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African American women superintendents : pathways to success

Kimberly Gales Johnson

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Human Resource Education
and Workforce Development

by
Kimberly Gales-Johnson
B.S., Southern University, 2003
M.A.T., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2007
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family. If it had not been for your love and support, I would not have made it through. Thanks for motivating and supporting me along the way.

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I thank the women of this study who graciously agreed to share their life experiences with me. I am forever inspired by your personal strengths and passion for the children and communities in which you serve. I wish to acknowledge the members of my graduate faculty committee, J. Kotrlik, Ph.D.; K. Machtmes, Ph.D.; R. Mitchell, Ph.D.; and Y. Wei. A special thanks to the chairman of my graduate committee; Dr. J. Kotrlik, who not only shared his scholarly advice but his personal wisdom as we toiled over the future of public school education. To Dr. K. Machtmes, co-chair of my graduate committee; thank you for guiding me through my data analysis and for your words of encouragement, which usually came right when I needed them the most. To Dr. Mitchell: thanks for your guidance, shared knowledge and your commitment to the growth and development of the field of education. To Dr. Wei: thanks for agreeing to serve as my graduate school representative; your service is greatly appreciated.

I am forever grateful to the awesome, dynamic, wonderful family that supported, encouraged, and motivated me throughout this process. I am grateful to my husband Chris for his willingness to sacrifice time, finances and many nights with no dinner to ensure that I was able to fulfill my dreams. I would also like to thank my mom and dad for helping me with my daughter and always setting high expectations for my growth with no consideration of limitations. To my baby girl: thanks for being my greatest inspiration and for your love, patience, and understanding. To Fallon, Olivia, Lillian, Corinn, and Brian Jr., I hope that my achievement will inspire each of you to dream big, work hard and not let your identification determine your destination. To my brother and sister, thanks for always taking care of your baby sis, your love and support throughout the years have made me the strong, confident woman that I am today.

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ABSTRACT

Historically, women and minorities have been underrepresented in executive school leadership. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of five African American women who in spite of historical statistics became superintendents. The pathways taken by African American women superintendents have failed to manifest educational leadership literature. Researchers, who have chosen to study African American women in leadership, focus mostly on the barriers they face. Findings from this study may be used to inform minority women with superintendent aspirations of experiences that led others to the top. The findings may also be use to support efforts made by university administrators to include the stories of African American women in educational leadership discourse. The methodology used for data collection was a semi-structured interview with five Superintendents across a southeastern state. The themes that emerged from this study include: Early Aspirations, Professional Experiences, Job Attainment, Mobility, and Reflections. The professional experiences of each participant varied, as each took a different route to the superintendency. They credited their job attainment to student success, their ability to develop teachers, being the only qualified candidate, and a reputation of being fair and consistent. Findings that emerged from an investigating into past mobility revealed that majority of the participants were the first African American Women Superintendents appointed to their respective districts. Overall, an attribute common to all their stories of ascension was a “Barrier-to-Opportunity” mindset. Each addressed what others would consider a barrier as an opportunity to grow and showcase their abilities.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Does equal opportunity in the workplace exist for all? This question may be answered divergently depending on the respondent and the position that he or she occupies within the mobility chain. Does gender and race coupled with position play a hand in the complexity of answers this question may yield? If asked by women, especially minority women professionals on the lower rung of the ladder, the answer may be no. However, for those occupying mid-level positions with upward mobility aspirations, responses to questions like this may vary as it depends upon the respondents' positional power in the organization to which they belong.

In 2005, Alston reported that at that time 10.9% of the nation's teachers were persons of color, 12.3% were principals, and 2.2% were superintendents. In 2011, the National Center for Educational Information reported that of the nation's African American teachers, 90% were female. Currently, <1% (5/71) of Louisiana's district superintendents are African American females (LDOE, 2012). This data suggest that as African American women ascend the ranks, their population numbers decrease substantially.

In Shakeshaft's (1999) review of women in educational administration, he described an unequal distribution between males, females and minorities in administrative positions. A possible explanation for this disparate may be explained in the literature. Researchers have identified several line positions that directly link aspirants to the role of superintendent that include central office administrator, high school principal and assistant superintendent (Glass, 2001; Kim & Brunner 2009; Ortiz, 1982). April Peters (2003) reported that, "Of the total number of public school principals (elementary and secondary combined), 43% were female and only 11% [of those female] were Black" (Peters, 2003, p. 5). These numbers paired with research findings may insinuate that the low representation of African American women as superintendents may be due to their low numbers as high school principals.

According to Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998), there is limited research associated with the career development of women and a full exclusion of women of color due to studies focused on white males. Although their attainment numbers are low, several women and minorities have been able to defy the odds and acquire this top ranked position. Nevertheless, a comprehensive overview of how they got there is still a mystery. Most researchers that have included African American women as part of their study have focused mostly on barriers and attributes they encounter as they aspire toward or toil in top rank leadership positions, without specifically identifying a common pathway. Though attempted by Revere (1987), no single pathway to the superintendency was found to exist for women and minorities in her study.

Among educational leadership researchers, women and minorities have not been a priority. The discourse surrounding the advancement of women, especially African American women as they ascend through the ranks of educational organizations, offers limited answers. The dominant discourse limits the progression of persons of color who aspire to serve as superintendents, thus their characteristics and experiences fall outside of the normal profile (Brunner, 2008). Although the discourse surrounding women in education administration is growing, there is a paucity of research related to blacks in the superintendency and even less on black women in the superintendency (Alston, 1996, 1999; Revere, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1999). Discourse describing the pathway to and the ideal candidate for the superintendency mostly perpetuates the attributes and experiences of white males (Carter, Glass, & Hord, 1993). When sampled in research studies, the numbers of African American women pooled are so low that the information gained may be less generalizable. For example, in a 10-year study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), 13% of the representative samples were women and 5% were women of color (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001). According to Allen

Jacobson, and Lomotey (1995), the research that does exist regarding African American women in administration parallels their issues with other women, especially Hispanics. Jackson (2003) adds that the studies that do exist focus on specific problems or issues. In a study conducted by Brunner (2008), she reviewed the discourse generated in chapters 6 and 7 of a 10-year AASA study (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001). In her review, she focused on three major topics relevant to discourse: the invisibility of, the lack of, and the limitation of discourse generated from the AASA study. Pertaining to invisibility, Brunner (2008) notes that,

“The representative sample is so overwhelmingly dominated by the responses of white men that the responses of women and persons of color, for all practical purposes, are invisible in the reports that discuss the superintendency in general” (p. 665). Brunner (2008) adds that “...failure to disaggregate and/or consider multiple perspectives during interpretation of the data can lead to conclusions that are at best uninformed and at worse completely off the mark” (p. 672). By assimilating the alternative attitudes of women of color into traditional discourse, we may support access for aspiring women of color (Brunner, 2008). Brunner (2008) asserts that when the discourse becomes mutually inclusive, the hiring of women and persons of color may become a commonality, and lessen pipeline issues.

Regardless of the demographic structure of the school district, traditionally superintendents have been white males (Brown, 2005; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 2000). The United States Census Bureau (2011) reported that in 2000 the superintendency was the most white, male-dominated executive position in the United States. As a complex political position, the superintendency is often referred to as a gender stratified executive position (Bjork, 2000), whereby men are more likely to advance from teacher to district superintendent than women (Skrla & Hoyle, 1999). Additionally, women, especially minorities experience internal

barriers that may stall their advancement. Internal barriers play a vital role in whether or not women and/or minorities ascend to top ranked leadership positions such as district Superintendent (Federal Glass Commission, 1995). Internal barriers include limited access to pipelines and clustering in staff jobs. Pipeline barriers are defined as discrimination in opportunities for advancement, promotions and salary increases (Cotter, Hermsan, Ovadia & Vannerman, 2001). Clustering is characterized as upward mobility in the past that is interrupted by severe discrimination in one's career that halts further progression (Cotter, et al., 2001). The presence of these barriers may yield or even stop African American women from ascending to the superintendency.

With 90% of African American women occupying minority-teaching positions in the United States (National Center for Educational Information, 2011), the probability of being represented in leadership positions should be high. However, for women, especially women of color, this is not the case. Although Black women outnumber black men at about the same ratio of white women to their male counterparts as teachers, their numbers continue to deplete as they ascend to top ranked leadership positions. They are heavily represented at the teacher level but drastically not in the role of district superintendent.

At this time, The United States is not producing enough leaders to meet the organizational demands of the future; once baby boomers retire (Harrison, Moran, & Moran, 2004; Treverton & Bikson, 2003). With such a projection of available spots, the roads leading to leadership should have many wide-open spaces. With a number of women, especially women of color graduating in educational leadership, a potential pool of applicants are forming as we speak. However, recent data reveals that the numbers of black men and women in upper-level educational leadership positions fall far behind their white counterparts (Alston, 2005).

Recruiting minorities into higher-level educational leadership positions has not been a priority amongst many decision makers. Even as concerns are voiced about the shortages of school administration candidates (Anthony, Roe, & Young, 2000; Houston, 1998; McAdams, 1998), the underrepresentation of women and persons of color in these positions remain significant (Brunner, 2000). Black women aspiring to lead school districts are confronted with a cycle of “Climbin’ on, reachin’ lands, turning corners, and sometimes goin’ in the dark” (Hughes 1954).

School superintendents contend with issues such as changing demographics, poverty, racism, drugs, and violence (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005; Kochan). These issues, due to their broad reach, have the capability to mobilize growth or defer it if district leaders fail to prepare students to deal with each. According to Moody (1983), there is “No task of the board of education that is more significant than the selection of a new superintendent” (p. 377). As asserted by Bjork and Kowaski (2005), “They are pivotal actors in the algorithm of school improvement and student success”(p.vii). Recently, their influence in the state of Louisiana has become more commanding after a recent reform package afforded them full autonomy regarding decisions about hiring, firing, and curriculum (Act 1, 2012). Although emphasized by Moody in 1973 and Scott in 1980, currently there is still limited research regarding African American superintendents and their pathways to the superintendency.

According to Nicholson (1999), having both teachers and administrators of color in professional positions provide a significant other for children of color in those schools and communities. Tillman and Cochran (2000) add that due to the best practice of using culturally relevant pedagogy for children in poverty to increase their academic success, black women superintendents are in key positions to ensure this practice is implemented. Jackson (1999) asserts that black women have consistently had experiences that prepared them for leadership throughout their lives. Experiences that are evident in Hudson *et al.* (1998) study concerning the

strengths that African American women superintendents bring to educational leadership. They found that perseverance, advocacy for all children, and high aspirations were among the top leadership strengths found by women of color in executive administration. Regarding their top motivations, the participants of Jackson's (1999) study noted children as one of the main reasons they became superintendents. Collectively, they felt that the superintendency put them in a position to affect change.

Need for the Study

As previously conveyed, research has not assiduously addressed the achievement gap between black women and their counterparts as school superintendents. Literature indicates that African American women in school leadership have been ill represented as district superintendents but heavily represented in staff positions such as district supervisors and elementary principals. Why is this so? There is a need to determine the factors pertinent to black women's ascendency to the superintendency and to add value to the current educational leadership discourse.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of five African American women superintendents in Louisiana and their pathways to the superintendency. This study will contribute to a limited body of literature regarding pathways to leadership for African American women aspirants. The following research questions serve as a basis for this study:

1. What are the pathways accessed by African American women as they ascend to the superintendency in Louisiana's public school systems?
2. What barriers or attributes do women of color encounter or access en route to the superintendency?
3. Did their pathway to the superintendency differ from traditional models?

Guiding Questions

Name: _____ Age: _____
District: _____ District Size: _____
Marital Status: _____ Children: _____

1. How would you describe your school district?
2. What life experiences informed your decision to work in education?
3. How did you enter the field of education?
4. What type of college/university did you attend?
5. How did you acquire your leadership certification?
6. What role did your leadership preparation program (if attended) play in helping you acquire the superintendency?
7. How did your leadership experience help you acquire the superintendency?
8. What was your first position in education?
9. From this position, how would you describe your route to the superintendency (what jobs did you occupy along the way)?
10. As you moved, from position to position, how did the number/ratio of African American Women (occupying the same positions) change?
11. Where in your career mobility story did you see the greatest number of African American Women?
12. What moment in your career, did you know (or was told by someone else) you were a leader?
13. What moment in your career, did you want (or was asked by someone else) to lead others?
14. From that moment, how soon after did you apply for your first administrative position?

15. From that moment, how soon did you acquire your first administrative position?
 - A. What was your first administrative position?
 - B. How old were you when you acquired your first administrative position?
 - C. What administrative positions have you held?
 - D. How long did you work in each position (note longest held position)?
16. From your first administrative position, how long did it take you to become a superintendent?
17. How many times did you apply before acquiring the position?
18. What position did you occupy prior to becoming a superintendent?
19. Have you always aspired to become a superintendent?
20. What experiences influenced your decision to become a superintendent?
21. Did you have a mentor or mentors during your pathway to the superintendency?
 - A. What was their gender?
 - B. What was their position in education?
 - C. If yes, what role did he/she play in helping you acquire the superintendency?
 - D. Did they sponsor your mobility?
22. Are you or have you been a member of any professional organizations? If yes, how did your affiliation with this organization help you acquire the superintendency or mobilize your career?
23. Are you or have you been a member of any Greek organizations? If yes, how did your affiliation with this organization help you acquire the superintendency or mobilize your career?

24. Are you or have you been a member of any religious organization? If yes, how did your affiliation with this organization help you acquire the superintendency or mobilize your career?
25. What is your perception of the pathway to the superintendency in this district and in general?
26. Have most of your predecessors come from within or outside of the school district?
27. What has been the race/gender of the past three superintendents in this district?
(If applicable: How do you think you were able to break this trend?)
28. How did you hear about vacant superintendent positions?
29. Describe the interview process you underwent to become a superintendent.
30. What was the most difficult part of the interview or recruitment process?
31. What prior experiences, prepared or helped you during the recruitment and interview process?
32. Is this your first assignment as a superintendent?
33. What internal (define) barriers did you face en route to the superintendency?
34. What position(s) have you occupied that best prepared you for the superintendency?
35. In your position, prior to acquiring the superintendency, were you replaced by someone (in your opinion) with the same skill set?
36. In your position, prior to acquiring the superintendency, were you replaced by someone of the same gender and ethnicity?
37. What position(s) have you occupied that best positioned (or placed you in direct line to the superintendency)?
38. If given the opportunity to repave your pathway to the superintendency, what changes would you make and why?

39. If given a chance to sponsor someone else's mobility, would you take it?
40. What advice would you give female aspirants concerning pathway barriers and how to overcome them?
41. What advice would you give female aspirants concerning pathway attributes and how to access them?
42. Overall, if you had to summarize three things that you know of, have learned about or did en route to the superintendency, what would they be?
43. Currently, there are five African American women superintendents in the state of Louisiana; did you know any of these ladies prior to obtaining the superintendency?
44. Now that you have attained this position, where would you like to go from here?
45. Can you describe three experiences (that may have been perceived as barriers to others) that you turned into opportunities in route to the superintendency?
46. In your experience, have there been any barriers (3) specific to women of color that have stalled their ascension to leadership positions?

Significance of the Study

Like many positions in education, the superintendent has the greatest potential to influence change in our society. Identifying the pathways accessed by women of color in their track toward the superintendency will contribute to a body of literature that disproportionately focuses on the plight of white men. By altering the discourse to include the mobility patterns that women of color follow when trudging toward the superintendency, a broad understanding of gender and race can permeate the existing body of literature.

This study will attempt to fill in the gaps and make the experiences hidden within the career mobility chain transparent by sharing the stories of the Black women who have participated in some or all of its components. The researcher plans to shed light concerning the

disproportionate numbers of minorities as district superintendents by providing insight on how current superintendents in Louisiana overcame internal barriers in their ascensions. An analysis of data will be conducted to determine the major strategies/sequences used by the participants of this study to transition from staff assignments to positions that aligned them with the superintendency and to discover if any alternate career paths emerge from their experiences.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions apply:

- **Organizational Career Mobility Theory-** “Any type of career movement throughout an individual’s entire employment history” (Kim & Brunner 2009, pp. 77-78).
- **Pipeline-** “A system in which persons move up the ladder of positions in some regular order, ensuring orderly succession” (Ortiz, 2000, p. 559).
- **Glass Ceiling Effect-** The existence of an impenetrable barrier that blocks the vertical mobility of women and minorities (Federal Glass Commission, 1995)
- **Internal Barrier-** Workplace structures that create gates and barriers for those who aspire to ascend to higher levels of leadership (Federal Glass Commission, 1995)
- **Positionality-** “Refers to the place one assigns to a person based on membership in a group, with major categories being gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age” (Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005, p. 116).
- **Jeanes Supervisors-** College educated, mostly black females, sent to southern states to help improve educational conditions and assist county superintendents (Alston, 1999)
- **Superintendent-** The executive leader of a school district.
- **Horizontal Movement-** “Job movement, such as a change of department or function of a job on the same hierarchical level” (Kim & Brunner, 2009, p. 78).

- **Vertical Movement-** “Vertical job shifting following an increase in salary, source of betterment, and stage in life” (Kim & Brunner, 2009, p. 77).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the variables that have led to or offer insight concerning the low representation of African American women as district superintendents in Louisiana's public school systems. A comprehensive review of literature was conducted primarily using the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR, Google Scholar, National Center for Education Statistics and Pro-Quest Digital Dissertation databases to research this topic. From this broad search, common themes that emerged included historical perspectives, internal barriers and attributes. In a related search, educational leadership pathway trends and career mobility theory emerged.

