major midwestern city, Zaporia relocated to continue using her K-12 certification. She explained her positioning, “I worked for one particular school district twice; once in the area of special education. I was there for two years and then I was recruited to smaller district where I then became supervisor of Special Education. My supervisor, when I was in the larger district, was a Caucasian male. I made him aware that I wanted to be an administrator and he did nothing to assist me. And it was only after I went to the smaller district that I was able to move up. I held three administrative positions within a course of seven years, so I was a supervisor for one year, a director for two years, and then a principal for four years. I held the position of Deputy Superintendent for eight years before being appointed Superintendent.”

Linda’s experiences were somewhat similar to Zaporia. Her initial teaching assignment was in secondary education. She describes her 18 years in education as
follows: "After teaching high school, I became a Counselor. From Counselor I became a Title 1 Coordinator; Assistant Principal with a high school, Principal within a high school, and Deputy Superintendent. After a major career change, I returned to education to accept the Superintendent position."

In response to the interview question, "What influenced your decision to pursue education as a career the influences differed among the women. Amelia stated, "In my senior year of high school, I became interested in high school counseling as a career choice. Throughout my undergraduate education, I was able to aim towards high school counseling. " Sylvia stated, "I love children and I can make a positive difference in their lives. I saw educators who were passionate, who are committed, who are enthusiastic, who saw the importance of educating all children, and seeing how that connects with the world in general, how producing students who are articulate, confident and well educated influences our daily lives locally, nationally and internationally." Linda’s entrance to the field of education was quite different than Amelia and Sylvia. Linda stated, "I had mixed a college prep with a business curriculum in high school and when I got ready to graduate, I had a high grade point average and was given two scholarships. So I ended up at a local university on a two-year degree track with one other African-American woman and 298 white girls. I completed the two-year degree. Most of the women I had affiliated myself with in my sorority were on educational tracks, and so I missed them and decided to go back. So I went back and became a teacher, which caused me to go four and a half years in order to parlay the two-year degree into a Secondary
Education Degree.” Beatrice explained, “I was drawn to education because I have a deep passion for the ‘little people.’ The younger people tend to motivate me.” Zaporia knew as a high school senior that she wanted to be a teacher. “A special education teacher whose classroom was near my locker asked me about my college plans. When I said I wanted to be a teacher, he told me about certain areas within special education that were good fields for women. I took his advice.”

Findings:

The professional backgrounds of these African American women superintendents’ were similar in that all of them received undergraduate degrees in education. Each woman entered the field of education upon completing their bachelor’s degree, however, their first professional positions varied significantly. Those women who chose a K-12 curriculum or a secondary education field of study had greater professional opportunities for career advancement than the one superintendent who majored in elementary education. The superintendent who majored in elementary education demonstrated leadership skills during her early elementary teaching years. The school administrator noted her leadership ability and she quickly moved into a staff level leadership position. That staff level position became the springboard for her to move into a line position that led to an administrative position.
Research Question 2: What staff positions and line positions did the African American women superintendents hold?

Interview Protocol Questions 6 and 9

6. Describe your first teaching position.

9. What administrative positions have you held?

Amelia and Beatrice are unique in that they never held staff positions in education. These women were trained as secondary or K-12 educators. Amelia explained the positions she held: “I came right out, after I student taught during my senior year, I finished up, I had another semester to go, so I substitute taught while finishing my last semester at a local university. I went directly from that into the Central Office working in the area of testing and assessments. Because I had taken some related courses in undergraduate school I was prepared for the assessments area. From that position I worked with Title I, and various state and federal programs within the Central Office. I was appointed Director of the Office of State and Federal Programs. I held the position of Director of Community and Legislative Relations, which were basically lobbyists for the school district. I was Deputy Superintendent for Instruction.”

Though Zaporia started out in an alternative learning environment she later became a special education professional within the K-12 setting. Because her credentials were K-12, she only served briefly in a staff position before being given leadership roles in her area of specialization. This leadership role quickly moved Zaporia into a line position. As she told her story, Zaporia recalled, “I recruited to a suburban district. Prior to accepting the teaching position, I made my aspirations for
an administrative position know. I went to this school district and worked in the classroom for six weeks. An opportunity presented itself for a supervisor of Special Education. I interviewed for the supervisor's position and received it. And so therefore, I stayed in that position for the remainder of that school year. Then the Director of Special Education came available. Here again, this person who had recruited me to school district, served as a mentor for me, was very supportive, went above and beyond in working with me and to see that I was prepared for the Director's position. This person had a real heart for seeing that minorities had opportunities and that they were able to obtain the positions for which they qualified. I became Director of Special Education.”

Linda, a secondary educator, held one staff position before moving into the area of Counseling, which is considered a line position. She shared her professional accomplishments including, Title 1 Parent Coordinator, High School Assistant Principal, High School Principal, and Assistant Superintendent.

An interesting point to note regarding the positions held by Sylvia is that early in her career as an elementary educator her leadership qualities were observed by her principal and she was asked to become the primary chairperson. She stated, “I think the principal saw in me leadership skills and asked me to become the primary chairperson and as a first year teacher, to be asked that, to be asked to lead teachers who were older than I and were experienced, that was a privilege.” From the position of primary chairperson, Sylvia became an Educational Resource Specialist and moved into the ranks of line positioning. “Now, the Education Resource
Specialist, was that like a mid-level position between staff and administrator. I’ve been an elementary school principal and director of elementary education,” she stated. Though not placed in the line staff positions initially, clearly Sylvia’s skills and leadership abilities were being observed by school administration and she moved from staff level positions into line positions. Although, she came from the ranks of an elementary school teacher, Sylvia demonstrated noteworthy leadership that helped to navigate her career to the superintendency.

Findings:

To summarize the positioning of these five African American women superintendents, those who were secondary and K-12 educators one moved rapidly from staff positions to line positions. One K-12 educator because of her Special Education background spent time in an alternative educational setting before moving into line positions. It is interesting to note that one of the superintendents with a secondary education background moved directly to a Central Office line position. However, the one teacher with an elementary education major demonstrated leadership skills early in her career that helped her to advance from staff to line positioning, and on to the superintendency.

