EXPLORING THE ATTRIBUTES, EXPERIENCES, AND MOTIVATIONS OF FEMALE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF COLOUR IN ONTARIO

by

Anjili Sophia Pant

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Anjili Sophia Pant 2016
EXPLORING THE ATTRIBUTES, EXPERIENCES, AND MOTIVATIONS OF FEMALE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF COLOUR IN ONTARIO

Doctor of Education 2016
Anjili Sophia Pant
Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
University of Toronto

Abstract

This study explores how the attributes, experiences, and motivations of female public elementary school administrators of colour in Ontario have contributed to their entry into administration. Data were obtained through qualitative life-history interviews with 3 currently practicing, middle-aged administrators: 2 African Canadian (a principal and a vice-principal) and 1 South Asian (principal). Resilience theory was used to investigate internal and external attributes of the participants, disruptions they faced, and motivational factors that enabled them to become administrators. Cross-case analysis revealed relevant attributes the participants shared: focus, resourcefulness, independence, social competence, a capacity for hard work, self-discipline, optimism, a positive attitude, perseverance, and a willingness to learn. Barriers to their entrance into administration were: the interview process, the struggle to obtain Canadian credentials, politics, and difficulty having their leadership skills acknowledged. Motivations to enter administration were: encouragement from others, persistence after unsuccessful attempts to enter administration, being able to meet interviewers’ expectations, and a passion for the work.

Among the findings were participants’ recommendations for aspiring female administrators of colour: Keep your ambitions to yourself. Know that it is a lonely job. Understand what the work entails. Recognize that administrative positions are not powerful ones. Avoid interacting only with people from your own ethnic background. Do not use the “race card” as an excuse for not
succeeding in the interview process. Remain calm when discriminated against. Most importantly, pursue the necessary credentials: Prepare for administration early in your career (work at the family of schools level, community, culture and caring, and numeracy and literacy). Seek out a variety of mentors. Stay connected with people who support you. Master a specific skill. Be resourceful. Keep current with educational jargon. Continue to develop professionally. Write and present at workshops. Use the media to showcase your school and practice. Finally, support the advancement of quality women of colour.

Suggestions for future research include: (a) repeat this study in 5 and 10 years; (b) examine leadership programs and determine whether women of colour are being hired; and (c) compare and contrast the career paths of women and men (both of colour and White).
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the people who helped make the completion of this dissertation possible. Thank you, Dr. Suzanne Stiegelbauer, my academic advisor, for your encouragement and support. Thank you, Dr. Nina Bascia and Dr. Joseph Flessa, professors on my thesis committee, for the comments and guidance that helped me to refine my writing. I am grateful to the University of Toronto for accepting me and giving me a chance to pursue a lifelong dream. I am indebted to the course professors, university staff, and fellow students who encouraged me and provided practical suggestions along the way. I also want to thank my mother, Sheila Pant, who was a gentle supporter of my efforts until her death on September 16, 2011. I praise and thank God for giving me the strength I needed to continue despite several setbacks I faced in the course of my doctoral journey.
## Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................ iv  
Dedication .................................................................................................................................... xiii  

Chapter One Introduction ............................................................................................................... 1  
  Gaps in Existing Research ...........................................................................................................2  
  Few Female Public School Administrators of Colour .................................................................2  
  Barriers to Women and Women of Colour ..................................................................................6  
  Employment Equity .....................................................................................................................7  
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................................10  
  Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................................11  

Chapter Two Literature Review .................................................................................................... 13  
  Setting the Context .....................................................................................................................13  
    1880s to 1920s ...................................................................................................................... 13  
    1920s to 1950s ...................................................................................................................... 14  
    1950s to post-2000s .............................................................................................................. 15  
  Patterns in Education .................................................................................................................20  
  Dealing with Diversity ...............................................................................................................21  
  What Needs to Change for Women of Colour ...........................................................................23  
  Overview ....................................................................................................................................23  
  Leadership Skills and Personal Attributes .................................................................................25  
    Public Elementary School Studies ........................................................................................ 26  
    K–12 Studies ......................................................................................................................... 27  
    Higher Education Studies ..................................................................................................... 28  
  Experiences of (Barriers Faced by) Female Administrators of Colour .....................................30  
  Racism and Marginalization ........................................................................................................31  
    Public elementary school studies ...................................................................................... 32  
    K–12 studies .......................................................................................................................... 35  
    Higher education studies ...................................................................................................... 38
Chapter Five Biographical Profiles of the Participants

April: The Striver

May: The Overcomer

June: The Organizer

Chapter Six Cross-Case Analysis

Attributes

Early Years: Focus

Young Adult Years

Resourcefulness

Independence

Work Life

Social competence

Hard workers

Self-discipline

Optimistic, positive, and teachable

High standards

Perseverance

Independence

Application to Resilience Theory

Experiences

Early Years

Bullying

Economic disadvantage

Special education class

Eighteen and pregnant

The 11-plus exam

Transient lifestyle

Young Adult Years
Table 1 A Comparison of Attributes in the Literature Review With Those of the First Wave of Resilience Theory .................................................................................................................. 75

Table 2 A Comparison of Experiences in the Literature Review With Those of the Second Wave of Resilience Theory ........................................................................................................ 77

Table 3 Resilience Theory Attributes, Participant Attributes, Similarities Between Them, and Attributes for Which There Was No Match .......................................................................................... 107

Table 4 A Comparison of Resilient Reintegration With Participants’ Motivations .................. 132

Table 5 A Comparison Between Attributes in the Literature and Those Found in This Study .................................................................................................................................................. 135

Table 6 A Comparison of Negative Experiences (Barriers) in the Literature Review With Those in This Study ........................................................................................................................................ 137

Table 7 A Comparison of Motivations (Successes) in the Literature Review and the Data Analysis Findings ........................................................................................................................................ 138
List of Figures

Figure 1. Similar attributes found in the literature review (red text) with those of the first wave of resilience theory (black text). ................................................................. 76

Figure 2. The Resilience Model (Richardson, 2002). ............................................................. 81

Figure 3. Alignment of my study with four research stages......................................................... 90

Figure 4. Summary of the participants’ recommendations for aspiring female administrators of colour. ........................................................................................................ 148
List of Appendices

Appendix A Information Letter: Jennifer Mitchell, Executive Staff, Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Professional and Protective Services ....................... 171

Appendix B Information Letter Marlene Kirkup, Advertising Rates & Specifications, Ontario Principal’s Council Register ................................................................. 173

Appendix C Advertisement for ETFO Newsletter, OPC Register and Professionally Speaking Magazine Seeking Participants ................................................................. 175

Appendix D Information Letter and Consent Form: Administrators ........................................ 176

Appendix E Semistructured Interview Questions: Administrators ........................................ 179
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved father and mother:

Henry and Sheila Pant.