Relevant literature is reviewed to examine the following questions:

1. What is the history of African American women as Superintendents?
2. How do women and minorities make career choices?
3. What is the traditional pathway to becoming a Superintendent?
4. What barriers do African American women face en route to the Superintendency?
5. How do African American women overcome barriers en route to the Superintendency?
6. What conceptual/theoretical frameworks offer insight concerning the constraints of mobility in an organization?

Historical Perspective of African American Women as Superintendents

Research about women of color in education administration over the last 20 years has focused on themes of underrepresentation in educational leadership roles, limited to no representation in educational thought and theory, and barriers that limit or discourage their successful ascension into the superintendent's position (Alston, 1999). To truly understand the

diminishing number of African American women leaders, a perspective of their historical stance in the field of educational leadership is required to gain a full picture.

Jeanes Supervisors

After securing Freedom Schools in the 1890's and consequently being re-segregated, black students were not afforded a quality education. Given this shift, the 19th century saw a rise in black female leaders starting their own schools. In the 1920's, there were more African American women in the workforce as teachers than white women (Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1998). According to Amott and Matthaei (1996), blacks were relentless in their pursuit of an education post-slavery due to the empowerment that a good education afforded them. They added that, second to domestic work, teaching was the occupation of choice for African American women post slavery. During this time, several black female educators opened their own schools and served as teachers and administrators (Giddings, 1984). In the 1930's, there was an increase in Jeanes Supervisors (Alston, 1999). Following the end of the civil war, the Negro Rural School Fund was created by Anna T. Jeanes to support Jeanes Supervisors. These supervisors were black female educators who worked to improve education in southern, rural states. Although these women reported to and performed administrative duties for county supervisors (primarily white males), they were de facto superintendents (Alston & Jones, 2002). These former teachers performed a variety of tasks necessary to improve instruction for African American students (Dales, 1998). Like modern day superintendents, Jeanes Supervisors served as a Negotiator, Crisis Handler, Resource Allocation Specialist, Disseminator of Information, Staff Developer, and Personnel Specialist (Sanders, 1999).

Profile of Jeanes Supervisors

Eight percent of Jeanes Supervisors were women (Guthrie-Jordan, 1990). By the mid 1940's, approximately 15% of Jeanes Supervisors held masters degrees (Easter, 1995). Due to

Jeane Supervisors, the largest number of Black females in administrative positions was documented in the south and southwest (Shakeshaft, 1989). According to Revere (1989), Velma Dolphin Ashley, an accomplished administrator and Jeane Supervisor, headed the Boley, Oklahoma, school district from 1944 until 1956.

Historical Data on African Americans as superintendents

In Jackson's 1999 study, she maintained that after searching various reports, dissertations, and records, she was unable to find an exact number of African American women superintendents from past to present. The statistics presented below represents a collection of the limited data available in literature.

According to Alston (2000), there were five black female superintendents in 1978. In a study by Moody (1983), he states that, "In 1981, 77 Black public school superintendents were identified, constituting 0.47 % of the 16,116 superintendents in the United States" (p. 386). Between 1981 and 1982, 2.2% of superintendents were African American (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). In 1982, there were 11 Black female superintendents, 16 in 1983, 29 in 1984, and 25 in 1985 (Arnez 1981; Revere, 1985). In a study conducted by Jones and Montenegro (1990), they reported that 24% of the nation's superintendents were female, 12.5% were minorities and of that 12.5% about half were minority women (Jones & Montenegro, 1990). In his 1992 study, Glass established that women constituted 6.7% and minorities 3.9% of all public school superintendents in the nation.

In the hierarchy of positions that exist within our social structures, Alfred (2001) points out that historically; white males have positioned themselves in the upper tiers in the same way that black women have been placed at the bottom. In Alston's 1996 study, she reported 45 African American women superintendents. By 1998, 5% of all superintendents were persons of color, however, information concerning the breakdown of that number by gender was

unavailable (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001). Bjork, Glass and Brunner (2001), in the *State of the American School Superintendency*, reported that amongst the 14, 000 superintendent positions in the nation, 15-18% were occupied by women. In that same year, they reported that African American women occupied 2% of the superintendent positions held nationwide. More recently, Glass and Francechini (2007) reported in the *State of the American School Superintendent* study that women occupied 21% of the 14,063 superintendent positions held nationwide.

Brown vs. Board of Education-School Desegregation

The history of desegregation in the United States is laced with practices that separate people of contrasting races in all aspects of their lives, including education. Following *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954), as well as the civil rights movement of the sixties, it was assumed that black administrators would be in high demand (Coursen *et al.*, 1989). However, since that was not the case, the settlement of Brown vs. the Board of Education brought with it the end of Jeanes Supervisors (Johnson, 2010). In *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal was unconstitutional.

Although the intended outcomes of the decision were noble and just, the reality was costly to the very community, it was supposed to help (Wilkins, 2011). The battle for equal educational opportunities that many had fought long and hard to achieve had a cost that was unexpected for the African American community (Bell, 2004; Horsford, 2009). Following this decision, schools began to desegregate and African American teachers and administrators were left looking for positions. After black and white schools merged, only white administrators were asked to stay (Toppo, 2004). Coursen (1989) stated, “Blacks supervising other blacks may have been acceptable in the South, but the possibility of black officials giving orders to white teachers and overseeing the education of white students was virtually unthinkable” (p.10). In the 11 years

following *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, more than 38,000 Black teachers and administrators in 17 southern and bordering states lost their jobs (Toppo, 2004). The number of African American educators diminished throughout the south during the 1960's by over 80% (Wilkins, 2011). In one southern state, the number of African American principals dropped exponentially between the years 1963-1973 from 209 to 3 (Patterson, 2001). At about the same time, Louisiana saw a 29% decline of its black leaders from 512 to 363. This decline not only affected black leaders but the people they led as well. Moody (1973) asserts that as African American principals disappeared, so did the teachers who served under them.

The repercussions of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954) on the number of African American women in leadership positions can be summarized in Bell's (2004) recollection of an elderly Black woman's statement about desegregation. She stated, "We got what we fought for, but lost what we had" (Bell, 2004, p. 125). Although African American leaders continue to gain representation as teachers and other staff, their pre-desegregation numbers as administrators have failed to recover.

Career Development

Pietrofesa and Splete (1975) assert, "Career development is an ongoing process that occurs over the life span and includes home, school and community experiences related to an individual's self-concept and it's implementation in lifestyle as one lives life and makes a living" (p.4). To better understand how career choice influences the development of African American women in the workforce, a review of career development theories are employed. The literature presented will range from general career development theories to those specific to women and minorities.

General Career Development Theory

In a monograph presented by Linda Gottfredson (1981), the theory of occupational aspirations and how they develop throughout a person's life was offered. Her study developed because of the limited research that acknowledged social class, intelligence, and sex as important predictors of vocational aspirations. She explored the role self-confidence (as influenced by social class, interest, values, intelligence, and sex) plays in a person's vocational aspiration at different stages of their lives. The first developmental stage of confidence starts at age 3 and ends at 5. In this stage, children grasp the idea of being an adult. In the *orientation to sex roles stage*, children ages 6-8 develop a self-concept about gender. In the next stage, *orientation to social valuation*, abstract self-concepts of social class and ability determine the social behavior and expectations of adolescents' ages 9-13. At age 14, *an orientation to one's internal, unique self* evolves. With age, each of the developing self-concepts is used to make critical assessments of job to self-compatibility. First, jobs are eliminated based on their incompatibility with gender. Next, occupations of low prestige are ruled out as jobs that relate to personal interest and values are picked up. As training and the first step in implementing choices (end of high school/beginning of college/career readiness) nears, another choice is made based on jobs that are readily available or a "Best fit" (p. 549). If problems are encountered while striving for the career choice selected up to this point, a compromise is made between interest, job level, or gender until acceptable work is found.

Donald Super (1957) developed the "life span, life space" approach to career development where he contends that individuals move through five stages of career development. In these stages, careers are developed based on the roles/position people encounter throughout their lives and the implications of decisions made in each role assumed. In the *establishment* stage, which includes ages 25-45, careers develop through comfort, advancement

and frustration. One limitation of this theory is that it fails to recognize how gender, socialization and structural inequalities affect career advancement (Cohan, 1997; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998).

John Holland (1973) developed the “trait factor” career choice theory, which proposes that individuals make choices about their careers based on interest. Holland emphasized that people perform better when amongst people and activities of common interest and psychological fit. This theory has been used as a basis for organizations that assist individuals with seeking, selecting and/or changing jobs. Additionally, the instruments they use often apply the principles found within this theory as well.

Career Development of African American Women

Brown (1995) explains that the reason most career development theories fail to address the needs and concerns of African American women, is due to the limited presence of these women during empirical testing. In spite of this, some researchers have broadly addressed the career ascension of minorities. Hackett and Byars (1996) contend that modeling is significant to the career advancement of African American women. In a career development study of black female faculty members at a majority white university, Alfred (2001) found that the women in her study took charge of their career development by creating their own self-images and ignoring mainstream stereotypes. In a comparison of their professional narratives, Johnson and Tisdell (1998) established that positionality influenced their career development.

In a qualitative study performed by Wilson (2004), concerning the career development of senior level African American women in technical colleges, data was analyzed in an effort to identify factors that contributed to their advancement in the workplace. The common factors found to be significant in the participants’ advancement were professional development, support

systems, and double jeopardy experiences. Goal setting, continued education, spirituality, and interpersonal skills were themes that emerged from Wilson's exploration of strategies that advanced the careers of minority women.

In a similar study conducted by Thomas (2004), an investigation of the factors that led to the ascension of African American women in executive leadership positions was explored. Factors identified as obstacles in their career development were racism and sexism. The researcher noted that although race and sexism were identified as inhibitors, the respondents never specifically said how each affected their succession. The factors beneficial in their succession were identified as institutional support, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

Barriers to Superintendency

Although they began their careers at the same point of entry, school administrators' access alternate routes as they navigate toward the superintendency in accordance with their individual and organizational situations (Kim & Brunner, 2009). The career paths of superintendents by district size, gender and ethnicity will be explored to better understand the complexity of this movement.

Pathway by District Size

Ortiz (1982) reported two major career paths of superintendents based on district size. His findings outlined a teacher, to principal, to central office, to superintendent path as the most common in large school districts. In comparison, Herring (2007) identified a similar path but applied it to both small (3,000) and large (25,000+) school districts. In the AASA study conducted in 2000, Glass reported that, "... many small-district superintendents are no longer moving up the ladder to larger districts" (p. 25). He found that due to family constraints placed on potential candidates and limited opportunities elsewhere, small district superintendents were usually hired from within.

Bjork and Keedy (2001) identified two major pathways to the superintendency that included moving from teacher to assistant principal/principal, on to central office staff and then the superintendency. This pathway was found to be more prevalent in large school districts. The second pathway in their study, which presented a more succinct route, included starting as a teacher and shifting from principal to superintendent. They found that this pathway presented itself mostly in small school districts with limited mid-level or central office positions.

Gender and the Superintendency

Career mobility for women in educational administration is quite different from that of men who typically become superintendents. Glass (1993) describes the natural pathway toward the superintendency as “a sequence of positions and experiences that tends to occur in a logical and ordered progression of positions of increasing responsibility and complexity” (p.30). Zeigler (1967) pointed out that while the pattern of women assumes an “in and out” orientation, men who view teaching as a stepping stone into administration have an “up or out” orientation. In comparison to males, women follow an extended track toward top ranked administrative positions. Glass (2000) noted that male teachers typically move into coaching roles, then transition to assistant principal or department chairs, work as a central office administrator, and finally acquire the role of superintendent.

In a study conducted by Fuller (2007), the career mobility path for men in leadership included assignments as secondary teachers, athletic coaches, assistant, and lead principals. Unlike Glass’ profile of male aspirants, Fuller stressed a secondary teacher lead-in. Forty-nine percent of Fuller’s male study participants identified a teacher, principal, central office route to the superintendency. In the same study, Fuller (2007) identified the typical administrative pathway for women as following an elementary or secondary teacher, to club advisor, to elementary principal, to director/coordinator, to assistant/associate superintendent course. Half

(50%) of the women participants identified with a teacher, principal, central office route to the superintendency. A major finding in this study was that male educators obtained the superintendency through line positions rather than staff roles. For men, an essential position en route to the superintendency was the secondary principalship. An essential position for women was identified as director/coordinator. Overall, the career pathways of women superintendents were found to be less vertical than men's and move diagonally between line and staff positions. Another finding outlined in Fuller's (2007) study was that men started their administrative career paths at around age 31, while women started at around age 36.7. Because women occupy both line and staff positions en route to the superintendency, their vertical movement patterns were found to be slower in comparison to men. Because of this dual occupancy, women's trek toward the superintendency could stall depending on their positionality.

Young and Brunner (2009) investigated career pathways to the superintendency by gender. Using both aspirants and non-aspirants, they found that men worked in line positions and moved vertically up to the superintendency, while women moved more horizontally and utilized staff positions. In Farmers 2007 study, he investigated the career paths of Texas public school superintendents by identifying common pathways by gender and educational attainment. Overall, the participants of this study identified the secondary principalship as the most beneficial assignment prior to acquiring the superintendency. One limitation of this study was that males heavily represented the sample population.

Ethnicity

Although literature concerning the career paths of minority superintendency is limited, some researchers have spoken on the matter. In a study conducted by Moody (1983), superintendents were asked to identify whether their mobility was two-dimensional. Specifically, he wanted to know if they were "professionally or geographically" mobile. More

black versus white respondents identified themselves as both. Glass (2000) conducted a national survey of school superintendents and found that all superintendents followed similar paths to the superintendency but with subtle differences based on race. According to Glass, minority superintendents follow a career path from teacher, to principal, to central office, and then acquire the superintendency.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) indicated that African American women did not obtain superintendence's as quickly as their counterparts; 56% of African American women were hired within the first year of actively seeking a superintendency compared to 70% of white aspirants. According to Nozaki (2000), some school districts sought out superintendents who represent various ethnicities to ensure the continuance of traditional norms that were upheld by the superintendent previously in office. Herring (2007) stated that, "25% of African American women reported waiting five or more years to obtain the superintendency compared to only 8 percent of white women and 9 percent of white men" (p. 27). This means that after acquiring their first administrative position, African American women spend a greater amount of time in the pipeline compared to their colleagues. Alston (1999) identifies a circuitous route for African American women aspiring to lead that includes; 7 years or less in the classroom, 2-3 years as assistant principal, 5 years or less as a high school principal, and at least 5 years as an assistant or associate superintendent.

In a related study, conducted by Johnson and Latimore (2009), an investigation into the mobility patterns of African American college presidents was launched. In this study, an analysis of the strategies used by minority presidents to negotiate their careers and the major factors that shaped their career paths was investigated. Major findings revealed that black

women president's career paths were shaped by their participation in extensive preparation activities such as special assignments and mentorships.

Barriers to the Superintendency for African American Women

With most literature, regarding gendered leadership reflecting that of Caucasian women (when compared to women of color), little is known about the insurmountable trials African American women face when trying to move up the corporate (or other organizational) ladder. With the passing of laws, geared toward equal opportunity for minorities in the workplace, threats such as stereotyping, multiple marginality, positionality and others should be abolished. However, for many African American Women aspirants seeking verbal mobility, these threats still exist.

Alston (1999) studied a sample of 45 black female superintendents to identify the constraints and attributes they encountered en route to the superintendency. The major findings of this study were reported in the areas of personal/professional background and job performance factors. The trends found in Alston's exploration of the personal/professional background factors shared by survey respondents revealed age, degrees, classroom experiences, pathways, and districts. The average age range of the respondents in this study was 50-54. The majority of the respondents held doctoral degrees and averaged more time in classroom than their male counterparts. A pathway finding revealed that a large portion followed the traditional pathway of women who began as classroom teachers, moved to central office, and then became superintendents. Additionally, most superintendents surveyed resided in an urban school district. The subsets identified in her exploration of job performance barriers yielded information concerning race/gender, sponsorship and ways to overcome each.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents of this study revealed that race and sexism were not major obstacles. However, an absence of sponsorship, due to a lack of role models to support that practice, was among the top barriers cited by the women in this study. To overcome these barriers, the respondents cited the development of positive working relationships with school board members, solid teamwork with experienced qualified faculty, and acceptance by non-black employees as beneficial experiences.

In Jackson's (1995) study of current and former superintendents of color, she explored the experiences that helped these women assume their positions in spite of the odds. A summary of interviews were analyzed and the profile findings of the respondents were as follows:

- The majority of the respondents held the highest academic degree possible in their field.
- Most followed a traditional pathway to becoming a principal.
- Most were elementary principals at various schools.
- They served as teachers for several years before becoming administrators.
- 50% of the respondents served as assistant, associate, or deputy superintendents in the districts where they acquired the superintendency.
- They resided in both large and small school districts with 7 out of 41 working in urban areas.

Regarding their personal influences, several participants talked about the role community and family played in their motivation and drive to be successful. Many felt that in addition to the support received from their husbands and family, their grade school teachers instilled in them a great sense of pride. Concerning leadership, no dominant type was identified; each respondent had a style all their own. However, they did agree that positive school board relationships were

critical in their attainment of and continued success as superintendents. Gender was identified more than race as an issue they encountered along the way. Jackson asserts, “How women are perceived may affect the success of women in male positions of power-especially African American Women” (1995, p. 153).

Brunner (2000) identifies three structural barriers inhibiting women of color in educational leadership programs. She explores the role narrow perspectives; risky research and lack of literature play in the experience of black women seeking advanced degrees in leadership. Regarding narrow perspectives, Brunner (2000) notes that, “...traditional educational administration curriculum continues to hold precedence over other perspectives including those of women and people of color” (p. 2). She also identifies risky research as a barrier for women of color. Brunner (2000) asserts that, “...topics focused on women and people of color is risky business for a junior professor on a tenured track” (p.2). She adds that, “...well-meaning academics have questioned me about whether others would value my work enough to publish it” (p.2). Romero and Storrs (1995) note that it is rare to find faculty advisors who view research on gender and race as important. Adding to previous conversations, Brunner (2000) also identifies a gap in literature that is focused specifically on African American women as superintendents.