Research Question 3: What served as valuable conduits in the career paths of the African American women superintendents?

Interview Protocol Question 12

12. How did the positions you held prior to administration aid you in becoming a
Clearly, choosing the path of K-12 or secondary education proved most valuable for three of the African American women superintendents. From the classroom, two of the three women moved directly into line positions. The other two women briefly served in staff positions before moving into line positions. For Linda the line positions can easily be mapped. She served as school counselor, Title I Parent Coordinator, Assistant Principal, Principal, Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent. Each position prior to the superintendency was held approximately 3 years. With the superintendent with the K-12 certification, her career movement towards leadership was within her areas of specialization. For instance if the superintendent’s certification was in Special Education, her career movement from special education teacher included Supervisor of Special Education, Director of Special Education, and Director of Student Services.

Zaporia recalled the advice of a mentor who said, “Zaporia in order for you to move to central office, it is my belief that you have to be a building principal before you do that.” Zaporia continued to explain, “So then, I interviewed for a building principalship, an elementary principalship. I got that position, but I also worked for six summers as the summer school principal at the high school, so that gave me high school. Then I shadowed some principals at both levels, elementary and secondary. And after shadowing both levels and seeing that the work as an elementary principal allowed me to really dabble into a lot more than what being a high school assistant principal would have allowed me to do, because most of that was with discipline and
things along that line, where being an elementary principal allowed me to do it all. So I was going to have an opportunity to work with the budget, an opportunity to do evaluations, an opportunity to do the discipline, to work with parents, to really work on student achievement, so really it was more of a well-rounded position.” From the elementary school principal position Zaporia moved to an Assistant Superintendent position and then to a Superintendent post.

Also significant in the career paths of the school leaders was a strong knowledge of business administration, within schools and outside of the educational forum. Beatrice left education, earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, worked with a Fortune 500 corporation, and based on values and personal ethics decided it was time to help shape and mold children by returning to the field of education. She stated, “I have been drawn back to education and I have always had a deep passion for the ‘little people,’ the younger tend to motivate me. I think the world, from what I have seen in the corporate world, it is going to be exceptionally challenging for young people. And those who are going to survive are going to need to be able to adapt readily to change, have good strong fact-finding skills and know how to do informational reading, fact finding, to connect this unrelated box. Also, critical thinking skills because every day 300 jobs go out of the economy; those are the lower non-technical manual kinds of jobs; 1,300 jobs are created on the other side of that coin. But those 1,300 jobs are higher order thinking skills. So those are knowledge workers and increasingly we see in America that we have moved from a manufacturing age to an information age, and the information age what you are
looking for are knowledge workers. And so the individual who comes with a skill set
where they have unique knowledge and unique skills is highly valued and highly
paid. Physicists are still hard to come by, so they are very highly paid. Computer
programmers are a rare breed, and they are very well paid, and the more innovative
they are the more they get paid. That’s what brought me back to try and bring the
children to this level of awareness.”

A point to be considered is that knowledge of the politics around education
can be advantageous for superintendents. Noteworthy, is the experience of Linda.
She stated, “I left education after 18 years and went into a political position in a city
of 3 million people. So I was a major decision maker and spent a successful 4 years
within the political arena. I gained professional experience in a broader community
forum and then returned to education as a high level administrator.”

Similarly, involvement in the political arena proved to be an asset in the career
path for Amelia. This superintendent served in a major political activist role that
allowed her to gain knowledge and expertise necessary as a school superintendent. “I
was director of the Office of State and Federal Programs. I was the director of
Community and Legislative Relations, which were basically lobbyists for the school
district,” she recalled. Amelia’s political position later opened the door for a Deputy
Superintendent position that led to a Superintendent position. “In all of the positions
held, particularly as a lobbyist, I was provided with the opportunity to know. I had an
opportunity to know the local environments, the state environments, and even the
national environments relative to education. So I had an opportunity to gain this
knowledge very early in my career which benefited me in becoming a superintendent.

When asked how the positions held prior to administration aided in becoming a school administrator, Linda stated, "I think all the positions that I held. I was in an all white department, I was the only black teacher in the building. I was in a building of 1,500 kids and a 100 staff and I was the only black. And I think standing alone, supporting the students, being in charge of the Afro-American Club, putting on the plays, and having to beg to have the lights turned on, having to just really claw up hill to do anything outstanding for kids, made me become a leader. I then ended up getting in the Union and most administrators you find today, most of us were union leaders. So I was a union person, involved in leadership in the Labor Union, and I think that comes from your feeling of power. As women you just don’t have any power, so you get into a group that can help you, and so I think that was the avenue that I had to take. I was leading the kids as the only black administrator/teacher".

Zaporia described the positions that aided her in becoming a school leader. She said, "Because I was in a special education track and I had an opportunity to work with not only elementary, but I worked in high school settings, so therefore I got a chance to interact with a number of teachers. I got a chance to arrange and hold meetings with teachers regarding the needs of kids, as well as with administrators and also working a lot with parents. I got a lot of experience doing that at the elementary, as well as the secondary level. So I was coming in with experience at
both levels. And so even when I went to central office positions where I was working with high school, as well as elementary, those were not unfamiliar territories for me. “

Prior to becoming an administrator, Sylvia stated, “Oh, I saw as a teacher, prior to becoming a principal, how certain administrators handled challenges, handled angry parents, handled teachers who were less than capable, handled students who were ADHD or who were challenged academically or physically or emotionally, and I said to myself, ‘I would do this differently. If given the chance, I would do this differently and give them a chance.’ I did a lot of observing, a lot of looking, analyzing and collecting strategies that I thought that I would employ, but also discarding strategies that I said I would never use in dealing with teachers, parents or students.”

Each of these women expressed the valuable preparation they received from each position they held prior to becoming a superintendent. In whatever position or career paths taken these women rose to leadership and gained expert knowledge in their appointed fields.