Your love, your care, and your life lessons guided me through this undertaking and throughout life.

Thank you for your sacrifices and for your wisdom.

I am grateful I had you for parents and for your influence in shaping the person I am today.

I trust you are in a better place, resting in peace.

I love you both and always will.
Chapter One
Introduction

As a female educator of colour in a medium-sized public school board in south central Ontario serving over 34,000 elementary students, I noticed early in my career that the school staff did not mirror the cultural diversity of the student population. During my 25 years of teaching, whether I taught in low-income or affluent areas, I found that administrators and board personnel were predominantly White, even though the student population was much more diverse. Of the 21 schools in which I taught, only five schools had less than five staff members of colour, including myself.

When I ventured into leadership activities that took me beyond the school, I was astonished to see the lack of diversity among those who held administrative posts compared to those who did not. Even though a large number of administrators were women, but of these none were of colour. As of 2012, there is only one Black male elementary vice-principal where I teach, a city with the eighth largest number of recent immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011a). To date, there is one female administrator of colour in an elementary school. The absence of public school administrators of colour, especially women of colour, led me to question the hiring and promotion practices in my school board, and to turn to education administration research for answers.

While in graduate school pursuing the question of why there were so few female school administrators of colour, I was led to investigate the experiences of female public school administrators of colour hoping that those who had succeeded in becoming administrators could offer advice to those aspiring to achieve that role. I know that such advice would have been helpful to me when I was on the road to become an administrator myself. While continued
research is surely needed, looking at the experiences of a sample of female administrators of colour is a good beginning.

**Gaps in Existing Research**

Research in education administration has said little about leaders of colour, and less about women of colour in leadership roles (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Lee, 1998; Lovelady-Dawson, 1980), until recently. In the last few years, in light of the increasing diversity of the student population, researchers are beginning to consider the issue (Haar & Robicheau, 2009; Mack, 2010; Pacis, 2005; Treverton & Bikson, 2003). Most studies of administrators of colour have been focused on men. When women were studied, there was a tendency for researchers to generalize their findings to *all* women, including women of colour (Morrison & Glinow, 1990). These research studies all mentioned the underrepresentation of women of colour in education administration and the predominance of White men (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Haar & Robicheau, 2009; Mack, 2010; Ortiz, 1982; Pacis, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Wallace, 2007).

According to Ah Nee-Benham (1997), one reason for the small number of studies of female school administrators of colour is the practical fact that there are so few of them in traditional school leadership positions to study. There are also very few female researchers of colour, thus few researchers overall are studying this group (Matthews, 1986).

**Few Female Public School Administrators of Colour**

Shakeshaft (1989) showed 1985 statistics that compared the number of Black and White female teachers and the number of Black and White female principals to highlight the few women administrators in the role of managers of schools in the United States. This
underrepresentation was at all levels except principals of elementary schools. Even at that level, they represented 16.9% of elementary principals. This did not reflect the 83.5% of all elementary teachers who were women. Shakeshaft mentioned the estimate of Black women’s representation as administrators in schools was even less than that of White women.

More recent statistics found in Byrd-Blake’s (2003) study, also conducted in the United States, quoted statistics from the United States Department of Education, 1995, which revealed that 65% of public elementary school principals were male, 35% female, and 16% people of colour. Only 6.4% of public elementary school administrators were women of colour (Byrd-Blake, 2003). Haar and Robicheau’s (2009) study pointed out that the “whiteness” of leaders in American public schools is even more noticeable than the imbalance in the gender distribution. The study showed “an under-representation of women and people of color in school administration with a 2:1 ratio of men to women and a greater than 2:1 ratio of White/Caucasian to people of color” (pp. 33–34). This is an improvement over the findings of Byrd-Blake’s (2003) study.

Treverton and Bikson (2003), observing the increasingly diverse racial and ethnic social landscape in America—which can also be seen in Canada—believed there to be a corresponding need for leaders who not only embody solid character, knowledge, and a global perspective, but who also reflect this growing diversity. According to Pacis (2005), men of colour are few and far between in administrative positions and there are even fewer women of colour.

In Canada, Wallace (2007) argued, even though the Employment Equity Act of 1985 protected against racial discrimination in employment practices, most education policies gave little attention to racist employment practices other than basic rights protected by the Charter. The consequences of which anyone can observe, that in Canadian schools there are few teachers
Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli (2009) add that the percentage of teachers of colour in the education system is *consistently less* than the percentage of people of colour in the general Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006, as discussed in Ryan et al., 2009). In fact, the percentage of working female teachers of colour has *decreased* relative to the percentage of Canadian citizens of colour in the general population, even though their real numbers have increased. Even with similar educational qualifications, in 1996 people of colour in Canada experienced an unemployment rate of 16% compared to 11% in the general population (Ryan et al., 2009). According to Agocs (1992, as cited in Wallace, 2007), White middle-class women have made gains in employment equity, however racist employment practices still exist in Ontario’s educational organizations.

Similarly, in Ontario, there are relatively few female public elementary school administrators of colour. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (2009) distributed a statistical survey to only elementary teachers; this survey did not include administrators. In June 2009 (ETFO), only 4.3% of elementary teachers—male and female—identified themselves as people of colour. In 2011, the Ontario Ministry of Education reported that 79% of public elementary teachers and administrators were female. However, there was no breakdown of the number into numbers of female public teachers and administrators, let alone the number of female public elementary teachers and administrators of colour versus White.

Despite low numbers of female teachers of colour, there may well be other factors affecting their representation in administrative roles. Males comprise 21% of the total public elementary teaching population, and 35.4% of public and Catholic elementary administrative positions in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). Similarly, in public and Catholic secondary schools in Ontario, in which the majority of teachers were female (25,120 vs. 20,907
male) in the 2009–2010 school year, only 48.6% of principals and vice-principals were female (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). The report did not give a breakdown of administrators by race or ethnicity.

Although the Ministry of Education does not publish statistics with regard to female public school administrators of colour in Ontario, neither do the two public boards of education I phoned, one can assume women of colour are not adequately represented in administrative positions. Thus, the need to address the low percentage of women of colour in administrative positions in the public elementary schools is significant. The student population is increasingly multicultural. There are too few people of colour in teaching and administration. There are too few women of colour in administration.