Stereotypes

African American women regard stereotypes as a significant barrier to advancement. After an African American woman applies for a position, majority members’ subconscious feelings of prejudice may alter how they relate to minorities and whom they recommend for leadership roles in education (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Steele and Aronson (1995) identified the effect of these subconscious thoughts as a *stereotype threat*. This threat occurs when one uses a stereotype about a group to rationalize their performance (be it positive or negative). They reported that the prevalence of a *stereotype threat* is higher when the task is difficult or

when ability is being measured. This threat, however, is not explicit in nature; just being in the minority may heighten majority members' sense of which group the job candidate identifies with (Inzlicht & Benzeev, 2003).

In an effort to gain a deeper insight concerning those who stereotype, Goodwin and Fiske (2001) indicated that dimensions of sociability and competence underlie stereotyping of out groups. As other groups are stereotyped based on skills related to their performance, women of color face stereotypes concerning their identity (Brown, 2008). The level of influence that *stereotype threat* has on women and minorities in leadership is still undetermined. Clearly, race and gender discrimination are barriers in the selection process even though laws have been passed to prevent discrimination.

Jackson and Harris (2007) investigated the perceived barriers African American women face when aspiring to college presidencies. Forty-three African American female presidents were asked to list and expound upon barriers of their advancement to the presidency. Although the study conducted by Jackson and Harrison (2007) identified exclusions from informal networks as the primary barrier preventing African American women from acquiring presidencies, 35 of the 43 participants of the study noted being stereotyped at one point or another.

Although much of the stereotyping they endure persists from unconscious thoughts shared by non-members of their race, they also face discrimination due to their gender as well. Women of color face "Gendered Racism" when they are unable to separate the individual aspects of their identities (Blake, 1999). They must decide if the prejudice they experience is due to race, gender, or ethnicity (Bowleg, 2008). Although each, at times, blurs the line, some writers feel that race stereotypes overpower gender (Moultrie & De le Ray, 2003) while others feel that

gender is more salient or the point is moot. Yolanda Moses (1997), president of the American Association of Higher Education states, “Racism and sexism may be so fused in a given situation that it is difficult to tell which is which” (p.15). Caroline Turner (2002) identifies this conflict as Multiple Marginality. In an article written in the *Journal of Higher Education*, Turner outlines African American women’s experience with multiple marginality and other barriers to leadership attainment. Having a better understanding of multiple marginality can better help people understand the challenges faced by women of color aspiring to become leaders. Relevant barriers that emerged from interviews conducted with 64 faculty members of color included multiple marginality, little respect, and overuse. As it relates to the intersection of race and gender, the consensus amongst faculty women of color was that being both minority and female hampered their success as a faculty member (Turner, 2002). One member gave an account of a joke made by her male, white supervisor concerning the advantage her multiple identities brought to his fulfillment of federal guidelines. This account was given to describe the lack of respect women of color face when trying to be perceived as a valued resource. Another barrier identified by women is this study was being overused by departments to handle menial tasks and all issues concerning diversity and gender.

Positionality

The saying goes that, “luck is being prepared when opportunity presents itself” (Hasim, Rahman, 2013). However, because of stereotypes and multiple-marginality, African American women are prepared but not available when luck calls upon them. A major barrier faced by African American women in their quest for leadership positions is positionality. This barrier refers to their placement within society as it relates to gender, race, and economic status.

Research has confirmed that black women are positionality disadvantaged due to their status as black and female (Alfred, 2001; Cohan 1997; Johnson & Bailey, 1999; Kerka, 1998).

In a study conducted by Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998), the effects of positionality are explored using their own personal stories. One of the findings that emerged from each woman's account was that as a group, women are oppressed, a circumstance that is aggravated by various positions (Latimore, 2009). Although it has been presumed that women who occupy two minority categories have an advantage in positionality, studies show that affirmative action disproportionately benefits white women by increasing their presence and status (Johnson 1998; Sokoloff, 1992). Clearly, the black woman's positionality within the intersecting social system of race, gender, and class adversely disadvantages her and can indisputably obstruct her career advancement (Latimore, 2009)

An exploration into positionality from a different perspective reveals that within the distribution of assignments in an organization, there are pivotal positions that may advance members' mobility. In the hierarchy of positions that exist within our social structures, Alfred (2001) points out that historically white males have positioned themselves at the top of the hierarchy as black women have been positioned at the bottom. Because black women are positioned outside of the power structure within the organizations they occupy, their participation in networks that could advance their mobility and provide opportunities for advancement is limited.

Gatekeepers

Due to the limited number of women and minorities securing the superintendency and the increased presence of search consultants in the selection process, the implications of the role of consultant firms and school boards in black women's succession to the superintendency is immense. Several researchers have questioned the role these sometimes-called gatekeepers play in the advancement of women and minorities in school administration.

In a study conducted by Tallerico (2000) of search consultants and their role in the hiring of minorities in educational leadership, several gatekeeping processes were found to be at work.

The findings were as follows:

1. Their view of the ideal candidate for superintendency usually paralleled that of white males.
2. Minorities with less prestigious experience and position don't make it past the initial screening phase.
3. If minorities did advance to the final screening process they underwent more scrutiny during the interviews.

In a study conducted by Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999), they examined the role search consultants play as gatekeepers in promoting or preventing women from attaining the superintendency. Using search consultants whose work resulted in the appointment of superintendents in New York from 1992 to 1993, interviews were conducted regarding the representation of women as candidates, the active recruitment of women, and bias against women. Consultants noted that fewer women were applying for the role of superintendent and those that did apply lacked the qualifications needed. They hypothesized that women were not applying because they were land locked due to their spouses' occupations and inability to move. Additionally they asserted that women failed to apply because they were loyal to the post they currently occupied and would wait to inherit higher positions. Another concern voiced by the consultants of this study was the lack of applicants who served as a High School principal. They viewed the high school principal role as an important position en route to the superintendency. As it pertained to the recruitment of women, 40% reported it as a priority. Proponents sent invitations out to professional women organizations and

made contact with female university leaders to gain access to potential women candidates. Nevertheless, even after their purposeful recruitment, some women did not apply due to lack of interest and fear of rejection (so they stopped competing). One consultant reported that, although women were identified as finalists in 75 searches, only nine actually got the job. In their perceptions of how women were viewed by school board members, the consultants' responses were summarized using the adjectives weak, irrational, and emotional. Nevertheless, the presence of female board members were noted as an essential alliance in efforts to help women overcome the perceptions mentioned and get them appointed to the superintendency.

University Practices

Higher institutes of learning have failed to adequately support minority students graduating from professional preparatory programs by offering discourse that perpetuates the advance of white men (Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999). Moody foreshadowed in his 1973 review of black superintendents that their survival would depend on a variety of things including, "...training, guidance, and sponsorship of young, aspiring black administrators" (p. 380). Additionally he noted that, "Internship programs for training black administrators be developed...and have a guaranteed placement component built into them" (p. 380). According to Tillman and Cochran (2000), the coursework in educational administration classes is usually taught by white-male faculty and derived from the experiences of white-male superintendents. They added (Tillman & Cochran, 2000) that in order to shift this practice, universities must purposefully recruit and retain more diverse faculty. Additionally, they proposed that faculty members in higher education collaborate with school-based leaders to identify potential mentors for minority students with leadership aspirations.

Attributes to the Superintendency

Even though the advancement of African American women has been described using the concrete wall versus glass ceiling connotation, there have been a small minority of African American women who have been able to chip off a piece of the concrete wall inhibiting many of their sisters. Through a variety of strategic moves, some African American women have been able to overcome a great deal of obstacles in their quest to reach the top.

In a qualitative study conducted by Ritchie (Fassinger, Linn, Johnson *et al*, 1997), the career development of 18 prominent African American women in the U.S. was studied to identify actions that helped them attain high professional success. Using interviews, the researcher set out to identify how background influences, resiliency tactics, attribute factors, and community support influenced their growth and development. A team of researchers interviewed the women and various findings were reported. One theme that emerged from the interviews was that successful women thought from a collective versus an individual perspective. They also noted a strong commitment to helping other women. Another theme shared by many women was their reliance on their families and mentors to help them press past the many obstacles thrown their way.

Networking and Mentoring

As identified by several researchers, mentoring is critical in the succession of minorities in higher-level administration positions (Alston, 1996, 1999; Brunner, 2000; Tallerico, 2000). In a previously mentioned study, Caroline Turner (2002) summarized the barriers faced by women of color in academia, in addition to noting the ways they overcame the odds and secured top ranking positions. As stated by Turner (2002), “Networking and mentoring were mentioned many times by faculty women of color as a key component of individual and group success and

progress” (p.84). Cuadraz and Pierce (1994) identified participation in formal and informal networks as critical to women of color’s persistence in academe.

Moody (1983) investigated the role professional contacts, such as mentors play in the selection of black public school superintendents. The major findings were reported in the areas of encouragement, sponsorship, and networks. Regarding encouragement, the researcher found that 1/3 of the black population sampled reported being encouraged by someone. Survey results revealed that a higher tendency (53%) of blacks than whites (45%) reported being sponsored by another person(s). Networks were identified as more useful to blacks than whites in the attainment of their first principal positions.

Professional Development Experiences

Participants in Turner’s (2002) study noted that professional development experiences also helped them deal with the threat of Multiple Marginality. As it relates to an organizations responsibility in helping women of color overcome these odds, Ng (1993) encourages them to “. . . break the silence that has ensured the perpetuation of racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization and exclusion in the university” (p.199). Organizations must recognize the effect that race and gender can have on women of color and the success of their company, both domestic and abroad.

Women face many barriers as they ascend to leadership positions. The barriers that impede the progression of non-ethnic women to that of African American women are closely aligned. In a review of several resources, common personal and professional barriers included amongst both groups include stereotypes/sexual stereotype and positionality/overrepresentation in strategic positions. Both women’s groups experience stereotypes in some form or another.

Despite their current numbers, at one time African American women were substantially represented in executive school leadership. After *Brown vs. the Board of education*, their numbers depleted and have not gained momentum since. To better understand their slow return to leadership, an initial focus was placed on how their careers developed. The literature revealed (despite a wealth of information) that modeling, positionality, professional experiences, goal setting, and spirituality (Hackett & Byars, 1996; Tisdell & Johnson, 1998; Wilson, 2004) helped influence African American women's overall career development.

To understand their low representation, most researchers have explored “what” has prevented African American women from ascending to the superintendency versus “how” those that made it, acquired their positions. The research presented in the literature review revealed several barriers to ascension that include:

- Professional backgrounds (Alston, 1999)
- Stereotypes (Steel & Aronson, 1995)
- Multiple Marginality (Turner, 2002)
- Positionality (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998)
- Consultant firms (Tallerico, 2000)
- University Practices (Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999)

The scant discourse concerning routes most frequented by women and minorities offer limited insight on how those (African American Women) who overcame the barriers presented above continued to navigate their way to the top. Glass (2000) identified a teacher, to principal, to central office route as the most common for minorities. Using the findings presented in the review above, this researcher will continue to explore the phenomenon that involves the low

representation of African American women superintendents and the attributes/routes that can be taken by aspirants once deciding to move toward executive school leadership.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

To better understand the research questions presented in this study, a review of literature was conducted to identify trending topics that addressed the low representation of minority women as superintendents. Overall, the information available was limited and that which did exist, as evident in the previous review, focused mostly on the issues that African American Women encountered en route to the superintendency and the strategies utilized to overcome those issues. However, what has failed to manifest from the scant literature regarding minority women in executive school administration is a true model of ascension. Because of this limitation, the conceptual frameworks for this study will contribute to common trends and offer nuances concerning the mobility pathways accessed by minority women before becoming superintendents.

The conceptual frameworks for this study, lies within the findings of two previous studies that focused on women and minorities in the workplace. This study is based on the pipeline barrier findings presented in the Federal Glass Commission's 1995 study and the career pathway model of women superintendents presented by Kim & Brunner (2009). These conceptual frameworks provide a clear lens. One provides an overview of the typical pipeline barriers and attributes experienced by African American women in the workplace, as the other, helps establishes a basis for potential routes accessed by women of color whom have become superintendents in spite of barriers stacked against them.

The pathway barriers outlined in the internal barrier section of the Federal Commissions fact-finding report (1995) address barriers specific to women and minorities advancement in the work force. In summary, they found that certain positions may lead to top managerial positions and noted networking, mentoring, varied experiences, and initial job assignments as common factors that affected women and minorities participation in these positions. This concept (presented by the Federal Glass Commission, 1995) provides a framework essential to the investigation of the role pipeline (pathway) barriers play in limiting minority women's opportunities to advance.

Glass Ceiling

The results of a federal study revealed that there are barriers that are rarely penetrated by women or persons of color (Federal Glass Commission, 1995). The presence of these barriers, as identified by the Wall Street Journal in 1986, was deemed a glass ceiling for those women and minorities that tried to penetrate them. However, after further investigation by the Federal Glass Commission (1995), this ceiling, which was thought to be equally challenging to women and minorities, was found to be impenetrable by minorities. More detrimental than a glass ceiling, black women debate that concrete ceilings stall their career advancement (Johnson & Latimore, 2009). Concrete ceilings prevent them from participating in activities that could advance their careers (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Bell and Nkomo (2001) assert that before women of color can tackle glass ceilings, they must first overcome the concrete wall. The Catalyst 2004 study of African American women and the barriers they face in upper level administration revealed that the participants believed that their advancement was stalled due to the presence of a "Concrete

Ceiling.” Catalyst (2004) adds that this type of ceiling is more difficult to penetrate, due to the lack of vantage points, and the opaque view of the top.

The goal of the 21-member bi-partisan body known as the Federal Glass Commission was to identify the barriers that impeded the advancement of women and minorities in the workplace. During their research, some of the methods they employed to collect data included: public hearings, research papers, surveys, racially focused groups, and an analysis of census data. From these sources, an environmental report was compiled. This report identified perceived barriers that existed in the workplace for a variety of marginalized groups and the strategies/practices they could use to overcome them. Their research unveiled three levels of barriers faced by minorities and women. They were characterized as societal, internal and governmental. Internal barriers were defined as those within direct control of an organization (Federal Glass Commission, 1995). They consist of the following components:

1. Lack of outreach and recruitment practices;
2. Climates that alienate and isolate minorities;
3. Lack of mentoring;
4. Lack of management training;
5. Lack of opportunity for career development and/or tailored training;
6. Little access to developmental assignments or highly visible task force and committees;
- and
7. Pipeline Barriers” (Federal Glass Commission, 1995, p7).

Although education was not one of the organizational sectors researched or analyzed, the findings presented in the Federal Glass Commission’s 1995 study may be relatively significant to

women and minorities in any sector. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the barriers identified by the Federal Glass Commission (1995) as a framework to gain a better understanding of typical barriers faced by minorities as they ascend to top ranked executive positions. Additionally, for the purpose of this research, the top executive position that this researcher will focus on is that of the district superintendent. Specifically, the researcher will analyze data collected to identify the pipeline barriers (Federal Glass Commission, 1995) that stalled the advancement of African American women as they ascended to the role of superintendent. Those affected by pipelines as an internal barrier face lack of advancement and may be clustered in staff jobs that are not tracked to the top (Federal Glass Commission, 1995).

Model of Ascension for Women Superintendents

Kim and Brunner's (2009) career pathway model for women superintendents was developed as a result of their investigation into the differences and similarities between women and men's ascension to the superintendency. To identify the typical pathways women participants took to secure a superintendency, data was collected from two national studies previously conducted by AASA. Using survey responses from the 2500 women superintendents who participated in AASA's 2000 and 2005 studies, pathways were identified based on respondent's answers to questions concerning their experiences as teachers and school administrators.

Responses were analyzed concerning their experiences as teachers and school administrators. Specifically, the survey questions that offered insight on their career pathways were used to construct common models of ascension. Each pathway was drawn using Ortiz (1982) classification of school assignments that include line and staff positions. Line positions

were characterized as those in direct line with the superintendency as staff positions were deemed positions indirectly linked to the superintendency. Using the responses most frequently given, two major career paths emerged from their investigation.

As depicted in Figure 1, Kim and Brunner (2009) identified four trends that exist in male ascendance to the superintendency:

- Men accessed more line positions en route to the superintendency.
- 80% of the male respondents taught in secondary schools.
- 63% of the male respondents had coaching experience.
- Men moved directly to the superintendency from a secondary principalship.