Findings:

Clearly, choosing the path of K-12 or secondary education proved most valuable conduits for three of the African American women superintendents. From the classroom, two of the three women moved directly into line positions. The other two women served briefly in staff positions before moving into line positions. Each of these women expressed the valuable preparation they received from each position
they held prior to becoming a superintendent, whether it was a line position or a staff position. In whatever position or career paths taken these women rose to leadership and gained expert knowledge in their appointed fields. The superintendents stressed that having knowledge of the politics around education served as advantageous and valuable conduits in their career paths. The awareness and knowledge of business administration within schools and outside of the educational forum served as important factors in the career paths of the superintendents.

Research Question 4: What type of professional socialization experiences did the African America women superintendents have in their career?

Interview Protocol Questions 1, 2, 4, 9

1. What were your experiences in professional socialization prior to entering college?

2. Name some of the community organizations with which you have a long-standing affiliation?

4. What are some of your affiliations within education organizations?

9. Who was your first mentor? How did that mentor influence your career path?

Each superintendent shared her experiences in professional socialization. The professional affiliations listed by these African American women superintendents included social and community based groups with memberships made up of professionals. Amelia recalled, “Actually, my senior year of high school, I was asked to be on the, actually the very first student representative on the Urban League. I had obviously very strong role models through those in leadership positions. So I knew the professionals in community service, courts and organizations as role models.
when I was very young. Those types relationships continued, as I became an educator."

All of the women superintendents were members of a national historically black sorority. These sororities have membership made up of college-educated women, many of whom are educators. As relationships formed between younger women and more mature women educators, these informal, sisterly relationships crossed-over to professional networking opportunities. Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda and Zaporitia credited membership in their respective sororities as key in their professional socialization. The relationship formed through these organizations served a major role in the professional development and career mobility of these women.

Though the women superintendents held memberships in their respective educational organizations, they participated in the ethnic minority division of these professional organizations such as the Multi-Cultural Concerns division of the American Association of Counseling and Development. The more seasoned members of the organizations, served as mentors, information channels, and sounding boards for the members who aspired for professional leadership. In most of the professional educational organizations, women did not hold officer positions, but they were powerful in their local districts. It was noted by Linda that the informal contacts among women members began after the formal meetings ended.

Amelia described the benefits her on-going affiliations with historically black organizations such as Urban League and her sorority. She also found involvement
with foundations and non-profit organizations that fund community projects were beneficial. She considered it important to get to know the decision makers, and community leaders from different venues. Amelia stated, “You get to meet the people the people who you service. You look at what you can offer the organization. Oftentimes, the members of these organizations are strong supporters of the local school district.” The professional socialization experiences could often result in funding for the school district that certainly boosts an aspiring superintendent potential as a fund-raiser. Amelia further noted that interacting with powerful organizational leaders provided her with an opportunity to observe successful leadership styles and techniques and take from those leaders useful skills for the education environment. “You learn from the organization, from its membership and then you transfer that information into leadership” she stated.

Sylvia shared observations that were similar to Amelia, “I’m one who likes to listen and observe, and I also want to see how leaders lead. And again, I was analyzing leaders, I was analyzing the chair people of the various committees, I was listening to see if their conversations with others were respectful or dignifying. I was observing to see if they themselves were passionate. If they appeared committed. If they were serious, and if they were organized. Then I was looking to see if they weren’t enthusiastic, then what was the response of the others? If they were not passionate, what was the response of the others? If they were not organized, what was the response of the other people? So with my tenure in Jack & Jill, with my tenure with the YMCA, all those programs, I was learning and again, accumulating
my repertoire of things I wanted to do and discarding the other lessons that were not useful. But in the organizations, I also found out how they responded to me and my leadership style and my involvement in the committees, and in those cases it was quite positive.”

Linda held the strong belief that professional socialization becomes a tool for displaying your work. She stated, “The more you are known, the more people can see your work and leadership style, which makes people believers in you. So when your name comes up, when you are aspiring for school or professional leadership you are not an unknown.”

Zaporia served on Board of Directors for community organizations and held memberships with numerous educational organizations. She viewed it important to “Get your name out there and put yourself in public view.” Her convictions were strongly stated, “Professional organizations allow for members to learn from colleagues, gives people an opportunity to know what you have to offer, allows you to see what they have to offer, and identifies opportunities for collaboration.”

All of the African American women superintendents shared stories of professional socialization, either formal or informal that benefited them as they moved towards the superintendency. With four of the superintendents the person serving as mentor, confidant, and role model to these superintendents was a woman. Interestingly not all of the women who aided the superintendents in their professional positioning and professional socialization were ethnic minorities. For Beatrice, because her leadership experiences were in business and industry, her mentor was a
white male. She stressed, “If you are going to succeed, you’d better talk to them. It’s important to look for competence first. For me, I gained information from those who were competent.” However since she has entered the superintendency, Beatrice received telephone calls from African American women superintendents who offered support, professional advice and friendship.

When asked about the professional benefits of affiliations with social and educational organizations, Zaporía responded, “They have allowed, those that are related to education, have allowed some networking. The sorority allows for networking and making connections. And really all of the organizations, even those that are involved with the church are beneficial. When I first arrived in a certain community while attending a meeting someone asked if I had met a certain African American woman who is a former board member. That networking experience which resulted from professional socialization has proven to be extremely valuable to me as an aspiring superintendent. “

During the interview the superintendents were asked about their mentors and how that mentor influenced their career paths. Sylvia recalled, “My first mentor was my fifth grade teacher. She taught me the importance of being sensitive to all kinds of people, you could see and feel her love and passion for education. She was my English teacher in middle school.” As Sylvia continued to reflect she stated, “Most recently Dr. V and Dr. M, African American women, have been mentors. Both of these women were strong student advocates, very articulate and held high level positions at the local and state levels in education. Recently I spoke with Dr.
Mattson, who is now retired. I asked her what was she going to do now that she is retired, she replied, ‘I just want to help people.’ Actually, Dr. Vans was assigned me a mentor about 15 years ago. The relationship continues today.”