Ah Nee-Benham (1997) claimed that it is important to research female school leaders of colour in order to illuminate their diverse practices and viewpoints, and to begin a discussion about difference, race, class, and gender as aspects of human diversity. The resulting increased understanding of diversity could give rise to important questions about current leadership practices. Ah Nee-Benham (1997) also argued that the omission of important “other” stories and perspectives is political and suggested that research be conducted that goes beyond participant narratives to examine the underlying socio-political institutions more deeply.

Haar and Robicheau (2009) supported Ah Nee-Benham’s (1997) point in their qualitative study of three female school principals of colour, arguing that school districts in the United States are facing challenges due to the changing demographics of the student population and that women of colour can no longer be ignored as potential school leaders. They also argued that, in fact, women of colour can contribute to the establishment of a positive, multiethnic learning environment. Mack (2010) added that students of colour will soon be the majority in American
schools. She argued that there is a need to mentor school leaders who embody the gender and ethnic diversity of the American education system today. The three African American public school principals interviewed in her qualitative study described how their efforts to improve their schools created school cultures that fostered academic success by providing equal opportunities and access to resources for students of colour.

**Barriers to Women and Women of Colour**

Although Klein’s and Homer’s (2007) *Handbook* implies that women’s internalized barriers to success, for example, fear of success, low self-esteem, and ascribing success to luck, have declined since the publication of their 1985 *Handbook* findings, research studies since then point to the contrary.

In their 1992 study, Russell and Wright identified two categories of barriers women encounter when attempting to attain administrative positions: internal and external. Internal barriers include limited encouragement and support (Anyaso, 2008; Bright, 2010), lack of experience, low self-esteem, low confidence level, lack of ambition, fewer chances to obtain necessary experience, superintendents’ perception that they lack qualifications, and home and family obligations (Gill, 1994; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Vasquez-Guignard, 2010). Low occupational aspirations and fear of transgressing societal expectations of women (Bright, 2010; Hill & Ragland, 1995), belief in their “inferior position” (Muñoz, 2010), the scarcity of female role models (Padro et al., 1993), and role conflict (Mahoney, 1993), are additional internal barriers.

External barriers include the different expectations of women and occupational socialization that excludes women from administrative levels through gender-biased recruitment
and selection criteria determined by male-dominated hiring committees, tokenism, and the isolation of women who do get hired (Bright, 2010). Other external barriers are masculine hegemony in society (Bright, 2010; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Vasquez-Guignard, 2010), physical violence by their partner (Lumby, 2013), an ideology that focuses on women’s inadequacy as leaders and low tenure in administrative positions (Shakeshaft, 1989), and a preference for “masculine” qualities of leadership (Gill, 1994; Mahoney, 1993). Wallin and Crippen (2008) looked at Manitoba public school superintendents during the 2004–2005 school year and found that five of the 37 superintendents were (White) women even though 45% of public school administrators were women. In addition, Wallin and Crippen (2008) found that both female and male superintendents valued male mentors who possessed stereotypically feminine and masculine characteristics. Women also lack experience in positions traditionally held by men and they are more likely to be unwilling or unable to relocate to pursue career advancement opportunities (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Padro et al.’s (1993) examination of the literature reveals external factors over which women have no control: a systemic belief that men are better administrators, harassment of all kinds, old boys’ networks (Bright, 2010), and other systemic barriers. Vasquez-Guignard (2010) states that systemic causes are subdivided into policies (unclear promotion procedures and a limited view of paths for promotion), and social practices (unreasonable hours and family obligations).

**Employment Equity**

Ultimately, the paucity of female public school administrators of colour is an employment equity issue. The disproportionate number of White males in positions of added responsibility in education first came under scrutiny in the 1980s. It was a time when school boards in the Toronto area were developing policies to first eliminate racism (Toronto District
School Board, 2004a); and policies dealing with sexism (Toronto District School Board, 2004b), homophobia (Toronto District School Board, 2004c), classism (Toronto District School Board, 2004d), and disability (Toronto District School Board, 2004e) followed after. An advisory committee was formed and the members wrote a race relations policy model for school boards to follow as it pertained to their own situation (Tator & Henry, 1991). The committee also created reporting methods and timelines for the model’s implementation. The intent of the recommendations was to promote equity throughout all levels of the education system (Bascia, 2001).

In August 1986, soon after the publication of the Royal Commission on Equality of Employment Opportunity (generally referred to as the Abella Report), the federal government passed the Employment Equity Act. This act had as its goal employment equity based on ability to perform a job. Specifically, it sought to rectify the disadvantage in employment experienced by racial minorities, women, Aboriginal peoples, and the disabled. In 1985 the Ontario government established the Affirmative Action/Employment Equity Incentive Fund (AA/EEIF) program, which was in operation until 1989. It was followed by the enactment of the Education Amendment Act, 1987, or Bill 69. The Ontario Ministry of Education’s Policy/Program Memorandum 111 (see Appendix D of this memorandum) commanded school boards to promote women so that they hold 50% of positions of added responsibility at all levels (supervisory officer, principal, and vice-principal) by the year 2000 (Padro, Rees, & Scane, 1993; Wallace, 2007; Wright & Allingham, 1994). On February 27, 1989, since the desired progress had not been made through Policy/Program Memorandum No. 111, a clause was added to Bill 69 directing boards of education to draft and implement an equity policy for the employment and promotion of women.
Since 1989, significant progress has been made toward the goal of having women in 50% of administrative positions. According to Ontario Ministry of Education (2011) statistics, the percentage of female principals and vice-principals working full-time in Ontario’s public and Catholic school systems in 2009–2010 was 64.6% in elementary schools and 48.6% in secondary schools. As heartening as these strides forward may be, they do not necessarily mean that equity has been achieved. There are many more administrative positions held by women at the elementary level. Female administrators in elementary schools are paid the same as their male counterparts in the elementary schools, but elementary administrative positions do not carry the high status given to corresponding positions at the secondary level. Leadership positions at the secondary level afford a more direct pathway to senior management positions.

Administrative positions in education have become more managerial and political. The work has become more complex and thus less desirable to many teachers (Young & Ansara, 1999). Moreover, many of the barriers to advancement traditionally faced by women are still in place (Loder, 2005; Pacis, 2005; Spicer, 2004; Taylor, 2004).