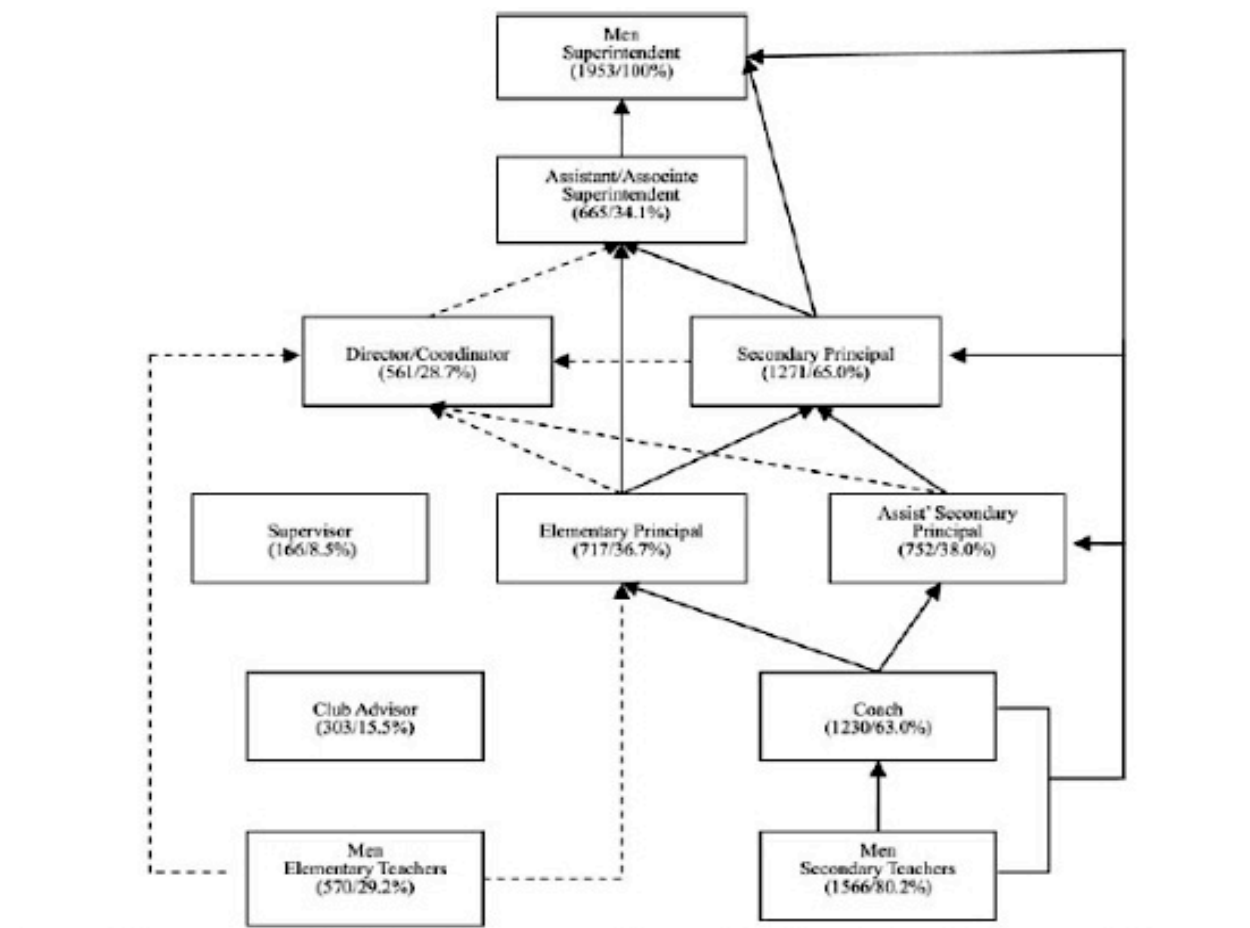


Figure 1. Model of ascension for men superintendents (Kim & Brunner, 2009, p. 88)

Kim and Brunner identified a separate path for women as they ascended to the superintendency (Figure 2):

- Women's career paths were found to be more horizontal than diagonal
- Women's seem to cluster in the middle.
- Women had experience in both line and staff positions
- Women's primary entrance into higher administration was through director/coordinator versus principal positions
- Although most female teachers are in elementary schools, the majority of the survey respondents (63%) had experience in secondary schools are both

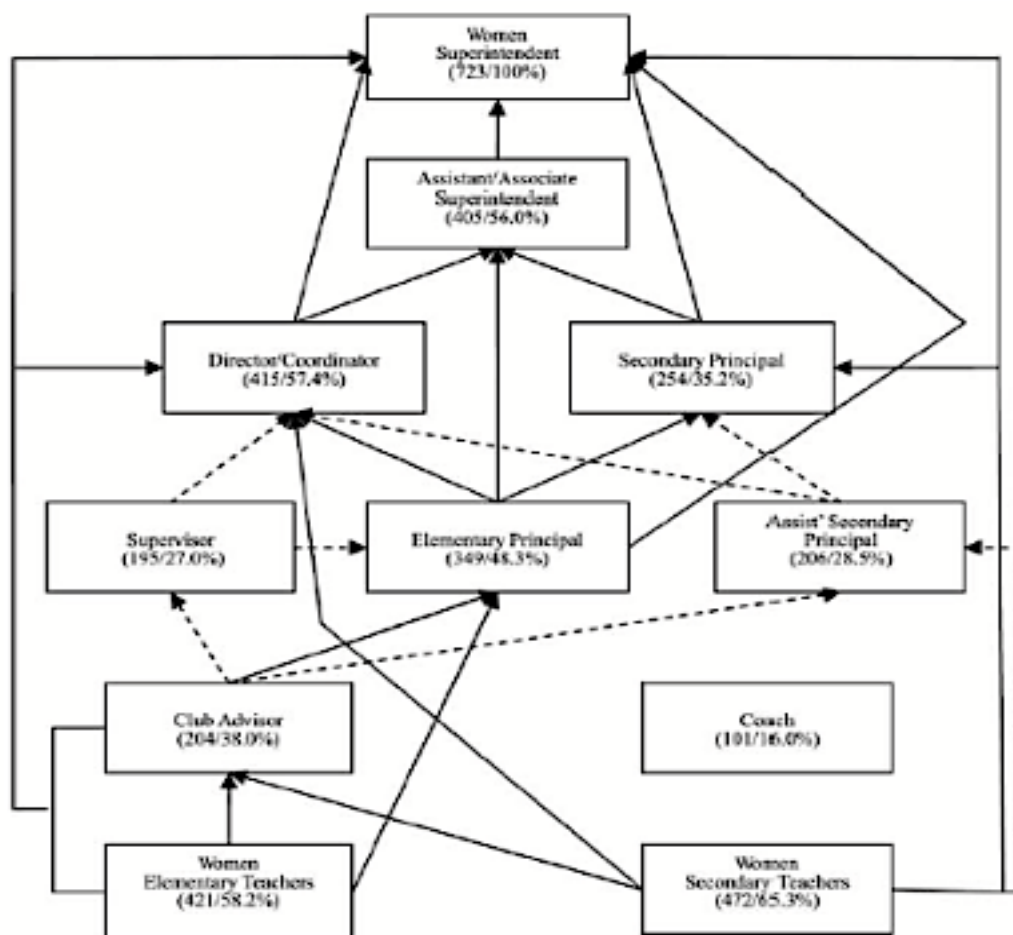


Figure 2. Model of ascension for women superintendents (Kim & Brunner, 2009, p. 89)

Despite components specific to the career mobility of African American women superintendents, these conceptual models will be used to initiate an exploration into their ascension. Although the aforementioned frameworks do not specifically address African American women superintendents, collectively they provide a powerful lens through which the questions of this research study can be explored.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Research Design

The low representation of African American women in leadership has yielded an array of barriers or attributes presented in the literature. However, their ascension to the superintendency has been a topic that has eluded many researchers. The model presented in the study by Kim and Brunner (2009) begins to shed light on their ascension by offering a pathway that addresses a fraction of their marginality; being a women. The most frequented pathway accessed by the women in their study involved a teacher, principal, and central office track. The findings presented by the Glass Ceiling Commission established the constraints that minority women encounter when attempting to move up in private organizations. Those constraints include little access to developmental assignments, clustering, a lack of opportunity, networking, and mentoring.

Due to the absence of a theory specific to the plight of minorities in the workplace, the frameworks for this study were paired based on their contribution to the overarching research question. The pathway offered by Kim and Brunner (2009) and the findings presented by the Federal Glass Commission (1995) provided the lenses used to frame this study. Both conceptual frameworks allowed the researcher to address two key questions: How African American women move through the education ranks to become superintendents and what common barriers and attributes they encounter along the way?

A phenomenological method of qualitative research was chosen to gain an in-depth perspective of the hidden variables that have led, helped, and hindered African American women superintendents in Louisiana from acquiring the superintendency. According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), phenomenological researchers “Seek to understand the deep meaning of a person’s

experiences and how he articulated these experiences” (p.96). To that end, extensive engagements with study participants in the form of explicit and systematic interviews typify the work of a phenomenological researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In phenomenological research, Seidman (1998) notes three purposeful interview types:

- The researcher familiarizes him/herself with each participant’s narrative (Seidman, 1998). This researcher facilitated preliminary interviews in a natural setting to help build a rapport with the participants of this study.
- The researcher focuses on experiences of interest (Seidman, 1998). This researcher used guided questions with subsequent follow-up questions to add versatility to the interview process and ensure depth.
- The researcher reflects and tries to give meaning to the respondents experience in light of their history (Seidman, 1998). This researcher triangulated data to reduce bias and maximize the effectiveness of the data collected.

A phenomenological approach enables a researcher to explore the lived experiences of current African American superintendents in Louisiana. According to Van Manen (1984), phenomenological researchers ask, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” (p. 38). He adds,

Phenomenology differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain . . . Insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world . . .so phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insight which brings us in more direct contact with the world (p. 37).

This study is focused on gaining insight from the experiences of African American women superintendents in Louisiana who have overcome the odds and acquired a position thought to be unattainable. Using narrative inquiry, the researcher focused on each woman’s

portrayal of her personal experiences in educational leadership. From these portrayals, the researcher produced a reflective report that filtered the participant's experiences through the conceptual frameworks established a priori. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry involves defining a person's life experiences through storytelling. Further, narrative inquiry helps the researcher to pinpoint shared moments between the participants that helped shape their lives and/or added meaning to their experiences (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). A phenomenological approach centered around narrative inquiry was appropriate for studying the ascension of African American women and the encounters they experience en route to the superintendency; thus, this methodology allowed the researcher to give meaning beyond the numbers. It is known that African American women are ill represented in top ranked leadership positions and that several factors may explain this; however, phenomenology allowed the researcher to determine the nature of or the context surrounding the statistics related to the low representation of African American women in executive school leadership.

The findings of this study will contribute to existing literature on women and minorities in school leadership. To permeate the existing body of literature, the researcher plans to fill the gaps produced by models of ascension that have traditionally focused on the plight of white men by adding the pathway experiences of minority women superintendents. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the pathways accessed by African American women as they ascend to the superintendency in Louisiana's public school systems?
2. What barriers or attributes do women of color encounter or access en route to the superintendency?

3. Did their pathway to the superintendency differ from traditional models?

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Rossman and Rallis (2012) define this method as sampling in which you “. . . have reasons (purpose) for selecting specific participants, events, or processes.” (p.138). Creswell (2007) adds that individuals are selected for purposeful sampling with the premise that they will be able to aid in the understanding of the issue of investigation. In research conducted by Maxwell (1996), three goals of purposeful sampling emerged.

First, the sample needs to represent the individuals under investigation (Maxwell, 1996). In this study, five current African American women superintendents in Louisiana are the purposeful sample. Boyd (2001) noted that 2 to 10 participants in a study are enough to reach saturation.

Second, the sample allows for the deliberate examination of questions presented at the beginning of the study and any additional questions that may evolve. The participants of this study were chosen because they were an intact group; collectively, they make up the entire population of African American women superintendents in Louisiana. The research questions that guided this study were open-ended. The guiding questions used during the interview phase also contain follow-up or clarifying questions that were used to ensure depth of knowledge during each participants interview. This type of questioning allowed the researcher to shed light on the topic of investigation without prohibiting the emergence of new information.

Third, the sample allows for comparisons that will show differences and similarities among the participants. Due to the absence of databases that specifically track superintendents by ethnicity and gender, the researcher had to take additional steps to locate the purposeful sample of this study. Using the Louisiana Department of Education’s list of current

superintendents, the researcher highlighted names that were possibly female and visited each of their webpages to confirm or deny their ethnicity. From this process, the researcher was able to deduce that in the state of Louisiana there are five African American women public school district superintendents.

Data Collection

According to Merriam (2002), the researcher of a qualitative study is the primary instrument for collecting data in a study. In this role, fieldwork must be conducted that requires the researcher to be in close proximity with the participants of the study to collect data (Merriam & Simpson 2000). Fieldwork was the primary method of collecting data in this study. Data was collected from three major sources: interviews, follow-up emails, and state documents (Merriam, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The purpose of collecting data from a variety of sources was to ensure triangulation. Data triangulation allows the researcher to make comparisons and validate data in like findings (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Holloway, 1997). Triangulation was achieved through a triangulation analyst. In this study, the peer debriefer, researcher, and study participants served as analyst. The participants validated the accuracy of the information presented in the transcripts. The researcher and peer debriefer met frequently to validate that data saturation had been met. The peer debriefer for this study was Dr. Krisanna Machtmes.

Using predetermined, open-ended questions based on findings presented in the review of literature, the researcher created a flexible interview environment that allowed for topic elaboration. According to Reinharz (1992), qualitative interviewing is a worthwhile process in understanding the lived experiences of women and minorities. Etter-Lewis (1993) adds that a loosely structured conversational interview allows the researcher to attend to the needs of black women and their style of narration and allow them to present their stories in an empowering way.

Interviews were conducted with the participants of this study until no new perspectives emerge from the discourse. Unstructured in-depth interview questions guided each superintendent's interview. Follow up questions for this study were "... directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196)." Using "bracketing," the researcher offset her "...preconceptions and personal views (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 24)."

Pathways were the main documents collected from the participants of this study. Each superintendent was asked to construct a pathway of their professional lives, starting with their first certified assignment in the public school sector leading up to the superintendency. This information provided the researcher with a graphic representation of the pathways taken by each superintendent and set the stage for a comparison of each woman's experience. It also served as a frame of reference to organize field notes and interview transcripts while validating misconceptions found in other sources.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts and pathway information collected during this study was analyzed using a modified version of Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) phenomenology methodology.

1. Listing and grouping of each relevant experience: The researcher highlighted every expression relevant to the experiences (Horizontalization).
2. Reduction and Elimination: The researcher tested each expression to determine the invariant constituents (meaning units). Expressions that were deemed necessary to understand the phenomenon were kept and labeled.
3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents (meaning units): The researcher clustered the invariant constituents (meaning units) into a thematic category. These categories became to core themes that emerged from the phenomenon being investigated.

4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation: The researcher checked the invariant constituents (meaning units) and themes against the original transcript. Units that were not compatible or explicitly expressed were deleted.
5. Use Validated Invariant Constituents to Construct Individual Textural Descriptions of the phenomenon: Using verbatim responses from the interview transcript and validated meaning units, the researcher constructed textural descriptions of the phenomenon.
6. Descriptions and Meaning: The researcher constructed for each participant a description of the meaning and essence of their experience in the phenomenon using invariant constituents and themes identified to support descriptions given.
7. Composite Descriptions: Using the individual textural-structural descriptions, the researcher developed a comprehensive description of the meanings and essence of each participants experience in the phenomena by representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Quality of Study

Ethical research was ensured using consent forms (Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996) and relationship building. Before starting the interview process, the researcher reviewed the consent form with each participant. Their consent was noted with a signature and recorded verbally on the audio transcript. Additionally, the researcher was transparent with regards to the depth of the study to establish a rapport and gain the trust of the participants.

Threats to data quality were controlled using internal validity practices. Golafshani (2003) asserts that, “Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (p. 190). To ensure that the findings presented correlated with the exact accounts of the research participants (Merriam & Simpson, 2000), the researcher provided each participant with a transcript of their interviews. She also conducted

follow-up phone calls with the study participants to clarify any vague information collected. Data bias was curbed using a peer review process. External reviewers were asked to read and analyze interview transcripts. Anonymity was established by assigning aliases to each participant of this study.

Lens of the Researcher

Patton (2002) asserts that if research is to be considered credible, the researcher needs to remain neutral to the phenomenon in their study. Latimore and Bailey (2009) add that all researchers should put aside their bias to ensure the research is not adversely affected. Given my dual status in educational leadership, I must curb my subjectivity to ensure the quality of my work.

I am personally vested in this research whether I choose to be or not. I am a black woman in administration, with no aspirations of becoming a superintendent. My career path in the field of education can be described as somewhat complex; thus, I have occupied several positions in my 10-year stint in the field. I began my career in education as a teacher and within 5 years worked my way into a support position that placed me in line with my first administration assignment. Since then, I have migrated through administrative and support positions. Currently, I work as an Assistant Administrator at a high poverty-high performing elementary school.

The experiences that have attributed to my mobility include positionality and sponsorship. I have always worked in schools with seasoned principals who gave me several opportunities to gain experience in a multitude of administrative practices and when given the opportunity, ushered me into several positions. I have also benefited from circumstances. Simply put, I have been in the right place at the right time and most of my career advancements have been due to promotions.

The most eminent experience that I have had in educational leadership was realizing that I deviated from the norm. Moving through the ranks, I began to notice that the more I moved the less represented my significant others became. Knowing their worth, I began to wonder why my black colleagues (who were outstanding teachers) were substantially represented in one position but drastically not in others. This curiosity fueled my desire to investigate this phenomenon more closely.

Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board Approval

Permission for the study was requested from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Louisiana State University. The approved application may be found in the Appendix.

CHAPTER 4: ORGANIZING, ANALYZING, AND SYNTHESIZING DATA

Using interviews as the primary instrument of investigation, five African American Women superintendents reflected on the professional experiences that led them to the superintendency. One out of the five participants opted to provide written responses to the primary interview questions as the others agreed to meet face-to-face. Most interviews took place in the personal offices of each participant. Post-interview communication was conducted via email and phone conversations with each superintendent or their executive secretaries. The post-interview communications served as an opportunity to clarify misconceptions and ask follow-up questions to gain depth. The questions asked reflected the primary topics of investigation: pathways, barriers, and attributes.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of five African American Women superintendents in Louisiana and their pathways to the superintendency. From their experiences, the researcher investigated their ascension to the superintendency to identify core themes. The data presented in this chapter was extracted from interviews conducted with 5 African American women superintendents currently serving in districts throughout the state of Louisiana. In this chapter data is presented in the following order: Demographics, horizontalization, meaning units, themes, textural-structural descriptions and composite textural structural descriptions

Demographics

Similarities that emerged from the personal profiles of each participant included their educational level, number of children, marital status, and historical stance as superintendents. Three of the participants in this study held doctorate degrees. Most reported having 2 or fewer

children and are currently married. Although their years as superintendents ranged from 2- 8, most began their tenure as the first minority female to occupy the superintendency in their district's history.