Amelia recalled her mentor who was a Director of Elementary Education, “Dr. Linda Little, she was probably more of a mentor than anyone. I knew her very, very well. We were members of the same sorority. As a young adult, I watched her life and she was so committed to children and community. So, Linda probably showed me best how you can be with integrity and grace, just totally a good role model. She was just always so prepared, professional, and knowledgeable. She is just really a wonderful mentor.”

Linda recalled vividly her mentor: “Dr. Mary Martin, in the ninth grade; she was the language/arts teacher. She influenced my career path by becoming an administrator of a school district and convinced her boss to hire me as a parent coordinator, and from the parent coordinator she pushed me to work at getting my doctorate, and she was working on hers at that time and I helped her with gathering some of her statistics on parents, and that allowed me to really see the work. I remember her telling me, when I said, ‘Why do I really need it,’ and she said, ‘it’s not that you need it, it’s a union card,’ or a mechanism for gaining admittance to education administration. She was white and was there when both of my children were born, our birthdays are two weeks a part and she drives up here for my birthday or I go there for hers. So we have dinner every year. I was 14 when she met me and I will be 56 this year, so for 32 years she’s been there for me. And when I received a
prestigious award, she came. She had someone bring her to the city that was over 3
hours away; she walked in and brought two of my other teachers with her.”

Zaporia stated that she had several mentors throughout her career.
Interestingly she noted a scarcity of African American women mentors early in her
career, but later in her career she did receive mentoring from an African American
woman superintendent. She stated, “Dr. Lawson was the first African American
woman superintendent for this major city. It was under her administration that I was
appointed Deputy Superintendent. I worked very closely with her as Deputy
Superintendent. Once she knew what my goals were, she told me what they felt I
needed to do and how I needed to proceed. She provided all of support and help for
me along the way.”

Each of the superintendents expressed appreciation for having a mentor. The
mentors are credited with the career advancement of the superintendents. It is also
noteworthy that although the mentoring relationship began within the workplace, the
relationships extended into the personal and familial lives of the superintendents.

The women superintendents were asked during the interview about the role
that women played in the professional organizations. Whether or not the women
were in core leadership position or peripheral positions. Zaporia stated, “Probably the
women that you see tend to be more peripheral. The women are peripheral, but as yet
as women in countries where oppression occurs and in these organizations, the
women are still connecting. You meet within the organization and then the contacts
become informal outside of the realm of the organization.”
Linda agreed with Zaporia but noted that gender can sometime become a barrier to professional socialization within organizations. She stated, “Women are peripheral members. I think you really have to force yourself in to be core. There is an African-American superintendent group and even they meet outside of all of us. The other day I was talking with one of superintendents, and they said, ‘Oh God, you know me and Chucky and so and so, we get together and eat lunch every two weeks.’ And I’m like, there’re only five of us, and we’re pulling away to form sub-groups. So still even within the blacks, men, women are not always included.”

Amelia observed that women also serve in peripheral roles within professional organizations, “Women are mostly peripheral in the organizations, but I think it is changing. Yeah, I think just over time and its peaked and there are more women superintendents. We have different kinds of roles and different organizations, and we do are more inclusive.”

Findings:

All of the women superintendents were members of a national historically black sorority. The superintendents viewed it important to maintain linkages with community based organizations that held a personal interest to them but also those historically African American organizations, such as the Urban League, NAACP, Jack and Jill, Association of Black Organizations, etc. The superintendents held memberships in professional organization but the all maintained affiliations with the organizations’ sub-groups that addressed ethnic minority concerns. The
superintendents felt that the leadership skills were gained through these affiliations. They further felt that membership in these organizations served to benefit them professionally as well as their school districts. Each of the superintendents agreed that professional socialization within organizations occurred, but more often outside of the formal organizational structure. Women are not always in core leadership roles within the organizations; however, women do connect with other women to offer professional support and networking.

Research Question 5: What perspectives did the African American women superintendents share on the importance of professional positioning and professional socialization in their careers?

Interview Protocol Questions 14, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15

14. What would you do differently if you could go back and change your professional positioning or career path?

5. How did your community and professional affiliations aid in your career mobility?

7. Describe your professional growth experiences.

8. Would you say that your professional socialization was through formal or informal contacts? How?

13. What were some of the systemic barriers to your professional socialization?

14. How were you able to overcome those barriers to reach the superintendency?

15. What would you do differently if you could go back and change your professional socialization experiences?

Linda believed that flexibility is important. As African American women aspire for the superintendency they must look outside of the norm and become
adaptable in professional positioning and professional socialization opportunities sought. Beatrice and Sylvia and Amelia agree professional positioning and professional socialization are important, but as aspiring superintendents move within the professional and social arenas, children's lives are at stake and whatever choices women leaders make, they must benefit children.

Amelia stated, "Professional positioning and professional socialization can help the aspiring superintendent grow into a superintendent. You need to make experiences that you can call upon, that you can pull from and make a difference in the lives of children."

Zaporia is convinced that professional positioning though important is less important than professional socialization. "There are opportunities there, there are people who are willing to mentor and to open doors to assist you in being all you can be," she asserted. As further stated by Zaporia, "You don't have to be the brightest person in the world, but you have to have people skills."

Sylvia echoes Zaporia, "In professional socialization, you must be an advocate in the community, working with youth, working with adults, working on projects, and developing yourself into that position."

Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda and Zaporia agreed that professional positioning, though can place some limits on the path to the superintendency, does not prohibit the African American woman who aspires for that position. Each woman has shown that gaining knowledge of the inner workings of the educational organization, seeking opportunities to show oneself as a leader, and commitment to
the education of children aid in reaching the superintendency. Sylvia stated, "You don't just become a superintendent, you have to grow into a superintendent. This means that you have to make every experience whether through professional positioning or professional socialization one from which you can grow, one that you can call upon and one from which you can gain resources." Zaporia encouraged women to seek leadership opportunities through professional positioning and professional socialization. "There are opportunities out there. There are people who are willing to mentor you and to open doors and to assist you in being all that you can be." Amelia offered her perspective on professional positioning and professional socialization by stating, "I would say that informal professional socialization is the best and most meaningful for the aspiring superintendent. If you've prepared yourself in all aspects of the job including school finance, then the professional socialization experiences are key contacts to draw from."