On February 26, 2010, I contacted the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the Peel District School Board (PDSB), and the Halton District School Board (HDSB) to find statistics on the number of principals and vice-principals of colour employed by each. The PDSB communication department personnel responded that they do not gather race-based statistics. However, they went on, it is the express objective of their board to hire, attract, and retain diverse staff reflective of their community. The secretary to the director at HDSB informed me that in order to obtain the statistics, I would have to write and sign a formal letter to the director, as this constituted a freedom-of-information request. The TDSB was the only board that had an employment equity link on their website. The link was to a document entitled, *Demographic*
Composition of Toronto District School Board Employees, by Barbara Herring and Associates Inc. (2007). This report revealed that the number of permanent principals and vice-principals of colour (both elementary and secondary) was 178 out of a total of 924 administrators. Of the 924 administrators, 1.0% were Aboriginal, 9.6% were Black, and 20% were visible minorities other than Black or Aboriginal (Barbara Herring, 2007, p. 24). According to Appendix A-Table A1 in this report, the percentage of administrators who were visible minorities other than Black in the TDSB does not reflect the same group’s 42.8% representation in the population of the city of Toronto. However, it is interesting to note (a) that the percentage of Aboriginal administrators (0.4%) is higher than the overall percentage of this group in the city of Toronto, and (b) that the percentage of Black administrators (8.3%) is also higher than the percentage of this group in the city’s population. Thus, over the past 15 years (Barbara Herring, 2007, p. 26), the TDSB has made progress in hiring people of colour in administrative positions. However, the report does not reveal the number of female administrators of colour in the elementary and secondary public schools. The TDSB would benefit from further research in this area.

Research Questions

Given the four points discussed in the previous sections on pp. 2–10 (Gaps in Existing Research, Few Female Public School Administrators of Colour, Barriers to Women and Women of Colour, and Employment Equity), the need to better understand the special qualities, experiences, and motivations of female leaders of colour and their role in equitable hiring by district school boards, this study seeks to examine these issues through a comparative case study investigation. The overarching research question for this qualitative research study is:

How have the attributes, experiences, and motivations of female public elementary school administrators of colour contributed to their entry into administration?
More specifically:

1. What attributes do women of colour have that help them to become administrators?

2. What barriers do women of colour working to become administrators encounter?

3. What motivates women of colour to become administrators?

One goal of the study is to provide information to women of colour interested in advancing in their careers. A second goal is to provide district school boards with information about the obstacles faced by women of colour and how they can shape administrative preparation programs to take account of the perspectives and experiences of women of colour. Finally, a third goal is to add to the literature on women of colour in public district school board administrative positions.

Definition of Terms

The terms used throughout this thesis are from the online dictionary *Merriam-Webster* (n.d.): **Culture** is defined in part as social beliefs and traits, and practices transferred by tradition and teaching of a social, racial, or religious group.\(^1\) **Racism** is defined as a belief that the physical differences among the various human groups account for individual or cultural achievement and it includes the notion that one’s own “race” or group is superior and has the right to subordinate others. It is bigotry against or hatred of another race or races. **Racial discrimination** is defined as unfair treatment of members of a group of people that one has singled out and prejudged unfavourably. **Immigrant** is defined as a person who goes to another country intending to become a permanent resident there. **Immigration**, then, is the movement of foreigners into a country for the purpose of settling there. **Sexism** is defined as preconceived

---

\(^1\) Brooker (2002) adds, “culture can have an active, shaping influence upon ideas, attitudes and experience” (p. 59).
attitudes or behaviour based on traditional stereotypes of gender roles. It is a negative attitude toward a person’s sex leading to, for example, limited job opportunities, especially such discrimination aimed against females. Women of **colour** refers to females who have skin colour other than white and whose background is Chinese, South Asian, African, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Middle Eastern, Japanese, or Korean, that is, other than European. They look different from White Europeans and their culture is different from mainstream, middle class White culture.
This chapter presents the history of Canadian education, a discussion of issues that have existed in education, and a literature review of female public school administrators of colour. The first section, setting the context of the history of Canadian education is in three sections: 1880s to 1920s, 1920s to 1950s, and 1950s to post-2000s. In the second section, there is a discussion of patterns in education, diversity, what needs to change for women of colour, and an overview. The third section examines studies that identify the leadership skills and personal attributes found in administrators of colour, and experiences of the barriers faced by female administrators of colour: Racism and marginalization, sexism and lack of power or access to power, and motivational factors for female administrators of colour: Networks, commitment to race/ethnic community, and spiritual connection. A discussion follows these three sections.

Setting the Context

1880s to 1920s

Bennett and LeCompte (1990) provided a historical and sociological analysis of public education in the United States in their book, *How Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Schooling*. Although their work is focused on the United States, given the similarities between the United States and Canada some of their work is applicable to the Canadian education system. For example, before the late 1880s, the one-room school house was a small, simple structure that provided elementary educational services for rural and small town communities. It had a teacher who instructed elementary students in mathematics, reading and writing, and cultural knowledge. In addition the following subjects were taught: “literature, morals, social values such as thrift,
hard work, cleanliness, patience, abstinence, and correct social behavior” (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, p. 42). There were very few nonteaching staff, such as administrators, and those who were responsible for the administration of the schools did not necessarily have any specialized training in administration or management (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990).

Before the late 1880s, Canada was predominantly an agricultural society where only a small percentage of workers were employed in industrial labour. However, by the late 1880s people had migrated from the farm to the city. By 1920, less than a third of Ontario’s population was still involved in agriculture. People left their farms and the remaining farms were larger and required fewer workers because machines had replaced both people and animals (Dawson, 2012). The challenge for schools was to produce people who had the skills needed to successfully function in an industrial society. As a result, mass public education was structured to produce young people who were prepared for the world of industrial labour that included: control, repetition, discipline, obedience to authority and a lack of originality (Dawson, 2012). In the 1920s, the goals of education changed from enhancing the moral and social skills of the working class to those of the 1990s: job skills training that would create economic and social stability, and decrease social unrest and poverty in cities (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990).

Proponents of school reform built on the message of progressive education in their efforts to produce change. Changes in curriculum occurred in most provinces, and the resulting new approach to education became apparent in purpose and methodology throughout Canadian schools (Patterson, 1990).

**1920s to 1950s**

Between 1919 and 1942, people who worked in Ontario’s education institutions focused on how schools could react to and prepare students for a province that was experiencing many
changes (Christou, 2012). Ontarians faced a multitude of situations and hard facts of modern life, for example, the two world wars, the Great Depression, rapid industrialism, immigration, and urbanization (Christou, 2012). Progressive educators thought the schools were outdated and incompatible with the modern world (Christou, 2012). Bennett and LeCompte (1990) pointed out that after World War II, changes in population distribution, the labour market, trade, natural resources, and technology culminated in the scientific management of schools. The one-room school in the rural setting gave way to sophisticated public education institutions solidified practical skills and job preparation (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). Progressivist schooling included several scientific approaches to educational reform, for example, child study, development psychology, health education and social science (Christou, 2012). In a rapidly changing social environment, many progressive administrators regarded scientific management and control as a viable strategy (Christou, 2012). Teachers’ federations and home and school associations were established to advocate and lobby for specific interests in Ontario’s schools (Christou, 2012).