Regarding their district profiles, all reported working in a rural area. Most serve less than 3,000 children, with four out of five leading a predominately African American student population. Although several similarities exist within their district profiles, one substantial difference was found in their current level of performance.

Table 1. Personal Profiles of African American Women Superintendents

Name	Years as Superintendent	Ethnicity	Age	Children	Marital Status	Highest Level of Education
Tiffany	2	African American	41	5	Married	Ed.D.
Jennie	4	African American	44	1	Single	Ed.D.
Shannon	8	African American	49	2	Married	Master's
Mandy	10	African American	69	1	Married	Ed.D.
Laura	2	African American	45	2	Married	Ed.D.

Table 2. Pathway to the Superintendency for African American Women Superintendents

Name	Bachelor's Degree	1 st Professional Assignment	Teaching Assignment	Auxiliary Assignment	Assistant Principal	Principal (ES)	Principal (MS)	Central Office
Tiffany	Secondary Education	Long-term Substitute	Middle School	Site Director	X	X	X	
Jennie	Elementary Education	Teacher	Elementary School	None Identified	X		X	X
Shannon	Computer Science	Secretary	Elementary School	Interim Principal	X		X	X
Mandy	Business Education	Parish Personnel	Middle School	None Identified	X			X
Laura	Elementary Education	Teacher	High School	Instructional Leader		X		

Table 3. District Profiles of African American Women Superintendents (Louisiana Department of Education, 2011, 2012)

Name	Hiring Status	Free/Reduced Lunch Status	District Size	District Location	Caucasian Students	African American Students	District Letter Grade
Tiffany	Outside	86.8	810	Rural	4.9	94.5	F
Jennie	Within	72.8	2,050	Rural	29.7	68.2	D
Shannon	Within	61.0	14,490	Rural/Urban	66.3	21.0	B
Mandy	Within	95.6	1,210	Rural	<1.0	98.9	C
Laura	Outside	89.9	1,940	Rural	6.1	92.5	D

Horizontalization

During the horizontalization process, the researcher, study participants, and a peer debriefer examined transcripts. After adding the corrections submitted by the participants of this study and the follow up responses initiated by the researcher, the transcripts were deemed valid. To validate the process of data analysis the researcher met consistently with a triangulating analyst. Being sure to practice epoche, the researcher read and re-read each transcript over an extended amount of time to understand the full essence of each woman's experience. Additionally, this process paired with deep reflection helped the researcher synthesize and organize the data in a meaningful way.

Meaning Units

After analyzing the responses from each participant of this study, the researcher identified meaning units. The meaning units were identified from the core questions that guided the interview process. After the units (that matched the core questions) were identified, they were coded, labeled and clustered together. To ensure that statements were not taken out of context, the responses of the participants were reported in their original form, free of

extraneous text. Each meaning unit, presented below, follows the sequence it appears within the guiding questions used during the interview process.

Meaning Unit One: What experiences influenced your decision to become an educator?

Tiffany: “It was my family, they are educators...but because of that I didn’t want to become an educator...when I became a long-term substitute in an alternative program that started it all...I developed a love for children and answered the call to become an educator.”

Jennie: “During my high school years, I was fortunate to serve as a teacher’s assistant for two hours of the day in a kindergarten and third grade class...both of those teachers were highly instrumental in my chosen career...as with many educators, I would spend evenings and summers playing school.”

Shannon: “My mother was an educator.... my grandparents decided that the boys had to work and the girls went to college, [and] all [where to become] teachers...my Mom was an educator and she would bring kids home with us on the weekend...so that’s why I ended up being an educator.”

Mandy: “Growing up I was exposed to persons in my family who were in education...I had an aunt who was an elementary teacher, two or three cousins who also were in education and I had an opportunity to observe them in my early years coming up...I [also] had some teachers who were pretty inspirational.”

Laura: “I think it was my teacher...I had a teacher that was excellent, a great role model... she later became the principal and from that point I just thought, hey, I want to be a teacher and shift to principal...when I went to college, I wanted to be a nurse... after I got married and had a child I wanted to be a teacher and wanted her [child] to become a teacher... at that time teachers had a status...I thought it was a safe position... I could raise a family and still take care of basic needs.”

Meaning Unit Two: Describe your college and certification experiences.

Tiffany: “I wasn’t going to school to be an educator...I went to school to be a writer and later received my BS degree in secondary education... I got my master’s degree in Administration and Supervision, took the test and passed it and got my doctorate from XXXX, took the superintendency test and passed it.”

Jennie: “I followed the courses prescribed at XXXX- a four year institution. This university afforded me a BA, MA, MA+30, and an Ed.D. While pursuing the Ed.D., classes were also taken at XXXX and XXXX Universities.”

Shannon: “[I] majored in computer science with a minor in math. So my first degree is not in education. I went through the old alternative certification program. While there, I went on to complete a master’s degree and later added on my superintendent certification.”

Mandy: “I graduated from XXXX university in business education...I took the civil service test and passed it...I went an alternative route [to receive my education certificate], it was added to my business education degree...it was different from the alternative routes you have available now... I immediately went into my master’s degree [program] because while certifying in English, I took courses on a grad level to certify.... my master’s degree was in elementary language arts...after my ELA [certificate] I continued to certify...I got an educational specialist degree... later I got certified in administration, child welfare, and city parish supervisor . . .after that, I immediately went to the doctoral program opened at XXXX...I was one of the first 45 students admitted to the educational consortium at XXXX.”

Laura: “I stayed in nursing two years... after having the baby, I went back to school and acquired a degree in elementary education...I got my master’s in administration and supervision.”

Meaning Unit Three: How would you describe your route to the superintendency?

Tiffany: “I was a long-term substitute in an alternative program... I was in a teaching position, then became an assistant principal, and from there principal. Prior to becoming a superintendent, I served on XXX’s external review team for high schools. From principal, I went straight into the superintendency.”

Jennie: “I have held several positions en route to the superintendency: classroom teacher- 8 years; administrative assistant- 2 years; principal- 4 years (middle school and alternative school); secondary supervisor- 4 years; superintendent 4- years—

Shannon: “I ended up applying not as a teacher but for a computer job...while waiting for the computer job the superintendent at the time said, ‘We don’t have a position in the computer department but one may be coming up. Would you consider replacing one of our secretaries?’ So I became a secretary in the personnel department. Before a position could open in the technology department, they opened a training school here for special education students so they would have jobs. They brought on a student worker and asked if she could work along with [me]... they saw that I could work with special needs students...the personnel supervisor came to me and said, ‘You have a knack for that [working with special needs students] and we have a need for a special education teacher. Would you consider going?’ ... I ended up becoming a special Ed teacher, non-certified... I became the special education department head and from there I became the administrative assistant at the same school...next I became an assistant principal at an elementary school. I stayed there for a year and became the principal of a middle school. I stayed there for about 3 or 4 years and achieved the supervisor of personnel position. I remained in personnel for about 3 to 4 years and applied for the interim superintendent position. Six months later, I became the permanent superintendent here.”

Mandy: “Once I got out [of school], my first job was with the welfare department...I got that job directly out [of college]...my first education job was in a high school. I taught ELA to seventh and eight graders. I was not certified at that time but did certify the next school year...while working on my doctoral degree I was promoted to assistant principal... I did one year as assistant principal and from there I was promoted to elementary supervisor K-8 and that was at central office . . . naturally, I aspired to become the superintendent...that was one of my goals.”

Laura: “I was a teacher at a high school for five years...I got a job as a math specialist in an elementary school...I stayed there for two and three fourths of a year and a principal tapped me to become his instructional leader, which was just like an assistant principal but I had not finished all my certification... from there I became the curriculum coordinator and then moved to principal and the superintendency... I actually skipped the middle layer [central office].”

Meaning Unit Four: What position best prepared you for the superintendency?

Tiffany: “You have to be a principal...I don’t feel that you need to be a supervisor at central office...the principal-ship is the hardest job...I’ve never been a supervisor or anything in central office but I know those jobs and how to do them... you may learn one thing in central office and dabble in a couple of other areas.... In my experience, you have to be a principal.”

Jennie: “The principal’s position proved to be most essential to the superintendency. This position exposed me to the overwhelming task of overseeing the entire operation of a school. It allows one to see the entire educational picture and plan accordingly. In other positions, most of the decisions are made by others, with the daily operations of the school being the responsibility of the principal. At this level, one is exposed to laws, procedures, and policies which govern schools, as well as preparing for the success of the school.”

Shannon: “The Personnel position allows you to have more exposure to workman’s comp issues, law suits, and a lot of things that the superintendent deals with on a day to day basis. Most of your biggest budget cuts have to come from personnel. They have to know how to deal with attorneys, background checks, and be able to deal with people.”

Mandy: “There was one position where everybody said, ‘if you’re in that position, you’re the next superintendent’...the supervisory position is the one that most of my predecessors have come from.”

Laura: “I would recommend a central office position prior to the superintendency because that has been my greatest transition. There are some central office positions that assist the superintendent in carrying out his job. Being brand new [to the superintendency] from a principal, I knew all the managerial things, the curriculum, the academics, dealing with parents, but the piece that I don’t know about was the politics and the things we have to deal with in terms of politics... building renovations, legal issues, those are the types of things that tie me up as a superintendent...just being a teacher or just being a principal coming to central office is very difficult.”

Meaning Unit Five: Describe the interview process you underwent to become a superintendent.

Tiffany: “I had to sit on a panel with interviewers that were superintendents from the area...they were from the top school districts...It was their task to give the board the top three or five candidates...that was the first step...the next step was a public forum where we answered questions from the audience and the moderator...from that point, the board selected who they wanted... the superintendents gave them a list of their top three... the superintendents sent a letter to the board telling them that by far, I was the one they wanted.”

Jennie: “I was interviewed by a panel of board members...each asked questions pertinent to education and the parish specifically. The improvement of test scores was a priority for the district, along with faculty-staff relations. The most difficult part of the interview was focusing of the particular questions [asked] and providing accurate, precise information.”

Shannon: “They used an open interview [where] anybody was able to come. The board members sat around a big horseshoe...the audience is to your back...there were community people there...after being questioned, you were able to say something at the end...they [school board members] called another meeting and made their appointment.”

Mandy: “It was a public meeting... I did a presentation first... I talked about what I would do in the district if they were to select me as their superintendent...after that; they [the board] asked me questions as well as the audience... It was not a difficult process thus my doctoral program had prepared me.”

Laura: “XXXX parish prepared me for this interview...we would have to interview with a panel and then go before a committee to answer questions...In this particular interview, I went before the public and the board...it was an open interview...I was used to that because I had done it in XXXX as a principal twice... I interviewed once and got a phone call a week later... there were 13 or 16 candidates... they chose the top five to interview in the open forum... I felt very comfortable with the questions and the board...I wanted to make sure I was not answering questions in a way they did not understand me...I wanted to be sure that my jargon was appropriate for the audience.”

Meaning Unit Six: Have most of your predecessors come from within or outside of the school district? What has been the race/gender of the past 3 superintendents in this district?

Tiffany: “The last one was not from within the district; she came from a neighboring parish. The one prior to her came from outside the parish. The one prior to her came from

within: I think. The one prior to me was a black female...prior to her was a white female...prior to her were men... most of them were men before that.”

Jennie: “There were only two who were not former employees of XXXX Parish Schools in some capacity...most served as a principal, supervisor then [were] awarded the superintendent position. 2 of the three were Caucasian; one African-American male.”

Shannon: “There is no female superintendent in XXXX parish history, not an African American male or female.”

Laura: “The last one [superintendent] was from within the district and the one before him was from outside of the district...I am probably the second one from outside of the parish...I am the first African American female in XXXX’s history... I think there has been a white male but it has typically been an African American man within the last 10 years.”

Mandy: “Most of the superintendents have come from within [the district]...I am the first African American female...there was a male African American who proceeded me... before him, they were all white males... there were no females.”

Meaning Unit Seven: In your position, prior to acquiring the superintendency, were you replaced by someone of the same gender, ethnicity and (in your opinion) with the same skill set?

Tiffany: “A white male replaced me. No [he did not have the same skill set].”

Jennie: “Yes [he had the same skill set] and somewhat more advanced as the transition was made...the roles of counselors began to change regarding the graduation requirements and diploma track. My successor served as a high school counselor, so he was able to fulfill the responsibilities with ease.”

Shannon: “I was replaced by a white male. He is very intelligent and knows the policy. He’s working on being more personable and comfortable in dealing with boards and large groups.”

Laura: “I was replaced by a male... I think he was good...they are transitioning to another principal... when you look at what happens after you leave a school you wonder if they are able to maintain... you want to know that you put something in that school to make it work... they have had some changes in leadership, but they are at a point where they had to get somebody stable [to bring things] back to where it was when I got there.”

Mandy: “I kind of hand picked her [my replacement]...I worked with her [previously] . . . so I think that she was equally prepared ... she is still with me now... she was that go getter, a lot like me because she would go outside of her job description and do other jobs . . . I saw her working to do whatever she was assigned to do... she took my position as assistant principal.”

Meaning Unit Eight: Now that you have attained this position, where would you like to go from here?

Tiffany: “Wherever God sends me...they say when you finish your doctorate doors will open up and I don’t feel that way...everyone thinks this is a stepping stone for me; but I don’t see it... I thought I would retire as a superintendent...[the interim state superintendent] made me feel like that was possible.”

Jennie: Given my original career goals, the final step was a professorship at a university. I have not given up on this aspiration. Being a single parent who is concerned about the education and welfare of my child, this has been placed on hold for now due to the possibility of having to teach night classes.”

Shannon: “Retirement... possibly some university work... or even working with boards. I have a 15-member board and we work well together...I’d like to do something with training boards because I think they need a lot of professional development.”

Mandy: “I would like to go to higher education or I’d like to start my own [consulting] business or purchase a franchise.”

Laura: “I believe we are going to be the number one district... we are going to make sure we are doing everything we can in order to reach that goal...but there are other aspirations as well...It is a small district and I believe God has greater things in store for me and when it’s time, I’ll know... I am studying other superintendents to see what they are doing to make it work.”

Meaning Unit Nine: Can you describe 3 experiences (that may have been perceived as barriers to others) that you turned into opportunities in route to the superintendency?

Tiffany: “God puts you in situations that prepare you for the next level...you don’t know what that next level will be, but looking back I can say that first interview help me...I applied for a principal position to get the experience going through an interview... I knew I was not going to get it...they had already decided who they wanted... I learned from that the types of questions they ask [during administrative interviews] and the need to be fully prepared for whatever questions [that may] come my way.”

“If anything, it’s the things that took place in my personal life that made me strong enough to deal with the issues [a superintendent faces].”

Shannon: “I had a self-contained class, teaching students all in one room (grades 3 to 5) all day with severe skill and behavioral deficits. I remember a student saying, ‘You know, you black women, you can’t come in and tell me what to do; I am going to knock that baby out of your belly.’ I decided that if I were to leave, it would be on my terms...I was able to transform those kids...These kids were termed alternative; they were not working on a diploma...I felt that they were placed in the program because of behavioral issues and non-supportive parents...I made it my business to say that I’m going to correct this...I started making home visits and doing exactly what my mom did...I brought kids home to live with my family on the weekends and had their parents to come over on the weekends as well. At that time [in education] things

were changing, everybody was tested [including] my students. I was called in and asked, ‘Well, what did you do to them? Your students out scored some of the regular Ed kids and they shouldn’t be scoring on that level because they’re alternative.’

After being asked by the secretaries whom she use to work with whether she would hold some of the tasked they had her do against them she explained, “No, no, yall know me better than that...what I learned to do was make the best out of a bad situation...when you ladies sent me out to that building with our old files, while I was filling, I also read every document I had to file...when you sent me to file lawsuits, I read every lawsuit that the district went through... I read what lead to the suits...when you asked me to put something in order for the superintendent, I read every piece to make sure I was doing it correct and for my own knowledge...you didn’t know you were giving me an opportunity to learn, but you did.”

Regarding special assignments, Shannon tells a story of being thrown in the fire, “The superintendent told me that a couple of principals and assistant principals were going to a conference and they needed somebody to step in and run the school. So he was going to send me down there...they sent me way down the bayou, where there were not many black people...I thought, they were trying to test me or get rid of me, but I went in, spoke with the kids, worked with the families: not a problem...I took it as an opportunity to gain exposure in the southern part of the parish. I think part of the training was to see if I could communicate and deal with all different cultural aspects in XXXX. White, purple, green, black whatever...they immersed me in the culture to see if I got it.”

Mandy: Regarding her mentor Mandy states, “It worked out so well [however] there were so many people who told me that it would be a mistake to be an assistant under him

because he was just iron clad... that turned out to be an asset for me...he was very supportive...it was like everything that everyone told me about him was the opposite.”

Regarding her ability to transform the face of the superintendency that had been dominated by white males in the past, Mandy reveals, “[I was] out in the community... people knew me from not only [being] in the school district but a lot of parents got to know me through the workforce alliance program... I volunteered to do things in the community... If they needed someone to write a grant, they came to me.”