In considering professional positioning and professional socialization, Linda remarked, "You have to be more inclusive. The networks and contacts that you make, the people that you work with have to represent diversity. The role of the superintendent requires one to interact effectively with a wide range of people. If you include that wide range of people in your circle of contacts as you aspire for the superintendency, you will be better prepared for the job."

Each superintendent was asked about the systemic barriers they overcame to reach the superintendency. Zaporia discussed budget constraints that impede professional growth opportunities. She stated, "When I was in a major city, there was
a freeze on conferences and other professional meetings. Because I knew that at this point in my life my desire was to become a superintendent and I needed to be at these meetings. So therefore I came up with the dollars to attend the meetings.” Another systemic barrier Zaporia identified was seeking positions outside of a district of employment. She stated, “When you are coming from another district or from another state, there are some people who do not like outsiders, and so therefore, sometimes you have to discern what type of person the district wants in their superintendent.” Beatrice noted, “The barrier that we are sometimes not aware of is that even when you have a number of black assistant superintendents or African American assistant superintendents, very often the top position still holds that white male. And you are serving a huge ethnic minority population, and you have adequate people with credentials who are African American.”

Amelia described systemic barriers that are steeped in gender bias and tradition. She stated, “I don’t look like or act like the CEO which some think should be male. I don’t do the types of things that the male CEO does, all that kind of stuff. That is just not my lifestyle. I don’t have the image that people kind of envision that a women CEO should have. In other words, the preconceived notion of gender role is a systemic barrier.”

Linda shared a similar view of the systemic barriers as Amelia. She stated, “I don’t have golf, everybody plays golf, and there are so many country clubs. I think if you are not a well-known country club type, you know, it is kind of hard to penetrate. There is an expectation that leaders are country club types and golfers. I am neither
and that can create a barrier for women superintendents. If you are not from the area, that can also create a barrier for you within the community.”

Findings:

These African American women superintendents shared that each experience is valuable and should be seen as an opportunity on the road to educational administration. Each woman placed a high value on professional socialization. The superintendents encouraged networking and information sharing. Each woman was influenced and aided by a woman. Each of these African American women is committed to helping women who aspire for the superintendent’s post. Whereas the superintendents acknowledged systemic barriers that included budget constraints to racism, to gender bias and tradition. Something as simple as not playing golf can become a systemic barrier for an African American women superintendent. However each superintendent offered ways in which they overcame the barriers. Where budget constraints posed a barrier to career advancement one superintendent made a financial sacrifice and paid to receive the professional growth and development she felt she needed in order to advance within her school district. Hard work, competence, and commitment were the remedies offered for the barriers of racism, gender bias and tradition.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide African American women who aspire for the superintendency a candid view of the professional positioning that occurs in education, the professional paths that current superintendents have taken to reach their administrative posts, and the professional socialization they received in their quest for the superintendency. The African American women superintendents who participated in the study discussed their views pertaining to professional positioning and career path leading to the superintendency and the importance of professional socialization in reaching the level of school superintendent.

Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda, and Zaporia recognized the support and relationships in their early lives that prepared them for leadership. These women were prepared for leadership through their educational, professional and social experiences. As the literature indicated (Grogan, 1996; Glass, 2000), these African American women superintendents possessed educational preparation and certifications necessary for the superintendency. Three of the superintendents possessed doctoral degrees, the fourth held two Master’s degrees and completed a prestigious fellowship for urban superintendents, and the fifth superintendent was completing her
dissertation. The superintendents agreed that the support came from informal and formal contacts, ranging from parental figures to teachers.

The themes significant to the role that professional positioning played for the superintendents were educational preparation, disciplines and certification that lend themselves to line positions, demonstrated leadership ability, and maintaining high visibility within the educational arena.

Educational Preparation, Disciplines and Certifications

Those women who chose a K-12 curriculum or a secondary education field of study had greater professional opportunities for career advancement than the one superintendent who majored in elementary education. The professional positioning varied among the women. However, the women who were K-12 or secondary education certified, held line positions rather than staff positions immediately after moving from a classroom teacher position. This discovery concurs with Tallerico (2000) and Shakeshaft (1987) who found that secondary educators were viewed more positively as prospects for the line positions and the superintendency.

Demonstrated Leadership Ability

Sylvia, the superintendent with the elementary education certification, demonstrated her leadership ability very early in her career. Though she worked in a staff level position after her classroom teaching experience, Sylvia received a central office position that helped navigate her to the superintendency. Sylvia’s professional
positioning was facilitated by her zeal, enthusiasm and leadership within the classroom. Though not in what Tallerico (1999) described as a high visibility position initially, Sylvia’s leadership abilities gave her the visibility needed to move from a staff position to a line position and ultimately to the superintendency. From my interview with the five African American women superintendents, it was clear that professional positioning is important but even more important is how the woman who aspires for the superintendency demonstrates her leadership skills within her school and community.

High Visibility

Zaporia was not in a line position initially. She made herself known through her work and among her colleagues in her role and interactions as a special education staff person. Zaporia encourages women who aspire for the superintendency to get their names out there and become visible.

Themes that emerged relative to professional socialization were active involvement in community, professional and social organizations, networking, and being mentored.

Active Involvement in Community Professional and Social Organizations

Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda and Zaporia provided a long listing of professional and social memberships and affiliations. All of the women superintendents were members of a national historically black sorority as well as
other organizations that serve the African American community. The superintendents viewed it important to maintain linkages with community based organizations that held a personal interest to them but also those historically African American organizations, such as the Urban League, NAACP, Jack and Jill, Association of Black Organizations, etc.

The superintendents held memberships in professional organization but the all maintained affiliations with the organizations' sub-groups that addressed ethnic minority concerns. The superintendents felt that the leadership skills were gained through these affiliations. Each woman stressed how professional socialization had been important in her career. Professional organizations, community boards, grass roots organizations, and sororities all played a significant role in their movement to the superintendency. Each of the superintendents recalled with great fondness the women who served as role models and mentors for them as they progressed to the superintendency.