1950s to post-2000s

In the late 1950s and 1960s in Canada, there was a student-centred focus on self-esteem and self-development regarding educational policies (Fullan, 2007). Social affluence focused on individual fulfillment and social justice (Fullan, 2007). There were no longer Grade 13 exit exams, and year-long subjects were changed into semester courses in secondary schools (Fullan, 2007). Large-scale reform failed in the 1960s because it focused mostly on the development of innovations and paid little attention to the culture of schools and districts in which innovations would take place (Fullan, 2007).
In Canada, there were no changes at the classroom level in the 1970s. For the Toronto District School Board, formerly the Toronto Board of Education, modernization was fueled by the election of local school trustees from the community, ability to obtain resources, and agreement with progressive policy directions (Gaskell & Levin, 2012). As Gaskell and Levin (2012) pointed out there was an emphasis on equal education for all: for poor children, for women, for gays and lesbians, for immigrant children, and English language learners. The focus was on making schools more humanitarian places, where students and parents were involved and literate; it was not primarily about testing and achievement scores; still teacher-centred teaching methods were denounced and changed to be more student centred (Gaskell & Levin, 2012). The goal was on whole school improvement, where parents and staff worked together for the good of all students (Gaskell & Levin, 2012). As Fullan (2007) noted there was a huge failure of reform because there were no implementation strategies in place; large-scale reform went underground as education focused on effective schools and innovative schools which were sporadically placed.

In the 1980s there was a renewed interest in large-scale reform but there was no sense of urgency and no commitment to implement it (Fullan, 2007). There was, however, an appreciation for the complexity of achieving it (Fullan, 2007). In the United States, the economic and education gap widened (Fullan, 2007). There was an increasing pressure on education systems to improve in a globally competitive market which led most Western countries to start accountability plans in the 1980s without planning for the work that would be required at all levels of the system to improve results (Fullan, 2007).

of government during the 1990s and identified the following as indicators of failure of public education: high drop-out rates, wide-spread functional illiteracy, and mediocre results in international mathematics and science tests (Fullan, 2007). The failures were attributed to: unclear purposes, fragmented curriculum, and inadequate accountability (Fullan, 2007). The reports advocated: externally established curriculum and a standardized curriculum (Fullan, 2007). They maintained that education needed to be transformed to meet competitive demands of the new global political economy (Fullan, 2007).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was more emphasis on investing in human capital for a better educated workforce, a focus on equipping people to face and shape change which became a more broad political interest (Fullan, 2007). It was pointed out in The Radwanski Report that automated and international production eliminates the need for low-skilled jobs for those inadequately educated (Fullan, 2007). It linked self-esteem and self-development to employability, earning power and an overall quality of life (Fullan, 2007). More emphasis was put on basic knowledge and skills (Fullan, 2007). It was suggested in The Radwanski Report that only one kind of general education is relevant to the needs of society and the economy; the challenge was to define the educational content that can do both (Fullan, 2007).

In the early 1990s in Ontario, the Progressive Conservative government created a crisis in education pointing to a high drop-out rate in secondary schools and a lack of accountability in education and was elected on a platform labeled “the Common Sense Revolution”. This platform aimed at restructuring, downloading and down-sizing public services and implemented a series of ambitious tax cuts. Modeled after other neo-Conservative government initiatives in England, United States, New Zealand, and Alberta, Canada, the Ontario government’s mandate was to make major changes in schools in: school governance, funding, curriculum and assessment
policies (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 2002). There was a focus on daily teaching of literacy and numeracy in elementary schools in order to improve skills; used external inspection and assessment to support the effort, invested heavily in instructional materials, provided on-going professional development and used “change agents” (consultants, lead literacy and numeracy teachers) at all levels of the system (Fullan, 2007).

The post-2000 strategies involved increased invasive accountability-based interventions in most school districts (Fullan, 2007). For example, Portelli and Vibert (2001) argued that standardized testing was part of the neo-Conservative agenda to supposedly close the educational and poverty gap by increased test scores. The argument was the Ontario education system needed to have common standards. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests were created by the Ontario government, Levin (2007) states, to increase literacy and numeracy skills for elementary students, which had increased very little in the 5 years before 2003. The aim was to have 75% of Grade 6 students read, write, and do mathematics at grade level by the spring of 2008—that is, in 4 years. Even though 75% is an improvement from the almost 55% of students who met this standard in 2003, the public and the educators were not pleased in knowing that 25% of students would not develop the necessary skills to participate fully in society (Levin, 2007).

Portelli and Vibert (2001) considered the EQAO tests biased because its standards are aligned with middle-class Anglo-European students who have cultural capital, power, and privilege on their side, and are more likely to succeed than others thereby reproducing the status quo. Further, a plea for common standards is a symptom of colonization, of a privileged mentality (Portelli & Vibert, 2001). In fact, Portelli and Vibert (2001) think it is imperialism in that, if it works for England, it should work for the whole world. One size fits all is a dangerous
position to take as it is inequitable, it privileges some views over others and excludes some views over others (Portelli & Vibert, 2001). Standardized testing marginalizes new Canadians, the intellectually challenged, working class students, and those who cannot identify with middle class norms (Portelli & Vibert, 2001). The tests may be standardized but the student populations who take the tests are not homogeneous (Portelli & Vibert, 2001). Standardized tests set up marginalized students for failure which is counterproductive to the tests goals (Portelli & Vibert, 2001).

Portelli and Vibert (2001) asserted the need for alternate possibilities. In a liberal democracy there could be a few tests of varying standards distributed at the same time, have tests translated into the first languages of English language learners, or test students about school life (Portelli & Vibert, 2001).

According to Fullan (2007) these policies and strategies have not produced a lot of evidence for people to adopt for student success. These are top-down approaches that don’t easily get commitment, ownership, or clarity about the nature of reforms (Fullan, 2007). It is not that standards, assessment, curriculum and professional development are wrong things to do; they are incomplete theories because they are out of touch with what happens in the classroom and school cultures (Fullan, 2006). For Fullan (2007) what works is a combining of top-down and bottom-up forces for change. Fullan (2007) calls this strategy capacity building with a focus on results.