Laura: When asked why she didn’t apply for the principal job after her mentor left she states, “I was not certified at that time...but they would have taken his [mentors] word if I would have applied, but I was not certified...however I supported the person who came in . . . she was a teacher that use to work under me...I carried on the roles and responsibilities of the school until she got acclimated to the new position.”

“At the school where I was a curriculum coordinator, I applied to be the principal . . .they gave it to someone else...I told the superintendent that he had made a very good choice and that I am willing to work with her to make sure that this school keeps going forward...I always remained professional in whatever I did... that may have been something that was a plus because most of the time people get bitter and I guess I didn’t get bitter, I got better...I kept doing my job, respected the principal, supported her 100 percent...three months later I was chosen as principal at another school. . .the first interview prepared me for the second one.”

Meaning Unit Ten: In you experience, have there been any barriers (3) specific to women of color that have stalled their ascension to leadership positions?

Tiffany: “Its not about black or white for me as it is more about your district having the wealth and clout to get things done...if you have the skillset to do the job, keep in mind that it

will be more difficult for you to get a job in an affluent district, it just will be... [If I would have applied anywhere else] they wouldn't have selected me because I'm a black women."

Jennie: Barriers: (1) The male domination of the education field; (2) Creating meaningful relationships with others who are reluctant to share expertise; (3) Building a sense of trust among employees.

Shannon: "I think they are stereotyped into one situation or another...people will challenge their ability...which makes, particularly black females, get on the defense...they don't have many opportunities to get out there and gain exposure...people think they won't be able to speak in public."

Mandy: "An African American women is going to run into (when they deal with the business part of their job), Caucasian males who perceive that because you are a female and your black, they can come in and easily run something and you're not going to stand up if you think something is wrong...even when we are dealing with black males they have the same thing [perception]."

Laura: "When most people don't get the first position, they quit and instead of getting better, they get bitter."

"They think, if they are not connected to someone, they can't do it. One of the questions I was asked when I got the principal job was, 'who did you know to get this job?' I didn't know anybody... I just did my job and prayed and whatever God had for me was for me...a lot of times they feel they have to be connected to somebody and that's not necessary."

Meaning Unit Eleven: Why do you think you were selected?

Tiffany: "As it pertains to being selected for the superintendency, Tiffany reports, "I was honest... they said that I had the passion to do the job... I was confident enough to do the job and I was going to do what it took to move the system forward."

Jennie: “When my application was submitted, there were only three applicants. I feel that since many [were not] certified as a superintendent, and the other two were [from] outside of the parish, the timing was appropriate for such a transition.”

Shannon: Regarding her attainment of the personnel position Shannon notes, “Because XXX had a lot of teachers that were lacking skills, my motto was that I’m going to make sure that you have the training...you’re going to love these kids and if you don’t, then you’re going to see the door...that became my motto; I think it helped me achieve that personnel position.”

As it pertains to why she was selected for the superintendency, Shannon reports, “My reputation for being fair minded, consistent, non-political, just doing the job, following policy, writing policies, being able to work through situations and also my ability to make people feel at ease was what they were looking for.”

Laura: As it pertains to why she was selected for the superintendency, Laura reports, “They [the board] want to know they can trust you.”

Mandy: “As it pertains to why she was selected for the superintendency, Mandy reports, “They knew me and they knew I had worked with a school that was academically unacceptable and turned it around...I completely turned that middle school around [using] the middle school concept, with anti-disciplinary group teachers...I wrote grants for all of the schools when they really needed it . . .I remember writing one when I had the flu...I had to finish it and I was really sick but I knew that I had a deadline...I got the grant.”

Meaning Unit Twelve: Did you have any mentors, sponsors, supporters, or motivators during your pathway to the superintendency? Have you mentored someone or sponsored his or her mobility?

Tiffany: “I was asked by Mrs. Dorothy Right to serve as a site director for a summer program...she gave me an opportunity to be a leader over teachers and students...she also taught

me how to be a very good teacher...I didn't have anybody to teach me how to be a good principal."

Jennie: "I was fortunate to have a very strong, well-disciplined mentor who refined my school leadership skills. It was this individual who was instrumental in my transition from a teacher into administration. Jennie reports the following concerning her mentors input on her decision to apply for the superintendency, "After consulting with my mentor to see if he was applying, then my decision was made. He did not apply because he was told that there would not be an assistant supt., and he wanted me to have that position if he were chosen as supt. He served as a principal throughout the district, including alternative, elementary, middle and high schools. He currently serves as my Child Welfare and Attendance supervisor." My greatest asset is that others in key positions saw the leadership trait within me and this was shared with key personnel."

Shannon: "I always stayed friends with the secretarial pool, so they came in and said, 'You know you can add superintendent to your certificate.' I said, yeah, but I'm not thinking about doing that...they got together [applied for her] and said, 'We are hoping that you apply to be the superintendent.' I said, hell no."

"I have a very supportive mother and family members. My family instilled in me that if I failed at something, it's not going to be because I didn't give it my all or that someone pushed me out the door."

"I still carry on that tradition of trying to encourage people to step out of their place. I tell my curriculum supervisors to encourage people if I want to see a big pool of applicants."

Mandy: "I was always chosen as a lead teacher or if somebody was chosen as the lead teacher [by principals], it was always me...I did volunteer work and annual reports...I helped the principals do these reports... I would take things home with me and just do it."

“This person became my mentor once I served under him as assistant principal...he had been in the system for 38 years...one you really respected...he was a good mentor that first year that I worked with him...I learned a lot from him... he was very encouraging as I worked on my doctorate...He encouraged me to apply [for central office position] he told me that he didn’t want me to leave but he didn’t want to hold me back, because he could see things in me that I didn’t see in myself.”

“I have some young supervisors who aspire to become the next superintendent...I let them work along with me...take them with me to the capital...looking at bills, at the law, lobbying, sitting in on conferences and I give them assignments. Matter of fact, I have one who just passed the superintendency test, she attributed that [passing the test] to all of the opportunities that I’ve given her to participate in the budget...she’s like a sponge, she catches on quickly.”

“If [someone] was not able to perform, the superintendent would ask me if I would take on that responsibility or do this or do that I always did it and I always did more than what was in my job description because I wanted to learn how the jobs around me worked...I learned to calculate salaries, I did title one work for the title one supervisor when the director was out.”

Laura: “I was tapped by my principal... he really inspired me to go further with leadership and education because there was something about him...he was just a really good man... he was very instrumental in everything I did in terms of leadership... he gave me opportunities such as writing school improvement plans and opportunities to sit in on parent meetings... I think the reason why the superintendency happen was because of that principal . . . It was a follow-ship, for I was able to follow a great leader...he was very successful in his career . . . he had an authoritarian approach, but at the same time he knew how to handle

situations . . .he chatted with me after I did not get the principal job that I applied for...he said, ‘don’t you stop; just know that its going to happen and know [that] you will be a leader.’”

“I trained two principals and a third one is on her way... hopefully she will get this particular school [participants’ old school/old position]... she was there when I was there... I also brought one over with me and she is my director... she skipped the principalship and came over as my director of instruction... If I go to a good conference and I feel that they need to attend, I always make sure they know where that information is and how it will help them get to the next level...there is a principal whom I have been trying to push into central office, but she likes the principalship; that’s her preference...I am always trying to help people go to that next level... I think that is why I moved because I was always helped others.”

Meaning Unit Thirteen: What advice would you give female aspirants concerning pathway barriers and how to overcome them?

Tiffany: “If you want to be a superintendent and what to have a good knowledge base and be respected in that position, you would want to have your doctorate and as your working on your doctorate get your +30. In this position, you serve people; you give them the resources and the supports they need to make sure that they are able to do their jobs.”

“[Have] a successful track record in whatever level or position that you’re in at your job and of student success...don’t be shallow, stay focused on what your vision is...bring something to the table... don’t pretend like you know something and you really don’t... don’t let titles go to your head...remember that the higher you go, the more you have to serve.”

Jennie: “I feel strongly that the more educational opportunities that are experienced during the pathway offer a greater perspective and support for any position. By acquiring as much knowledge as one can, the responsibilities seem to make more sense. At the superintendent level one has to have a vision for the entire district and plan accordingly. Having

strong, supportive personnel in all areas of the central office makes this task much easier.

Regardless of the position held, I have learned that it pays to listen to all stakeholders...do not be afraid to follow your dreams and goals. The road may be difficult, but each trial offers a greater understanding to the entire process, and a clearer view of what lies ahead. Most importantly, find a mentor (a good one) to assist you along the way.”

Shannon: “Make sure that everything you do is consistent and you’re being fair in every situation with everyone. Most legal cases have to deal with consistency in employment, sick leave policies, and workman’s compensation.”

“Be willing to take a back seat and not be the star all the time...get out there and show your knowledge.”

“Don’t get into political games...read newspaper articles and study school law...sometimes people get into issues where they let politics creep into their decision making and that’s a no, no...be in tune with what people believe, how they think, and what there expectations are based on where you are. I have a keen sense of watching people...be able to hold it [your anger] and deal with it in a positive manner because that will get to people more than you trying to come out the box and challenge them because that’s what is expected...be able to speak off the cuff on issues, people will paint you into a corner and you have to be able to respond to that.”

“My philosophy is to lead by example but also to be a facilitator. I bring people together, I tell them our situation, they come up with solutions, and we discuss how they affect different groups... I would consider myself as a facilitator. In meetings, I’m not upfront pushing a point. I sit, listen and talk when its time. I’m not here to be a star; I am here to make stars.”

Mandy: “You have to prove yourself...whether it’s a teaching, principal, assistant principal job... do a good job at it...establish a reputation that you are not a pushover, that you are tenacious, that you will do what you have to do to get it done and have it done in a proper way... be professional at all times. You have to know how to deal with school board members professionally as well as the audience ...you have to maintain your calm at all times, no matter what...you have to look at it as they are attacking the position; its not me personally... remain professional at all times with board members, you just don’t loose your cool...you have to get to know board members . . .if you don’t establish a relationship [with them], you wont be there for very long.... they have to feel comfortable in coming talk with you about any problem.”

Laura: “Pay attention to details and be accurate with what you are doing... be sure to follow guidelines . . .make decisions based on accurate data...If you are aspiring to be a superintendent, you should start (even if you are writing a thesis) gearing it toward that position and learn as much as you can... field experience as much as you can as a superintendent...serve on committees at the central office level so you can be close to the superintendent as see what he/she does... also research the community in which you would like to apply and the school/district data.”

“Being honest and fair; honesty is major... If a person can’t believe your word, then they are going to count you out and then that becomes your reputation...If you can do the task, say yes, but if you can’t, then be honest and say, you know what, I can’t do that but I can learn...know current trends; know what is happening in education and have a solid philosophy...a lot of times we talk education talk, but it is not ours...you have to be able to say this is what I believe [in] and this is what I stand for...have a clear vision, [know] where you are going and how you will get there.. plan with the end in mind...if you are really serious about

leadership you have to study it...at any given day you can be tapped, people have to see that extra and they have to see the work ethics, but at the same time they have to see the character...have integrity; no matter what happens do not compromise your integrity.”

Themes

During the peer review process, meaning units and the transcripts that accompanied them were reviewed. Transcripts were analyzed to ascertain the meaning and essence of each superintendent’s experience in an effort to transform each meaning unit into a core theme. Before units could be assigned a theme, a peer debriefer reviewed the clusters created by the researcher to ensure data triangulation. The core themes that emerged from the narratives of African American women superintendents were identified and are shown below. The researcher checked each cluster against the original transcripts to validate meaning units and themes.

Table 4. Themes and descriptions of the lived experiences of African American Women superintendents

Themes	Descriptions
Early Aspirations	Education Aspirations; College Aspirations
Professional Experiences	Entry level positions; Teaching; Administration; Central Office, Essential Positions
Job Attainment	Interview Process; Selection
Past, Present and Future Mobility	Predecessor; Successor; Next Position
Reflections	Barriers to Attributes; Minority Barriers; Mentorships; Attributes

Thematic-Textural-Structural Description

After completing the textural and structural descriptions derived from each meaning unit, I re-analyzed the data against my research questions. This was done to establish a logical sequence and create a thematic-textural diagram that summarized each woman’s experience relative to themes found in their narratives. Presented below is each participant’s thematic descriptions followed by a comprehensive diagram.

Tiffany

Tiffany, a married African American women and mother of five, was the first superintendent that I interviewed. The first part of our interview was conducted at a local library and concluded at a school she once served as the administrator of on June 7, 2013. Her educational background includes a Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate, and +30. At the time of this interview Tiffany was beginning her third year as superintendent of schools.

Her early educational aspirations were prompted by her family's legacy. However, after initially fighting these influences, she later changed her original major from nursing to education. This move was promoted after a long-term substitute position confirmed her desire. She stated, "I developed a love for children and answered the call to become an educator." Following this change, Tiffany sought out additional certifications in administration, supervision and school superintendency. She notes, "I wasn't going to school to be an educator...I went to school to be a writer and later received my BS degree in secondary education."

Tiffany's professional experiences reflected that of a traditional model of ascension. After entering the field of education as a long-term substitute (at an alternative school), her route to the superintendency could be described as mostly linear. She propelled herself to the superintendency using a series of line positions with one horizontal move as an external reviewer. She began her teaching career in a secondary post, moved into administration but by passed the central office position often mentioned in literature to secure the top spot in public school education. Her route is outlined below:



Tiffany identifies the principalship as the position most essential to the attainment of and success within the superintendency. She states, “You have to be a principal...I don’t feel that you need to be a supervisor at central office...the principal-ship is the hardest job...I’ve never been a supervisor or anything in central office but I know those jobs and how to do them... you may learn one thing in central office and dabble in a couple of other areas.... In my experience, you have to be a principal.”

Regarding her attainment of the superintendency, Tiffany described the interview process as easy. She participated in a public interview facilitated by some of Louisiana’s top superintendents. They were responsible for identifying the top candidates and submitting those names to the school board so that they could make their final selection. Tiffany recalls, “The superintendents sent a letter to the board telling them that by far, I was the one they wanted.” She perceives that she was selected because the board felt that she was honest, passionate, and confident. She states, “I was confident enough to do the job and I was going to do what it took to move the system forward.”

Looking at the continuing cycle of mobility, a description of past, present, and future shifts will be described. An African American woman preceded Tiffany in the superintendency. Overall, she describes the gender make-up of her predecessors as female in recent years and mostly males before then. A white male succeeded her in her principal position. She did not feel that he possessed some of the same skill sets as her. Regarding the next link in her mobility chain, Tiffany had mixed feelings. After initially stating that she would retire as a superintendent, a statement concerning Ollie Tyler (an African American women who once served as the interim state superintendent for Louisiana) evoked state superintendent aspirations.

In Tiffany's pathway reflections, barriers to opportunities, minority barriers, mentorship experiences, and advice for future aspirants are given. One example that Tiffany recalls of a "Barrier-to-opportunity" experience involved allowing a failed attempt at securing a principal job to serve as a learning tool for the kinds of questions asked during an administrative interview. Additionally she credits her personal tragedies as sources of strength and states, "Considering my personal life, I should not be in the position I'm in...people can't believe it... some people may have taken it and said I can't move forward... I took it and said, Yes I can." One of the barriers Tiffany identified exclusive to women of color involved opportunities to lead affluent school districts. She did not feel that she would have been as successful in acquiring the superintendency if she would have applied to a predominantly white or affluent school district. Regarding the role mentorships played in her ascension to the superintendency, Tiffany identified a mentor who helped less in her ascension and growth in leadership but taught her how to be a great teacher. Overall, the advice that she would give women with superintendent aspirations includes: having a good knowledge base, obtain a doctorate degree, have a record of student success, and remember that you are in this business to serve to others.

Shannon

Shannon, a married African American women and mother of two, was the second superintendent that I interviewed. Her interview was conducted in her personal office on June 18, 2013. Her educational background includes a non-educational bachelor's degree followed by an alternate certification in education that lead to a Master's +30. At the time of this interview, Shannon was beginning her ninth year as superintendent of schools.

Shannon's early educational aspirations were brought on by her mother; an educator who would sometimes bring students home on the weekends. She states, "My grandparents decided

that the boys had to work and the girls went to college, [and] all [where to become] teachers.” Nevertheless, Shannon went against her grandparents’ directives and her mother’s desire, and opted to enroll and received a degree in computer science. Ironically, after graduating from college, she was unable to secure a job in her field and was offered a secretarial position at the school board office. This position, symbolic to the common thread found throughout Shannon’s story of ascension, became one of many experiences that lead to opportunities.

Shannon’s professional experiences reflected that of a comprehensive model of ascension whereby several positions were accessed in her rise to the superintendency. After entering the field of education as a secretary, Shannon was asked (after a successful experience working with a special needs student) to accept a position as a special education teacher. After pit stops in several administrative assignments, her final leap to the superintendency was short as she moved from the interim to permanent post. Her route is outlined below:



Shannon identifies the personnel position as most essential to the attainment of and successful transition to the superintendency. She states, “[it] allows you to have more exposure to workman’s comp issues, law suits, and a lot of things that the superintendent deals with on a day to day basis. Most of your biggest budget cuts have to come from personnel. They have to know how to deal with attorneys, background checks, and be able to deal with people.”

Regarding her attainment of the superintendency, Shannon describes the interview process as one in which her outward appearance reflected a calm, confident candidate who was nervous beneath the surface. She participated in an open interview with each school board

member positioned around her in a horseshoe. After taking questions from board members and the community, she was able to speak freely at the end. Another meeting was called and she was appointed. She perceives that she was selected because of her reputation. She had a reputation of not only student success but also in developing teachers. Additionally she states, “My reputation for being fair minded, consistent, non-political, just doing the job, following policy, writing policies, being able to work through situations and also my ability to make people feel at ease was what they were looking for.”