Networking

The women considered networking key in gaining leadership skills, and having their leadership abilities recognized. The superintendents recognized the value of formal and informal networks. Each of the superintendents agreed that professional socialization within organizations occurred but more often outside of the formal organizational structure. Women are not always in core leadership roles within the organizations however women do connect with other women to offer
professional support and networking. For most of the superintendents formal networking relationships over time became informal and social relationships.

Mentoring

Each superintendent was influenced and aided by a woman in her career. Some of the superintendents described specific attributes the mentors modeled for them. Others recalled the specific directives they received regarding how to reach the leadership positions within education. Each of these African American women superintendents expressed a commitment to helping women who aspire for the superintendent’s post.

Other Findings

Several general themes emerged from interviews with African American women superintendents conducted by Jackson (1999), these same themes surfaced in each of the interviews conducted in this study:

1. The women interviewed recognized the support and relationships in their early lives that prepared them for leadership. The early support came from informal and formal contacts, ranging from parental figures to teachers.

2. The women viewed their role as a “higher calling”. That is to say, the women believed they were making a difference in the lives of educators and students and that a spiritual leading directed and sustained them in their role as school superintendent.
3. The women emphasized their preparedness for leadership through their educational, professional and social experiences.

The Superintendents’ View of Their Role

As the interviews progressed, the discussions prompted the superintendents to share more openly, and new information emerged as an offshoot of the professional positioning and professional socialization issues. In qualitative research this is not uncommon. Wiersma (1995) refers to this perspective of qualitative research as modified analytic induction approach. The superintendents’ view of their role expanded the research while providing what will hopefully serve value insights for the aspiring superintendent. The superintendents described their role differently. Their descriptions included a chief operating officer, political educator, goal oriented educational leader, and committed educator of children.

Chief Operating Officer

The women interviewed differed in how they considered the role as superintendent. Two women superintendents, Amelia and Beatrice, viewed the school district as a corporation and their roles as Chief Operating Officer. Amelia described the school district in terms of a town or community within the community. Each department within the school district was interdependent and critical to the successful managing of the town.
When asked how she viewed her role Amelia replied, "You have to view yourself as the Chief Operating Officers of a corporation. We have over 3,000 employees, almost $25 million in facilities. Our operating expenses are over $160 million. We operate anything from food services to transportation, to purchasing the warehouse. I hire teaching staff and all other employees that make this school district run smoothly and effectively. A huge issue for me as CEO is related to legal services, and just all the things that make up your organization and most communities in education. One of the biggest employers in town in among the biggest cities is this school district. It is in that way a very difficult business to keep everything going. There is a whole business infra structure that supports that, so you have to know what we do in order to operate efficiently and effectively. That aspect of education usually doesn't get a lot of attention; it doesn't get attention until something goes wrong. I think while they are looking at the development of educational leaders and ways to find more and more teaching staff, there is a fine line between knowing and receiving scholarly programs and managing the direction of the school district."

The example used by Amelia was school transportation. In this particular district school buses were the major transportation source for the students. If the buses were somehow impeded in their functions, the district would be impacted severely. Yet, little attention is given to the school bus operation in isolation. Therefore her approach to each of the functions within the district was comparable to the operation of a business.
Beatrice echoed Amelia's view of the school district operation. She viewed her school district as a very large business in need of a person with business savvy in charge. "It's a $50 million business and we need a business person to run it. So I tend to run it like a business. I have a dashboard that I have created, which is a set of key indicators mapped to the schools that we can monitor, so that we can tweak them where we need to, to keep the ship on course," stated Beatrice.

Political Educator

Linda saw her role as dual, political and committed educator. On the one hand she had to successfully interact with the politicians and appeal to the taxpayers. This superintendent understood the value of a strong lobby at the local, state, and national levels. "Because I interact on a daily basis with the politicians, I understand the role of politics in education," Linda remarked. Coupled with her political role, this superintendent remained true to her commitment as an educator. In her own words Linda affirmed, "I have to do what's right for the children. Because when you make your decisions based on what is best for children, the rest of it will not matter. Even though you'll get killed in the newspaper, and you will get beaten up constantly by the public, but you always have to say, 'what's best for kids' and be able to look yourself in the mirror every day and feel good about what you are doing."

Sylvia described her role as an educator who loves children. She was primarily committed to educational excellence for all children. Sylvia was emphatic, "I want to help children. My motivation has always been helping children. I always
ask what can I do to help children? I’m a strong student advocate.” Coupled with
that, Sylvia recognized her responsibility to train and support the educators in her
district to strive for educational excellence for all children. “For example”, she said,
“if you want teachers to read and grow through professional reading, you need to
provide them with books and other incentives in order for them to read. Then you
assigned them tasks and provide opportunities for them to share and utilize what he or
she has learned from those reading.

Goal Oriented Educational Leader

Zaporia set her sights on school administration very early in her career. This
woman decided she wanted to lead a school district and put her plan into action.
Zaporia recalled working several years as a teacher, she said, “And then basically
having some conversations with some of the supervisors and I said ‘I would like to do
what you are doing, what do I need to do to make that happen’?” She prepared
herself for leadership through strategically seeking various administrative level
positions. She described her role as an educational leader.

Committed Educator of Children

Overall the superintendents’ view of their role varied; however one common
theme rang throughout the interview process; these women were committed to the
education of children. Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda and Zaporia articulated their
commitments differently. Beatrice stated, “I love what I do. I have a sense of
urgency to make changes.” The women believed they were making a difference in the lives of educators and students. Each woman spoke with enthusiasm about her work as a school superintendent. In her interviews with superintendents Shakeshaft (1987) also found that women educators expressed a high level of commitment to the profession and devotion to the profession.

Professional positioning and professional socialization played critical roles in the lives and careers of Amelia, Beatrice, Linda, Sylvia and Zaporia. If pearls of wisdom could be compiled from each superintendent they might read:

Amelia: *Never allow what others perceive as your deficit become a deficit for you.*

Amelia is the superintendent who moved from student teaching to her first professional position within Central Administration. Amelia commented that some educators expressed concerns with her lack of extensive classroom experience. Rather than accepting a teaching position, she moved quickly into the lobbyist arena and learned a valuable part of education, the politics. Amelia also viewed her role of superintendent as Chief Operating Officer of a corporation. She knew her district and the fiscal implication associated with running a wealthy district. For Amelia professional positioning very early in her career played a key role in her movement to the superintendency.