Large-scale reform is about shared meaning, it includes simultaneously individual and social change (Fullan, 2007). Socially meaningful change in complex times is difficult to attain (Fullan, 2007). This background of the history of Canadian education lays a foundation for
discussion of larger issues in education and for the topic of this thesis, female public school administrators of colour.

**Patterns in Education**

Doud and Keller (1998, as cited in Loder, 2005) claimed that in the United States it is possible for males to become administrators in their 20s and 30s whereas females typically enter administration in their 40s and 50s. Loder’s (2005) American study looked at how Black and White female administrators from different generations managed work–family balance. In Loder’s study, the older cohort was born between 1931 and 1948, and the younger cohort was born between 1960 and 1972. Both Black and White female administrators from the older cohort had little to no maternity leave and were made to resign when they started a family (Loder, 2005). More recently (in the late 20th century), although longer maternity leaves were now granted, the younger cohort of Black and White females administrators in Loder’s study struggled with balancing work and family life. With females often bearing the majority of responsibility for childcare, it was difficult for them to put time and effort toward advancing in their careers (Loder, 2005).

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2011), as recently as 2010, more males led secondary schools and more females led elementary schools in Ontario, even though there were more females than males teaching in both secondary and elementary schools. As for class, both male and female teachers tend to come from the middle class due to the high cost of the certification requirements: completion of an undergraduate university degree and a teacher education program, which is given at a university (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013). Regional differences are prevalent because of the diversity in the Canadian education population. Ryan (1999) projected that immigrants from 50 to 100 countries would arrive at schools in major cities
across Canada in the 21st century. Although members of the dominant group, White and male, will continue to gain advantages from their dominant status, they will not be able to control the education system. The evolving population will change who holds powerful positions in education (Ryan, 1999).

**Dealing with Diversity**

The growing diversity of Canada’s population as a whole is a reality and it becomes more evident each passing year. This is because Canada’s immigration policy has changed over time (Statistics Canada, 2011b). Most recently, its goals are to meet labour market needs, reunify families, and realize humanitarian objectives. As the policy has changed so has the country of origin of immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011b).

With a population of 2.5 million, as of 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2011b), Toronto is the largest urban centre in Canada in which recent immigrants have settled, followed by Montreal and Vancouver, and immigrants of colour comprise 19.1% of Canada’s total population. Statistics Canada’s National Household Survey (2011b) found that the largest number of immigrants of colour comprised of South Asian (25.0%), Chinese (21.1%), and Blacks (15.1%) for a 61.2% of the total population of colour. In 2011, there were 381,745 immigrants living in Toronto who had arrived between 2006–2011. The influx of people of colour is a good indication of how the complexion of Toronto and its education system is changing. According to Statistics Canada (2011b), 15% of school age children between 5 and 19 who live in Toronto are students of colour.
In order to deal with the growing diversity in its schools, Ontario district school boards have created policies that support diverse populations. For example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has five equity policies:

1. Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity,
2. Antisexism and Gender Equity,
3. Antihomophobia, Sexual Orientation, and Equity,
4. Anticlassism and Socio-economic Equity, and
5. Equity for Persons with Disabilities.

Governing these is the Equity Foundation Statement that asserts that equal access to resources, programs, and services, and equality of opportunity are necessary for the success of students as well as staff and management who work in the school system (TDSB, 2004a). The TDSB acknowledges that specific groups within the school system have been targeted for unequal treatment because of individual and systemic prejudice associated with race, colour, ethnicity, linguistic origin, culture, disability, age, socioeconomic class, nationality, place of origin, ancestry, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and family status. This biased behaviour has hindered the success of individuals and prevented them from fully contributing to society. Since 2004, the TDSB has ensured that the principles of equity, inclusion, and fairness are integrated into all board policies, practices, programs, and operations (TDSB, 2004a). Moreover, in the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity policy, Section 1.8: Employment and Promotion Practices (TDSB, 2004a, p. 7) it is specifically stated that the board will serve and uphold its diverse population of employees by:

- **1.8.1.** ensuring that equitable employment and promotion practices exist;
- **1.8.2.** identifying and eliminating systemic barriers in the employment and promotion system;
o 1.8.3. ensuring that employment and promotion strategies focus on under-represented communities;

o 1.8.4. establishing outreach activities and affirmative action strategies (e.g. encouragement, mentoring, training and staff development) that focus on marginalized groups of aboriginal, racial, ethnocultural and faith communities in order to ensure that schools and other workplaces within the Board achieve equitable representation at all levels;

o 1.8.5. ensuring that the Board's commitment to antiracism and ethnocultural equity is communicated throughout the Board, and that staff, students and community are aware of this commitment;

o 1.8.6. eliminating barriers and encouraging diverse groups of aboriginal peoples and people from under-represented racial, ethnocultural and faith communities to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions.

What Needs to Change for Women of Colour

Women of colour can use the equity policy statements developed in their respective district school boards as a supportive resource when they decide to apply for administrative positions. Women of colour come from a different social context than all men (of colour or White) and White women. They have to learn to be bicultural if they want to be successful. Women of colour have to learn the White middle class educational patterns and behaviours, and know how to maneuver in this arena. When patterns of promotion to administration of women of colour are similar to that of White women and all men, then school systems will be one step closer to equality for all.

Overview

In this literature review, I focus specifically on the research dealing with female administrators of colour. I chose to review only studies that use a qualitative or mixed method approach, because these methodologies lend themselves to eliciting the kinds of experiences female administrators of colour encounter on the way to taking up administrative positions. The narratives of women of colour give rise to comprehensive themes that will help future
administrators of colour. It is not enough to say, for example, that racism ranked high on the Likert scale of barriers faced by these women. Data gleaned from anecdotes add depth to the discussion on racism beyond what quantitative analysis alone can capture.

My investigation into the literature on female administrators of colour shows that there is a dearth of research in the area of educational administration. Most of the studies that were conducted in the United States were primarily focused on African American and Asian female leaders. Most also focused on females of a particular racial group, with the exception of Ah Nee-Benham (1997), Loder (2005), and Turner (2007). In discussing the findings of all of these studies I have grouped Canadian and US studies together as my goal was to discover what supports and obstacles female administrators of colour in North America have in common. Recent emphasis in both Canada and the United States on understanding and working with diversity has provided increased supports for female leaders of colour, but has not changed the landscape in general. The website “Re:Gender,” for one, provides academic and political support for advancing diversity for senior faculty and administrators in university settings, especially women (Re:Gender, n.d.).