To investigate whether or not the mobility chain that Shannon accessed to mobilize her career is repopulating itself with women of color an account of her predecessors, successors, and future interest are given. A Caucasian male preceded Shannon in the superintendency. Overall, she describes the gender make-up of her predecessors as all male and all white. Shannon made history in her parish, by becoming the first woman and minority to acquire the superintendency. In her post prior to the becoming the superintendent, a white male replaced her. When asked if he possessed the same skill sets as her she stated, “He is very intelligent and knows the policy. He’s working on being more personable and comfortable in dealing with boards and large groups.” Regarding the next link in her mobility chain, Shannon identifies a career that would utilize one of her biggest assets. She discloses, “I have a 15-member board and we work well together...I’d like to do something with training boards because I think they need a lot of professional development.”

In Shannon’s pathway reflections, barriers to opportunities, minority barriers, mentorship experiences and advice for future aspirants are given. Two examples that Shannon gives of “Barrier-to-opportunity” moments involved helping tier 3 students achieve academic success and turning an unpleasant experience in a warehouse into a chance to gain knowledge. Shannon

recalls, “I had a self-contained class, teaching students all in one room with severe skill and behavioral deficits...these kids were termed alternative; they were not working on a diploma... I made it my business to say that I’m going to correct this...I started making home visits and doing exactly what my mom did...I brought kids home to live with my family on the weekends and had their parents to come over on the weekends as well. At that time [in education] things were changing, everybody was tested [including] my students. I was called in and asked, ‘Well, what did you do to them? Your students out scored some of the regular Ed kids and they shouldn’t be scoring on that level because they’re alternative.’ Additionally, Shannon explains that after acquiring the superintendency, the secretarial pool that she began her career with were concerned that she would hold some of the tasks they asked her to do against them. She responded by saying, “when you ladies sent me out to that building with our old files, while I was filling, I also read every document I had to file...when you sent me to file lawsuits, I read every lawsuit that the district went through... I read what led to the suits...when you asked me to put something in order for the superintendent, I read every piece to make sure I was doing it correct and for my own knowledge...you didn’t know you were giving me an opportunity to learn, but you did.” Some of the barriers Shannon identifies that are exclusive to women of color include being stereotyped, perceived as not being able to speak publicly and having their abilities challenged. Overall, the advice that she would give women with superintendent aspirations includes: being fair and consistent, staying abreast of current issues, studying school law, be able to deal with frustration in a positive manner, and practicing facilitative leadership.

Jennie

Jennie, a single African American woman and mother of one, was the third superintendent that I profiled. Unlike the others, she chose to respond to the interview questions

in writing. Target questions were completed and emailed to the researcher on June 13, 2013. Her educational background includes a Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate, and +30. At the time of this interview, Jennie was beginning her fifth year as superintendent of schools.

Her education aspirations were prompted by an early experience working with children and influential teachers. She states, "During my high school years, I was fortunate to serve as a teacher's assistant for two hours of the day in a kindergarten and third grade class...both of those teachers were highly instrumental in my chosen career." Upon leaving high school, she followed the prescribed course of action to receive a bachelor's degree in education.

Jennie's professional experiences reflect that of a traditional model of ascension. After entering the field of education as a teacher, she took a linear route to the superintendency. She propelled herself to the superintendency using an uninterrupted series of line positions (all administrative). After accessing several administrative positions, her final leap to the superintendency was from a central office post. Her route is outlined below:



Jennie identifies the principalship as the most essential to the superintendency, noting that this position gives exposure to the overwhelming task of running a school district.

Regarding her attainment of the superintendency, Jennie cites understanding and providing accurate information to the questions asked during the interview process as the most difficult part. She was interviewed by a panel of board members who asked questions specific to the improvement of test scores and faculty-staff relations. She perceives that she was selected because people in key positions saw her leadership efforts and shared them with key personnel.

Additionally, she feels that because many of her co-applicants lacked the superintendent certification needed to fulfill the job, things worked in her favor.

Looking at the continuing cycle of mobility, a description of past, present, and future shifts will be described. To investigate whether or not the mobility chain that Jennie accessed to mobilize her career is repopulating itself with women of color, an account of her predecessors, successors, and future interest are given. Two of the past three superintendents in Jennie's parish were Caucasian and from outside of the parish. One of the past three was African American. She felt that her successor, a Caucasian male, had the same skill sets as her. Due to his counseling experiences, she felt he would have an easy transition. Regarding the next link her mobility chain, Jennie references a career plan she wrote years ago that places her in a professorship at a university. However, due to her status as a single mother, she is hesitant to make that leap.

In Jennie's pathway reflections, minority barriers, mentorship experiences and attributes are identified. Some of the barriers Jennie identifies that are specific to women of color involve colleague's unwillingness to share their expertise and questioned decision-making. Regarding mentorship experiences Jennie reports, "I was fortunate to have a very strong, well-disciplined mentor who refined my school leadership skills. It was this individual who was instrumental in my transition from a teacher into administration." Overall, the advice that Jennie would offer to superintendent aspirants is to seek out experiences in leadership, which will help to broaden their perspective as a superintendent. Additionally, she suggests they find a mentor to support them along the way.

Mandy

Mandy, a married African American women and mother of one, was the fourth superintendent that I interviewed. The interview was conducted in her personal office on June 19, 2013. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree in a field unrelated to education followed by an alternative certification in education that led to a Specialist, Master's and Doctorate degree. At the time of this interview, Mandy was beginning her 11th year as superintendent of schools.

Family members and teachers she observed in her early years prompted her educational aspirations. Despite these aspirations, she graduated in business education with hopes of not becoming an educator. However, as faith would have it, she seized an opportunity to secure an elementary education certification, after accepting a position working with middle school children. She adds, "Later I got certified in administration, child welfare, and city parish supervisor."

The start of Mandy's professional experiences began outside the public school system. Unlike others who occupied entry-level positions in the school system before making their leap to a teaching post, Mandy began her career working with families. Her route can be described as somewhat unconventional thus she bypassed the principalship en route to the superintendency. Her route is outlined below:



Not stating definitively whether or not there is a position essential to attaining and finding success within the superintendency Mandy does state, "The supervisory position is the one that most of my predecessors have come from."

Regarding her attainment of the superintendency, Mandy felt as if her dissertation defense prepared her for the interview process. She participated in a public interview; during which she made a presentation and answered questions from board members and the audience. In her presentation, she spoke about her plans if selected as the superintendent. Mandy perceives that she was selected due to her record of student success. She recalls, “I completely turned that middle school around [using] the middle school concept, and with anti-disciplinary group teachers I wrote grants for all of the schools when they really needed it.”

Looking at the continuing cycle of mobility, a description of past, present, and future shifts will be described. To investigate whether or not the mobility chain that Mandy accessed to mobilize her career is repopulating itself with women of color, an account of her predecessors, successors, and future interest are given. Most of Mandy’s predecessors have come from within her district and most, with the exception of the one prior to her, have been white males. She is the first African American woman to be promoted to the superintendency in her district. Someone she handpicked and had previously mentored succeeded Mandy in her supervisory position. Not only did this woman replace Mandy as a supervisor; she also replaced Mandy as an assistant principal. Regarding the qualifications of her successor, Mandy explains, “I worked with her [previously] . . . so I think that she was equally prepared . . . she is still with me now . . . she was that go getter, a lot like me because she would go outside of her job description and do other jobs . . . I saw her working to do whatever she was assigned to do.” Additionally, when asked if this woman had what it took to be the next superintendent of schools, Mandy smiled and said, “yes.” Regarding the next link in her mobility chain, Mandy’s account of the next chapter in her life does not involve public school education. Referencing the business degree she previously earned, Mandy aspires to start her own business after departing the superintendency.

Barriers to opportunities, minority barriers, mentorship experiences and attributes are identified in Mandy's pathway reflections. Two examples that Mandy recalls of barriers she transformed into opportunities included an experience with an unpopular mentor and an account of how she transformed the face of the superintendency. After being advised that accepting an assistant principal job under the man who eventually would become her mentor was a bad idea, Mandy credits this experience as one of her best. She states, "there were so many people who told me that it would be a mistake to be an assistant under him because he was just iron clad... that turned out to be an asset for me...he was very supportive...it was like everything that everyone told me about him was the opposite." As mentioned previously, Mandy was the first African American Woman superintendent in her districts history. In an account of how she was able to break this trend, Mandy credits her exposure and work within the community. One barrier that she identifies specific to African American women is being perceived as docile by both white and black men. Regarding the role mentorships played in her ascension to the superintendency; Mandy credits most of her mobility shifts to self-motivation. She states, "I took advantage of any opportunity that would allow me to get the experience that I needed...that was partially responsible for me advancing so quickly... I didn't need the motivation from anyone else...I've always been self-motivated . . .my father, grandmother, mother, they've always said they weren't worried about me because I always knew what direction I was headed." Additionally, she credits the principal she served under as someone who taught her how to lead. In keeping the cycle of mentoring going, Mandy also revealed that she is sponsoring the mobility of others in her district. She notes, "I have some young supervisors who aspire to become the next superintendent...I let them work along with me...take them with me to the capital...looking

at bills, at the law, lobbying, sitting in on conferences and I give them assignments.” Overall, the advice that Mandy would offer someone with aspirations of becoming a district superintendent is to have a reputation of professionalism and a record of success in each position occupied.

Laura

Laura, a married African American women and mother of two, was the fifth superintendent that I interviewed. The interview was conducted in her personal office on June 19, 2013. Her educational background includes a nursing declaration followed by a change to elementary education. In addition to her Master’s degree, Laura holds certifications in the areas of instructional supervision and elementary administration. At the time of this interview, Laura was beginning her 3rd year as superintendent of schools and in week’s prior had tried to resign.

Laura credits a teacher turned principal as someone who inspired her to become an educator. Additionally, her decision to become an educator was solidified after giving birth to her first child. She felt that teaching was an honorable profession and a safe choice for someone just starting a family. Nine months after giving birth, she changed her major from nursing to education and entered the field as a high school teacher.

Laura’s professional experiences reflect that of a horizontal model of ascension. After departing from her teaching assignment, most of Laura’s career moves were horizontal in nature. Most of the positions she acquired offered minimal professional gains in administrative experience but gave her an opportunity to support and serve as a liaison between her colleagues and the administrative staff. After securing, three support positions, her experience as an administrator started in a principalship and shifted (with no stops in between) to the superintendency. Her route is outlined below:



Laura identifies a central office stop as essential to the attainment of and transition to the superintendency. She notes, “There are some central office positions that assist the superintendent in carrying out his job. Being brand new [to the superintendency] from a principal, I knew all the managerial things, the curriculum, the academics, dealing with parents, but the piece that I didn’t know about was the politics and legal issues.”

Regarding her attainment of the superintendency, Laura believes that the interview process she underwent to become a principal prepared her for the public/board forum used during her superintendent’s interview. She was certain to curb her educational jargon so that all would understand her responses. Laura perceives that she was selected because the board felt that she gave honest answers and they could trust her.

In review of her continued chain of mobility, Laura identifies past, present, and future shifts. Laura discerns that typically the superintendents in her district have been African American men. However, she was the first African American woman assigned to the superintendency in her district’s history. She was replaced by a white male as principal and felt that he was a good replacement. Nevertheless, she revealed that he was no longer the principal and her former district was searching for his replacement. Regarding her next career move, Laura explains, “I believe we are going to be the number one district... we are going to make sure we are doing everything we can in order to reach that goal...but there are other aspirations as well...It is a small district and I believe God has greater things in store for me and when it’s time, I’ll know.”

Her pathway reflections include the barriers to opportunities, minority barriers, mentorships, or attributes she experienced en route to the superintendency. An example of a barrier Laura transformed into an opportunity relates to not being selected for a job. She explains, "I applied to be the principal . . . they gave it to someone else... I told the superintendent that he had made a very good choice and that I am willing to work with her to make sure that this school keeps going forward... I always remained professional in whatever I did... that may have been something that was a plus because most of the time people get bitter and I guess I didn't get bitter, I got better... I kept doing my job, respected the principal, supported her 100 percent... three months later I was chosen as principal at another school." Some mental barriers Laura has examined specific to African American Women is their belief they have to be connected to someone to gain entry into certain positions and their tendency to give up once they are not selected for a job the first time. With regards to the role a mentorship played in her advancement, Laura notes, "I was tapped by my principal... he really inspired me to go further with leadership and education because there was something about him... he was just a really good man... he was very instrumental in everything I did in terms of leadership... he gave me opportunities such as writing school improvement plans and opportunities to sit in on parent meetings... I think the reason why the superintendency happen was because of that principal." In addition to being mentored, Laura spoke about the role that mentoring others played in her career advancement. She reveals, "I trained two principals and a third one is on her way... hopefully she will get this particular school [participant's old school/old position]... she was there when I was there... I also brought one over with me and she is my director... she skipped the principalship and came over as my director of instruction... I am always trying to help people

go to that next level... I think that is why I moved because I was always helped others.” Overall, her advice to women with superintendency aspirations is to have a reputation for making decision based on data, stay abreast of current trends in education, have a vision that’s all your own, and seek out opportunities to participate in experiences relevant to the superintendency.

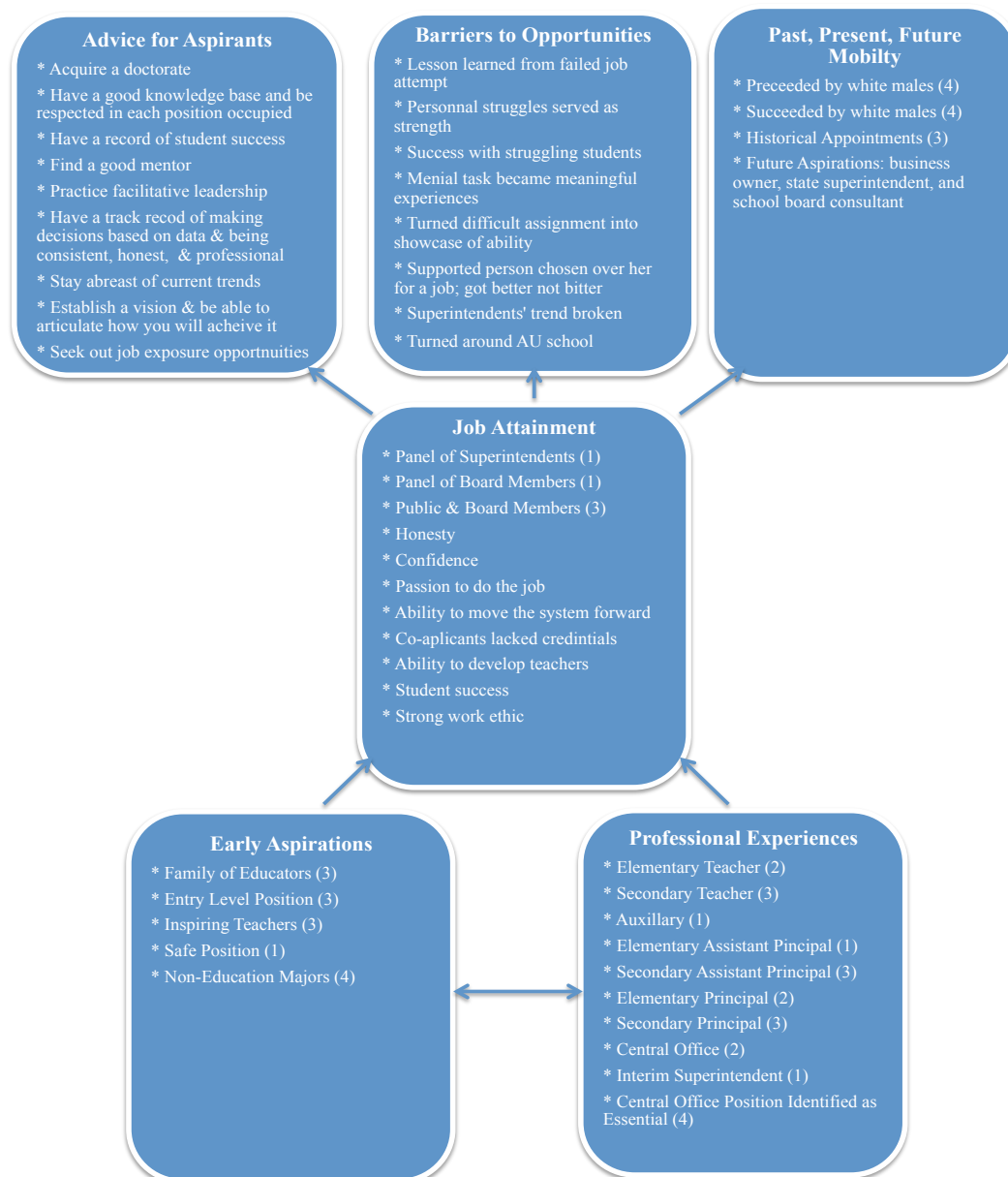


Figure 3. Composite thematic-textural structure

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, OUTCOMES, AND IMPLICATIONS

With 90% of African American women occupying minority-teaching positions in the United States (NCEI, 2011), the probability of obtaining leadership positions should be high, however for African American women, this has not been the case. Black women's numbers continue to deplete as they ascend to top ranked leadership positions. Even as concerns are voiced about the shortages of school administration candidates (Anthony, Roe, & Young, 2000; Houston, 1998; McAdams, 1998), the underrepresentation of women and persons of color in these positions remain significant (Brunner, 2000). However, unlike research that focuses solely on the factors that inhibited them from rising to the top, this researcher investigated and outlined how those who acquired the superintendency did so. Using a sample of African American women who attained this position in spite of barriers, themes emerged from their pathway narratives. The five superintendents who participated in this study discussed pathways used to gain entry into the superintendency. The superintendency is often referred to as a gender stratified executive position (Bjork, 2000), whereby men are more likely to advance from teacher to district superintendent than women (Skrla & Hoyle, 1999).