Sylvia: *Show your leadership skills because you never know who’s watching you.*

Sylvia was a young, energetic first year teacher when she was asked by her building principal to become Primary Education Chairperson at her school. From that position, Sylvia moved into line staff positions that led to the superintendency.
Whereas Sylvia was not placed in the path for line positions, her success came as a result of demonstrated leadership ability and to a certain degree professional socialization.

**Linda:** *Use each professional positioning experience as your guide to leadership.*

Linda worked in multi-facets of the educational arena. She used each experience from the position of Title 1 Parent Coordinator to the position within local politics to help shape her for the superintendency. Her most profound advice to anyone seeking the superintendency is to do the best job you can do in each position you hold, and “stop swatting the butterfly. Let the butterfly land on you.” Linda’s success trek to the superintendency can be traced to her professional positioning.

**Zaporia:** *Set your sights on your goal, make your goal known to those in authority, and work towards your goal.* Zaporia decided very early in her career that she wanted to become a superintendent. She told several of her supervisors that she wanted to move into an administrative position. She sought good counsel from women educational leaders and she made the necessary decisions to learn everything that would benefit her in becoming a superintendent. Zaporia benefited from professional positioning and professional socialization. Though on the path for a line position, Zaporia sought networks, contacts and mentors to guidance in reaching the superintendency.

**Beatrice:** *Follow you heart.* Beatrice started out her career in education. She left education and spent over 20 years with a Fortune 500 company. Then one day she said, “After spending 23 years there, quite frankly it was more of an internal
something that was gnawing me….I’ve been drawn back to education.” In returning to her first love, education, Beatrice brings the knowledge of marketing and human resources, national and international business relations, and superintendent’s training from a national foundation. Professional socialization played a critical role in Beatrice’s career. She learned the skills of people relations in business and industry and used those skills to land the position of superintendent.

Confirming or Opposing the Literature

The interviews with the 5 superintendents confirmed much of what the literature revealed. The study conducted by Glass (2000) and supported by Anderson (2000) reported that African American women superintendents were well prepared academically and professionally for their positions. Blanche (1996) stated that women superintendents achieved higher levels of formal preparation. This finding was also cited in SASS data (1993-1994).

The women believed they were making a difference in the lives of educators and students. Each woman spoke with enthusiasm about her work as a school superintendent. Likewise in her interviews with superintendents Shakeshaft (1987) also found that women educators expressed a high level of commitment to the profession and devotion to the profession.

Shakeshaft (1987), Tallerico (2000), AASA (2000) and Grogan (1996) found that those superintendents with the K-12 or secondary education certification moved into the administrative ranks rapidly. In the case of Linda, Amelia and Zaporia, the
K-12 and secondary education majors, their movement into line positions was more rapid than Sylvia the elementary educator. The professional positioning varied among the women. However, the women who were K-12 or secondary education certified, held line positions rather than staff positions immediately after moving from a classroom teacher position. This concurs with Tallerico (2000) and Shakeshaft (1987) who found that secondary educators were viewed more positively as prospects for the line positions and the superintendency.

Davis (1997) and Lacost (1987) provided a description of internships suggested the importance of internships for aspiring superintendents. The superintendents interviewed did not have access to an internship experience. Zaporia described a shadowing type of experience where she spent a short period of time with superintendents for the purpose of learning the role and responsibility. However, there was no mention of a formal internship for the superintendents.

Grogan (1996), Glass (2000), Shakeshaft (1993) and Borja (2001) all mention the importance of mentoring programs to promote aspiring leaders into administrative positions. Amelia, Beatrice, Linda, Sylvia and Zaporia all spoke of their professional mentors and how the mentoring relationships benefited their careers.

The superintendents emphasized the critical role that networking plays in the superintendency. Their positions support the findings of Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan (2000). However, within the professional organization, the superintendents believe that networking occurs for women on a more informal basis.
Communication skills were described by Tallerico (2000) as key for women who seek the superintendency. This communication was described more as behavioral and included experiences as well as jargon. For Linda this was proven true. Her lifestyle and experiences are not in keeping with what is considered the traditional superintendent and have posed a barrier for her. Linda recognized that the “country club lifestyle” and the communication that goes along with that has been a hindrance for her.

Zaporia and Linda discussed the importance of “getting your name out there” or having high visibility as an aspiring superintendent. Tallerico (2000) stated that one of the problems African American women educators face is that they are not place in high visibility positions where they can be seen as prime candidates for educational administration.

The study by Grogan (2000) supported the position of the superintendents relative to the necessity for the woman superintendent to have political savvy and a strong business stance. Both Linda and Amelia emphasized the importance the superintendent becoming knowledgeable of the politics in education.

Conclusion

Collins (1991) states that there are certain themes that will be prominent in African-American women’s experiences. According to Collins, they share the common experience of being Black; Black women will respond or react to common themes in a variety of ways based on their own previous experiences; and there is a
connection between their experiences and their consciousness. The interviews with Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda and Zaporia represented the voices of African American women superintendents who shared common experiences. Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda, and Zaporia were prepared for leadership through educational, professional and social experiences. Professional positioning varied among the women, however, it seems as though the superintendents who were prepared as K-12 and secondary educators were afforded opportunities within the line positions for career mobility. The superintendent who was an elementary educator, moved into a staff position with leadership responsibilities early in her career because of her hard work and zeal for education.

These African American women superintendents stressed that knowledge of the politics around education can be advantageous. Also significant in the career paths of the school leaders was a strong knowledge of business administration, within schools and outside of the educational forum. The women superintendents discussed the importance of having knowledge of school finance.