The studies included a range from looking at African American female administrators, to female senior managers of colour in public education, to women of colour with doctoral degrees in other professions. Studies of administrators of colour in higher education institutions were included because they allowed me to look at the phenomenon of barriers and supports across the education spectrum. In each section I have grouped studies according to the level of administration they address—Public Elementary, K–12, and Higher Education. The review of these studies revealed that each level has some unique demands, and that studies at each level reflect the differences in the contexts.
A number of categories of study were omitted from this review: (a) earlier studies (pre-1990) that focused mostly on the experiences of White female administrators and men; (b) studies that focused on White women; (c) studies about administrators of colour in private schools; and (d) studies conducted outside of North America.

The following three major themes emerged from the studies reviewed in this chapter:

1. leadership skills and personal attributes,
2. negative experiences (obstacles), and
3. motivations (successful strategies) used by women of colour who succeeded in attaining leadership positions in their respective fields.

**Leadership Skills and Personal Attributes**

The reviewed studies identified a number of personal and leadership traits common to female administrators of colour that helped them overcome obstacles that may have stopped many others along the way. At all three levels of education (elementary, secondary, university and management), successful female administrators of colour showed the following attributes:

- They had specific goals (González, 2007; Pacis, 2005).
- They had a compelling reason to work hard and achieve their goals (González, 2007; Lee, 1998; Montgomery-Ennis, 1996; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Pacis, 2005).
- They were persistent and determined (Bagwell, 1999; Bright, 2010; Christman & McClellan 2008; Lee, 1998; Nicholson, 1999; Vasquez-Guignard, 2010).
- They were personable (Bright, 2010; Montgomery-Ennis, 1996).
- They had a strong sense of self (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997).
• They believed in themselves (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Montgomery-Ennis, 1996; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004).
• They were resilient (Bright, 2010).
• They possessed values consistent with good leadership, for example, integrity (Bright, 2010).
• They had credibility (Vasquez-Guignard, 2010).
• They possessed problem-solving skills, internal locus of control, and independence (González, 2007).
• They had a strong work ethic and high standards for their own performance (Lee, 1998).
• They felt they were treated fairly at work and by other administrators (Ross, 2000).
• They networked to make connections (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997).
• They made efforts to gain visibility with teachers and Board personnel (Lee, 1998).
• They continued to develop their leadership skills and grow professionally (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Pacis, 2005).
• They had an effective management style (Bagwell, 1999).

Public Elementary School Studies

While the characteristics listed cross all levels of administration, the following describes some of the studies that address female leader characteristics at the elementary school level. The elementary level requires a sense of community and an ability to work with parents that is somewhat different from other levels. Ah Nee-Benham’s (1997) study, which included women from three different communities (African American, South Asian, and Cuban), mentioned the importance of making connections, engagement in continuous leadership development, using
best practices, and participating in collective efforts to create change in the school community as supports to advancement into administration for female public elementary school administrators of colour.

Lee (1998), in her study of six Asian American female school administrators, found that the women were motivated to become administrators because of experiences that socialized them to the administrative role. This socialization process, coined “anticipatory socialization” by Adkison (1981), allowed them to make the psychological adjustment from teacher to administrator. All six held jobs related to helping other teachers, or took leadership roles working with their race/ethnic communities before becoming administrators. Most held curriculum development and teacher training jobs, and reported finding working with teachers satisfying. Most participated in the development and implementation of innovative programs.

K–12 Studies

Montgomery-Ennis (1996) found that African American female administrators had acquired leadership skills and personal characteristics that overcame barriers to administration and ensured success. These included behaviours such as working twice as hard and devoting time to preparation for promotion. This was mirrored by advice given by an Asian American administrator who was a participant in Pacis’s (2005) study. She believed that women had not only to be better at their jobs, but also to perform above and beyond requirements.

Bloom and Erlandson (2003) suggested taking more risks and ignoring the judgments of others are important to administrative success. Montgomery-Ennis (1996) identified the ability to maintain flexibility and work well with others, self-confidence, strong character, experience, and high qualifications as most important to administrative success: “a doctorate is almost a must” (p. 81-1A). All the Asian American women in Pacis’s (2005) study agreed that overcoming the
stereotype of Asian women as “submissive” was crucial to their administrative success. The first step in overcoming this stereotype was instilling in them the belief that Asian American females could and should lead schools. The women in this study worked hard to change the prejudice against them and as a result became assertive and able to successfully lead others (Pacis, 2005).

The Asian American female administrators in Pacis’s (2005) study developed leadership skills in order to become administrators. They worked hard to make their leadership skills visible to those who could influence their careers. One of the participants in the study provided a list of leadership skills that contributed to her gaining entry into administration:

I had to work “harder” to gain respect; develop strong verbal and written skills; know how to have a vision; be able to develop relationships with both students, parents and colleagues; be open to all ideas (not just ones I grew up with); have a great understanding of how all students learn; know how to network and [k]now when to stop (not to be too pushy); develop, strengthen, and become an expert…continue to grow professionally; and be outgoing. (Pacis, 2005, p. 64)

Although participants in Pacis’s study thought that Asian American females had the skills necessary to lead schools, it was a challenge to convince those in a position to hire them as public school administrators of this (Pacis, 2005). An African American administrator in Montgomery-Ennis’s (1996) study echoed the need to “develop effective communication, interpersonal and technical skills” (p. 81-3A). It is clear that women public school administrators of colour had to obtain more credentials, develop the necessary leadership skills, and work above and beyond the requirements of the job in order to be considered on par with other administrators.

**Higher Education Studies**

According to Montas-Hunter (2012), the eight Latina administrators in higher education studied utilized a collaborative leadership style, and showed warmth in their communication with
others as a way to share power and encourage consensus in groups. A trait that contributed to the participants’ success in higher education was competence. The eight Latina academics succeeded because of a firm belief in values, for example, responsibility, integrity, and education; self-awareness (knowing oneself); and perseverance.

Bright’s (2010) study included 14 Black female senior-level administrators in predominantly White community colleges. These participants attributed their success to resilience, persistence, personability (being nurturing, helping others), and having strong values (the integrity to do what is right even though they face many injustices as Black women).

In Vasquez-Guignard’s (2010) study, four Latina women who secured professorships at an university in Southern California were found to possess personal attributes, such as persistence: personal drive/positive attitude, and credibility: formal training in teaching.

Christman and McClellan’s (2008) study of seven diverse female administrators in educational leadership programs, which explored how these female administrators of colour had sustained their administrative roles and overcome racism and sexism in departments where they were the only or one of a few women of colour, identified the following markers of resiliency in their participants: having a Type A personality, perseverance, being convinced that failure was not an option, optimism, having a feeling of success and satisfaction with teaching, scholarship, tenure, appreciating relationships and valuing people, being a role model for others, being a voice for women of colour, and being excited about responsibility.