Summary of Findings

The pathways that led each participant of this study to the superintendency are varied. Information concerning the pathways accessed by each participant of this study is presented using a logical continuum that highlights their pre-professional, professional, and post-attainment experiences.

Reflecting on their pre-professional experiences, the participants of this study recalled the occurrences and people that influenced their decision to become an educator. An analysis of their responses yielded the following influences: family members, entry-level positions, and

teachers. Even though, they were able to identify sources of influence, not all heeded the call. As each member of this elite team spoke about their entrance into college, it became obvious that education, regardless of their listed influences, was not their initial career choice. Majors declared upon beginning their college careers consisted of writing, nursing, business, and computer science. Most stayed committed to their initial majors as others decided to teach after reaching a fork in the road. After graduating from college, several accepted teaching positions and accessed multiple pathways to the superintendency. A comprehensive review of each participant's route to the superintendency reveals that most accessed secondary teaching, assistant principal, and principal positions en route to the superintendency. Although some occupied central office positions, majority felt that this position was essential to the attainment of and success within the superintendency.

In their post attainment reflections, the participants were asked to identify positions essential to attaining and transitioning to the superintendency in an effort to identify positions clusters, to describe the profiles of prior superintendents, and to describe their interview process. The positions most recognized included the principal and central office supervisor post. The participants of this study established that the highest concentration of African American Women in their mobility track was at the entry-level. This level included but was not limited to teaching. The percentages of African American women identified in the positions they acquired after their entry-level post, remained constant through their journey to the superintendency.

Most of the barriers identified in this study were not perceived as such by the participants of this study. They did not explicitly identify internal or personal barriers encountered en route to the superintendency. Most of the barriers presented were discussed as opportunities for success. The barriers turned by the women of this study into opportunities for success-involved

triumphs in student learning, special assignments, and personal struggles. On the other hand, the participants explicitly identified the experiences they encountered that aided in their transition to the superintendency. They were keenly aware of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that had led them to the superintendency in spite of their gender and ethnicity. Overall, they listed the following as beneficial behaviors for aspirants: acquire a doctorate, establish a record of student success, be a facilitative leader, stay abreast of current trends in education, create a personal vision, and seek out job exposure opportunities. The character traits noted as beneficial included making decisions based on data and being fair, consistent, honest, and professional at all times.

Outcomes

Outcomes are presented below in terms of the relationship between the themes that emerged from this study and the literature presented in chapter 2. By comparing the studies relative to the pathways, attributes, and barriers faced by women and minorities in past studies to the narratives of the women who participated in this study, the extent to whether or not their lived experiences can be deemed typical may be determined.

Pathways

Ortiz (1982) reported two major career paths of superintendents based on district size. The typical pathway identified in small school districts involved a teacher, to principal, to superintendent track. Although all superintendents in this study worked in small, rural districts, most of their pathway narratives did not reflect the model offered by Ortiz. Although most passed through each position outlined, many accessed the assistant principalship and other jobs along the way. One exception was Laura. All of her vertical movements reflected the typical career path outlined by Ortiz. This signifies that once she acquired her first administrative position, she transitioned directly to the superintendency. Glass (2000) reports in another study

concerning district profiles that minority female superintendent were usually hired in economically depressed districts. Comparing his findings to the district profiles of this study's participants, his findings held true. Data retrieved from the Louisiana Department of Education identifies the lunch status of each districts student population as majority free and reduced.

Regarding models of ascension reported in the literature, Kim and Brunner's (2009) career pathway model for women superintendents was developed as a result of their investigation into the differences and similarities between women and men's ascension to the superintendency. They found that men worked in line positions and moved vertically up to the superintendency, while women moved more horizontally and utilized staff positions. Laura was the only superintendent who reported horizontal staff positions en route to the superintendency. The horizontal positions she occupied included: math specialist, curriculum coordinator, and instructional specialist. More specifically, Alston (1999) identified a route for African American women aspirants that included 7 years or less in the classroom, 2-3 years as assistant principal, 5 years or less as a high school principal, and at least 5 years as an assistant or associate superintendent. In comparison to the superintendents of this study, the years identified in each post do not apply. However, a portion of Alston's model was reflected in Shannon's narrative. Of the five superintendents interviewed, Shannon was the only one who worked as an interim superintendent prior to obtaining the superintendency. Nevertheless, due to their district sizes and meager budgets, most small school districts do not have associate or assistant superintendent on staff.

In his 2007 study, Farmer analyzed the career paths of Texas public school superintendents by identifying common pathways by gender and educational attainment. Overall, the participants in Farmer's study identified the secondary principalship as the most

beneficial assignment prior to acquiring the superintendency. Regarding positions essential to the attainment of and transition to the superintendency, most of the superintendents interviewed for this study recognized positions in central office as most valuable. However, Tiffany and Jennie were adamant about the benefits of their secondary principal post. Tiffany states, “I don’t feel that you need to be a supervisor at central office...the principal-ship is the hardest job.” Jennie further explains; “This position exposed me to the overwhelming task of overseeing the entire operation of a school. It allows one to see the entire educational picture and plan accordingly.” In a related study, Johnson and Latimore (2009) investigated the mobility patterns of African American college presidents. Major findings revealed that black women president’s career paths were shaped by their participation in extensive preparation activities such as special assignments and mentorships. Shannon participated in a variety of special assignments before getting her first shot at administration. She reports that on numerous occasions she was asked to report to schools around the district. She felt as if these special assignments were a test of her ability. The superintendent wanted to see if Shannon could handle being a principal. He wanted to be sure that she could work with students and parents from all cultures and ethnicities.

Barriers and Attributes

Alston (1999) studied a sample of 45 black female superintendents to identify the constraints and attributes they encountered and accessed en route to the superintendency. An absence of sponsorship, due to a lack of role models to support that practice, was among the top barriers cited by the women in this study. The majority of the respondents held doctoral degrees. Attributes cited by the respondents of this study included the development of positive working relationships with school board members, solid teamwork with experienced qualified faculty, and acceptance by non-black employees as beneficial experiences. Like the participants in

Alston's study, most of the women profiled in this study held doctorate degrees. Mandy was one of 45 who participated in a doctoral program that was facilitated by three universities. A third of her degree came from each. Shannon and Mandy acknowledge school board relationships as essential to the superintendency. Shannon acknowledges that one of her challenges after being hired was to repair the divide her predecessor caused amongst the board members. She now credits her relationship and ability to work with her board members effectively as a part of her success. Mandy adds, "you have to get to know board members . . . if you don't establish a relationship [with them], you won't be there for very long." Jennie was the only superintendent who acknowledged an experience with a qualified faculty member as a benefit to her advancement. She explains that others whom she had worked with spoke on her behalf to personnel with hiring power. None of the women in this study acknowledged acceptance by non-black employees as beneficial to their mobility.

The goal of the 21-member bi-partisan body known as the Federal Glass Commission was to identify the barriers that impeded the advancement of women and minorities in the workplace. Amongst the three types of barriers identified, internal barriers were defined as those within direct control of organizations. Of the seven components outlined within this barrier, three were significant to the women investigated in this study. Lack of recruitment and outreach practices were noted by the Federal Glass Commission as an internal barrier faced by women and minorities. Likewise, the women of this study explained that the educational programs and professional organizations they made use of en route to the superintendency failed to offer recruitment and outreach services. However, in spite of this barrier, most initiated their own networking experiences and when the opportunity presented itself, acquired the superintendency

in their first attempt. Another practice noted by the commission as an obstacle for women and minorities was lack of mentorship opportunities. The women of this study all identified mentors at one point or another in their mobility stories. Laura even felt that the superintendency would not have happened if it had not been for her mentor. Lastly, FGC identified a lack of opportunity for career development as an obstacle that presents itself to marginalized groups seeking advancement in the work place. Since all of these women created opportunities even when they were not prevalent, this barrier seemed not to affect their mobility. Jennie offers the following advice to aspirants, “I feel strongly that the more educational opportunities that are experienced during the pathway offer a greater perspective and support for any position. By acquiring as much knowledge as one can, the responsibilities seem to make more sense.”

In Jackson’s (1995) study of current and former superintendents of color, she explored the experiences that helped these women assume their positions in spite of the odds. Major findings revealed that the majority of the respondents held the highest academic degree possible in their field. Most were elementary principals at various schools. Fifty percent of the respondents served as assistant, associate, or deputy superintendents in the districts where they acquired their positions. Regarding their personal influences, several participants talked about the role community and family played in their motivation and drive to be successful. Many felt that in addition to the support received from their husbands and family, their grade school teachers instilled in them a great sense of pride. Unlike Jackson’s findings, most of the women in this study started their professional careers in secondary positions. Tiffany, Jennie and Shannon all served as middle school principals en route to the superintendency. As mentioned previously, only one of the superintendents in this study served as an interim superintendent

prior to obtaining her position. Similarly to the respondents of Jacksons study, the women in this study cited family members who were educators as the driving force behind their aspiration to become educators and their biggest supporters as they moved throughout the ranks.

Brunner (2000) identifies three structural barriers inhibiting women of color in educational leadership programs. She explores the role narrow perspectives; risky research and lack of literature play in the experience of black women seeking advanced degrees in leadership. With regards to the role educational leadership, programs played (through exposure to literature concerning the advancement of women and minorities in executive school leadership) in helping the women of this study acquire the superintendency; all reported their role as minimal. They explained that other than content specific to the legal issues, leadership styles, and budgetary issues that superintendents deal with on a regular basis; they were not exposed to models of ascension for African American Women.

African American women regard stereotypes as a significant barrier to advancement. Jackson and Harris (2007) investigated the perceived barriers African American women face when aspiring to college presidencies. Thirty-five of the 43 participants of the study noted being stereotyped at one point or another during their career. Shannon was the only superintendent in this study that explicitly identified stereotypes faced by women of color with leadership aspirations. She states, "I think they are stereotyped into one situation or another...people will challenge their ability... they don't have many opportunities to get out there and gain exposure...people think they won't be able to speak in public." Mandy recalls that in her experiences, black women have been stereotyped as being docile not only by Caucasians but by African American men as well.

Another barrier for African American women is gatekeeping. This involves people who tend to hire or recommend people with similar backgrounds or identities for positions. Usually the profile of a gatekeeper has been described in the literature as a white male that limits the advancement opportunities of qualified females (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Jennie, Shannon, Laura, and Mandy had historical appointments; they were the first African American women superintendents in their district's history. Therefore, gatekeepers did not impede their progression to the superintendency. In another report of gatekeeping practices, Tallerico (2000) investigated search consultants and their role in the hiring of minorities in educational leadership. Tallerico reported that if minorities did advance to the final screening process, they underwent more scrutiny during the interviews. The women in this study participated in a similar interview process. Overall, they felt that the process, though stressful, was not difficult. Mandy, Tiffany, and Laura identified past experiences that helped them get through the process with ease. Mandy noted her doctoral defense as Tiffany and Laura acknowledge past interviews as beneficial experiences.

In a study conducted by Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999), they examined the role search consultants play as gatekeepers in promoting or preventing women from attaining the superintendency. A concern voiced by the consultants in this study was the lack of applicants who served as a high school principal. They viewed the high school principal role as an important position en route to the superintendency. None of the women in this study identified a high school principalship, while three of them served as secondary principals but in a middle school setting. Therefore, the African American women superintendents profiled in this study were not adversely affected by their lack of experience as high school administrators.

In a study conducted by Nelda Isaacs (2012) with five ethnically diverse female superintendents, she examined the experiences that led them to the superintendency. Based on their experiences prior to obtaining the superintendency, the women of her study offered the following advice to future aspirants: mentorships, spirituality, family support, and superintendent and board relationships. Contrary to the superintendents profiled in Isaacs study, most of the advice offered by the superintendents in this study referred specifically to educational experiences that may benefit aspirants. However, all credited mentorships, family support, and board relations as attributes to their personal career development.

Implications

This study has several implications for minority women in school administration. It has implications for the educational leadership programs that prepare them, the aspirants who will follow them and the researchers who choose to study them.

An implication that can be drawn from this study concerns the role of educational leadership program administrators. The findings presented in this study along with other resourceful literature may be used to increase the awareness of the issues that African American women face in their mobility track. This may be accomplished by diversifying the discourse used within leadership programs of study to include that of African American women. In addition to information concerning job tasks, legal issues, and leadership styles, it is important that educational leadership professors include career mobility as a topic of interest. With thousands of women and minorities receiving degrees in educational leadership, it is important that these graduates are prepared to overcome the slippery slope of school administration that awaits them. Although many have succumbed to the downward slope, program leaders are encouraged to provide aspirants with the narratives of those who have risen to the top in spite of

the barriers noted in the literature. Additionally, they should provide both male and female students with information concerning the barriers that impede the advancement of women and minorities in education. Doing this ensures that efforts taken to re-populate leadership positions with women and minorities becomes an agenda advocated by all stakeholders in education, not just minorities. Educational leadership program administrators should also facilitate mentorship opportunities for multiply marginalized students. By identifying people in the field who have secured top ranked leadership positions in spite of their marginalities, minority students could be linked to people who may sponsor, mentor, or support their mobility decisions and provide opportunities for them to showcase their leadership abilities.

Another implication that can be drawn from this study concerns minority women with executive school leadership intentions. This study reveals that no single pathway exists for minority women aspiring to become superintendents. Although they identified common behaviors and experiences that heightened their positional power, their routes were as uniquely individual as each of them was. Therefore, the findings of this study paired with other resourceful literature can be used to help aspirants note, through the experiences of others, the behaviors and attitudes essential to mobilize their careers. As they complete each course required, they should also tailor their assignments to ensure relevance and practical application. As they search for districts to gain employment, they may reference the literature to identify a district profile common to the advancement of African American women. When faced with assignments that seem unbearable, they should turn it into a learning experience. When unsure of their next move, they should find a mentor who possesses some of the qualities identified in the research and one who is highly respected by others. Be the leader today that you want to be tomorrow. In their daily practices, they should serve and lead simultaneously; have a track

record of fairness, honesty, and professionalism; and allow the stories of these women as well as those in their personal arsenal serve as a blueprint for success as they kick start their journey to the superintendency.

A research implication includes the need for an increase in the number of qualitative and quantitative studies that continue to investigate the mobility track of African American women in leadership. Researchers should regard studying African American women in leadership as a valuable and worthwhile practice as their work will contribute to the limited body of knowledge that exists. Descriptive studies related to a “barrier to opportunity” mindset are needed to determine if this variable influences the mobility of African American Women. Studies that investigate the relationship between impoverished districts and African American women’s attainment of leadership positions is needed as well. Quasi-experimental studies need to be conducted on the use of imbalanced discourse in educational leadership programs. In conclusion, future research is needed on the effect narrow research, limited discourse, and a positive mindset has on the advancement of African American women in leadership.

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APPENDIX: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.6692
F: 225.578.6792
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at [http://appl003.lsu.edu/osp/osp.nsf/\\$Content/Humans+Subject+Committee?OpenDocument](http://appl003.lsu.edu/osp/osp.nsf/$Content/Humans+Subject+Committee?OpenDocument)
- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
 - (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru E.
 - (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2)
 - (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
 - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
 - (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
 - (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.
Training link: (<http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp>.)

1) Principal Investigator: Kimberly Gales-Johnson Rank: Ph. D. Student Student*? Y/N Y

Dept.: HRR Ph: 225-776-5812 E-mail: kgales2@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank and e-mail for each
If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Krisanna Machmes, PhD Associate Prof. School of HRE

3) Project Title: Louisiana's African American Women Superintendents: Pathways to success

4) LSU Proposal?(yes or no) NO If Yes, LSU Proposal Number _____

Also, if YES, either ☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant OR ☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students) Minority Women Superintendents

• Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Kimberly Gales-Johnson ** Date 5/4/13 (no per signatures)

"I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Effective August 1, 2007, all Exemptions will expire three years from date of approval, unless a continuation report, found on our website, is filed prior to expiration date

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted _____ Category/Paragraph 2

Reviewer Mathews Signature Robert C. Mathews Date 6/13/13

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-6692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 6/12/2016

IRB# E8322 LSU Proposal# _____
Complete Application
Human Subjects Training

VITA

Kimberly Gales-Johnson was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and is the youngest of three children. She attended elementary school in Plaquemine, LA and received her secondary education at a private school located in Baton Rouge, LA. Kimberly obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Child Development in the spring of 2003 from Southern University. In the spring of 2007, she earned her Master's degree in Elementary Education from Southeastern Louisiana University. Her specialty area is early childhood with an emphasis on emergent readers. She has acquired several certifications that include: Reading Specialist, Technology Facilitator, Child Search Coordinator, and Educational Leadership. She will graduate from Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College with a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in December 2013. Kimberly has been employed in the public school system for 10 years. She has experience working as an elementary teacher in grades PK, 1st, 2nd, and 6th. Additionally, she has served as a consultant, provided professional development and wrote a 12-month thematic curriculum for Head Start Programs in Northern Louisiana and Mississippi. Non-teaching positions held by Kimberly include: Reading Interventionist, Reading Coach, Instructional Specialist and Media Specialist. Currently she is an assistant administrator at a Pre-K through 6th grade elementary school located in southwestern Louisiana.

Kimberly presently resides in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with her husband Chris who also works with children as a mental health counselor and percussion instructor at a local high school in Baton Rouge. Kimberly and Christopher have been married for 7 years and have one daughter who just turned 3 in May.