Amelia, Beatrice, Sylvia, Linda and Zaporia maintained active memberships in African American organizations. Even within the professional organizations, these women superintendents established affiliations with the divisions that addressed issues related to ethnic minorities. The women superintendents further stated the importance of holding memberships in local community based organizations and foundations. Though the major purpose of these involvements is to contribute to the respective causes, the superintendents stressed the importance of high visibility and
effective leadership within these groups. Within the professional and social organizations the African American women superintendents observed that contacts were made after the formal meetings were conducted. Finally, the women superintendents stressed the importance of learning from the established leaders within the professional, community, and social organizations. The leadership style, the effective methods for getting tasks accomplished, the organizational structures were all key for the women superintendents as they observed and participated in professional socialization experiences.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study focused on African American women superintendents in the Midwest. Future studies focused on other ethnic minority women superintendents could provide an enhanced view of the concerns around professional positioning and professional socialization for women. Future studies might include African American and other ethnic minority males who also have low representation in educational administration positions. Future studies might consider African Americans superintendents in other geographic regions.

The literature and the interviews conducted for this study have shown that professional positioning is very important in the career path to the superintendency. Future studies might focus on women currently in staff positions and line positions who hold the superintendent’s certification and their strategy to move into administration.
The literature recommended major changes in educational administration curriculum at colleges and universities. Future research could target current graduate students enrolled in educational leadership, school administration, and other programs that prepare superintendents. The study might focus on whether or not the students are gaining information and skills necessary to address the non-traditional roles of the superintendent, such as serving as a political leader within the school district and management of the school district like a corporation.
APPENDIX A

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: July 3, 2002

To: Charles Warfield, Principal Investigator
    Cheryl Celestin, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 02-06-14

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Role that Professional Positioning and Professional Socialization Play for African American Women Who Aspire for the Superintendency” has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: July 3, 2003
APPENDIX B

Participant Invitation Letter
ROLE THAT PROFESSIONAL POSITIONING AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION PLAY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO ASPIRE FOR THE SUPERINTENDENCY

Dr. Charles Warfield, Principal Investigator and Advisor
Cheryl Celestin, Student Researcher

Dear

I would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative study that will examine the professional positioning and professional socialization of African American women school superintendents in the Mid-West area of the United States. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to African American women who aspire for the superintendent’s post. As an African American woman superintendent participating in this study, you will respond to interview questions pertaining to:

- Professional positioning and career path leading to the superintendency and
- The importance of professional socialization in reaching the level of school superintendent.

This qualitative study will examine the uniqueness and similarities of the Midwestern African American women superintendents through structured interviews and observations. You will respond to open-ended questions that allow for individual variations.

Your participation may provide women aspiring for the role of superintendent a clear picture of the impact of professional positioning and professional socialization. Through data collected in this investigation, more African American women may become knowledgeable and equipped to move into the role of school superintendent. By sharing your insights and experiences leading to educational leadership, aspiring women may have a concrete guidepost to aid them in successfully attaining the positions of school administrators.

As a participant in this study your name, school district and any other identifying descriptions will be excluded from the study. Your participation in this study will entail one face-to-face meeting, not to exceed two hours, in which you will respond to a series of interview questions (see attached). The interview will be audio taped. All data including the audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Primary Investigator’s office for at least three years after the...
completion of the study and then destroyed. You may terminate the interview or withdraw from the study at anytime.

You may contact my advisor or me as listed below:
Dr. Charles Warfield, Advisor
Western Michigan University
Teaching Learning and Leadership
(616)387-3879

Cheryl Celestin
(517) 241-8869 (office)
(517) 484-8063 (home)

You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research (616) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. You should not sign this document if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature.

____________________  _______________________
Date                  Signature of Participant
APPENDIX C

African American Women Superintendents Interview
African American Women Superintendents Interview

Introduction

Listed below are the questions that will be posed to each African American woman superintendent participating in the qualitative research on role that professional positioning and professional socialization play for African American women who aspire for the Superintendency. The questions are designed to reveal the career positioning that occurs in education, the professional paths taken to reach the administrative posts, and the professional socialization received in the quest for the superintendency by each African American woman superintendent studied. Some of the questions are deliberately vague as to not lead the respondents in positive or negative direction. However, follow-up questions are prepared to help eliminate any ambiguity.

Professional Positioning

1. What influenced your decision to pursue education as a career?
2. What was your undergraduate major when you entered college?
3. What other fields did you consider as a major?
4. How did you arrive at elementary (or secondary) education as your teaching preference?
5. Tell me about your student teaching placement and experience.
   a. What was the sex of your placement supervisor?
   b. How did that person influence your career?
6. Describe your first teaching position.
7. What was the sex of your professional counterparts in your early teaching positions?
8. How did your initial teaching experiences influence your decision to seek educational administration positions?
9. What administrative positions have you held?
10. In your first administrative position, were there more men or women holding similar positions in your school district?
11. In retrospect, what barriers were in place as you moved from your first teaching position to the first administrative position?
12. How did the positions you held prior to administration aid you in becoming a school leader?
13. How did the positions you held prior to administration hinder you in becoming a school leader?
14. What would you do differently if you could do back and change your professional positioning or career path?

Professional Socialization

1. What were your experiences in professional socialization prior to entering college?
2. Name some of the community organizations with which you have a long-standing affiliation?
3. What has been the benefit of these affiliations to you professionally?
4. What are some of your affiliations within education organizations?
5. What has been the benefit of these affiliations to you professionally?
6. How did your community and professional affiliations aid in your career mobility?
7. Describe your professional growth experiences?
8. Would you say that your professional socialization was through formal or informal contacts? How?
9. Who was your first mentor? How did that mentor influence your career path?
10. In the professional organizations in which you have membership, what are your observations relative to the sex of the group’s members?
   a. How many of the members are women?
   b. What are the positions held by the women members?
   c. Are the women core or peripheral members of the organization?
   d. How does professional socialization occur within the organization?
11. How would you describe the career mobility of women in your school district?
12. What role did sex equity play in your professional socialization?
13. What were some of the systemic barriers to your professional socialization?
14. How were you able to overcome those barriers to reach the superintendency?
15. What would you do differently if you could go back and change your professional socialization experiences?
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Another glass ceiling for Hispanic females. On line Journal of Advancing Women in Leadership. 1(1).


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