González’s (2007) study identified resiliency in 12 Latinas obtaining doctoral degrees. These doctoral students demonstrated problem-solving skills, independence, an internal locus of control (self-control), and clear goals, and they achieved their educational goals. It is these characteristics to which they attributed, at least in part, their success.
Participants in Nichols and Tanksley’s (2004) study, African American women who had completed doctoral degrees in their professions, attributed their success to a number of personal characteristics. A positive attitude, perseverance, high motivation, commitment, and self-confidence were some of the traits these women reported possessing that helped them overcome severe obstacles. These women had many words of wisdom for those aspiring to advance in their careers. For those in pursuit of a doctoral degree, one participant suggested that women had to, “be confident in yourself that you can attain this goal. Learn to organize your time to include study, fun, family, and above all, God. Become intimate with friends, perseverance, excellence, and truth” (p. 180).

**Experiences of (Barriers Faced by) Female Administrators of Colour**

It is a challenge for women of colour in Canada to get hired and even more problematic for immigrant women of colour to obtain teaching and administrative positions, even when these jobs are vacant (Moll, 2001, as cited in Wallace, 2007). In Canada, hierarchies exist in the education organization and racism takes a back seat in efforts to improve gender equity (Wallace, 2007).

Almost all the studies reviewed found that racism and sexism were inherent obstacles for women of colour seeking senior administrative positions in school districts and in elementary, secondary, and higher education. It appears that racism and sexism in public institutions mirrors the systemic oppression and marginalization of women of colour in society at large. Barriers to positions in administration faced by women at both the elementary and secondary levels in the literature reviewed included: (a) exclusion from informal social networks, (b) assumptions that success is due to affirmative action, (c) facing constant scrutiny, (d) devaluation for working on behalf of students of colour, and in one case (e) being told she would not become an
administrator in a particular school district because of race—she was Black. A doctoral student was not permitted to write a paper on Chicano theory because her White professor had not read any literature in the area, and faculty members were not given personal leave time for celebrating their significant cultural holidays.

**Racism and Marginalization**

Based on the studies reviewed, women of colour feel thwarted in their efforts to achieve equity in the workplace. They believe they are marginalized because of their race and gender, and many reported that they had seen people demanding equity being stigmatized and isolated. Barriers from a variety of sources needed to be overcome before women of colour could enter administrative positions (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997). Russell and Wright (1992) found that women of colour were actively discouraged from pursuing administrative positions. Nichols and Tanksley (2004) found that they were discouraged from pursuing doctoral degrees. They often struggled alone in their efforts to strategize ways to advance into administrative positions. They were left out of formal and informal networking connections, which meant they lacked administrative support to enter administration (Montgomery-Ennis, 1996). The absence of mentors meant women of colour had to learn from their own observations of the mistakes and successes of their superiors (Lee, 1998).

Even after becoming administrators, women of colour reported feeling excluded and isolated by other administrators (Taylor, 2004). Senior management often ignored their requests for assistance or their contributions to serious discussions (Spicer, 2004). When women of colour finally achieved an administrative position in schools or in higher education, they were often accused of obtaining it because of affirmative action requirements rather than their own efforts (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995). Female administrators of colour were constantly
scrutinized (Nicholson, 1999; Spicer, 2004), and their leadership was resisted by subordinates (Allen et al., 1995). They were challenged by parents in the school community and had to deal with racist attitudes and actions toward students of colour (Taylor, 2004).

Elementary and secondary administrators faced a host of work pressures and time constraints. Work pressures included organizational socialization, a predominant male culture (Nicholson, 1999) and the need to work harder than their peers in order to prove their worth (Pacis, 2005). The time commitment required to balance work, family, personal (Pacis, 2005), and community activities (Lee, 1998) was an additional obstacle.

It was also found that women of colour were criticized for their fluency in English: they either spoke it too well or not well enough. One African American elementary administrator reported being criticized by educational assistants and lunchroom supervisors for acting like a snob because she spoke formal rather than colloquial English. The principal in question had undertaken formal study to learn to speak correctly (Bagwell, 1999). Secondary administrators reported being criticized for a lack of English language proficiency (Pacis, 2005). When faculty of colour took time to spend significant cultural days with their families and communities this was frowned upon by other faculty members who thought it unfair that they received additional holidays (Sotello & Turner, 2002).

**Public elementary school studies**

Marginalization occurs when people in institutions first label people and then exclude them from the central and significant work of teaching, learning, and leading in schools (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997). Moving the work of women leaders of colour from the margin to the centre requires challenging the organizational value that prizes conformity and silence. Ah Nee-Benham’s qualitative (1997) study of a female African American chair of a middle school
counselling department, a female South Asian teacher, and a female Cuban school principal revealed that all three women experienced marginalization due to race. This caused them to re-examine the school structures and racial stereotypes that presented obstacles to their creating their identities as female school leaders of colour. Two of the three women leaders in Ah Nee-Benham’s (1997) study suspected the use of “diversity” or “equity-oriented” jargon in their school systems was superficial because they believed White European hegemony was deeply embedded in educational environments and would not change. It was their belief that people who put pressure on the institution to enforce equity were often isolated and stigmatized. They expressed frustration and anxiety at being unable to access people in positions of power who could assist them in advancing their careers. They also reported that instead of being seen as caring, nurturing, and protective of all students, the three women leaders of colour were negatively stereotyped as working on behalf of students of colour, and devalued for doing it because this was not considered the work of serious school administrators (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997).

In Ross’s (2000) qualitative study of six African American female administrators from smaller school districts in east Texas, the participants stated that they experienced barriers that educators in larger districts did not face. One of the participants was told out right that she would have to leave the school district if she wanted to secure a position in senior management because she was Black. She perceived that White colleagues were being promoted to leadership positions over more qualified Black candidates. Another participant reported that being a successful administrator was a barrier to her promotion. Superintendents did not want to promote someone who was successful in handling the problems of a school with a large Black student population, fearing that another administrator would not be as successful. A third participant recalled
incidents in which parents or other administrators made rude, racist remarks to her: “For example, if a parent gets mad enough they will refer to you as ‘that Black woman’.” She observed that, “There is a lot of racial ignorance, not accepting each other for our differences” (p. 123).

One of the participants in Russell and Wright’s (1992) qualitative study of five Canadian female administrators of colour found that there was no possibility she would be considered for a principalship because she was Black. Another participant in this study stated that she experienced additional performance pressures because she did not conform to the White male norm. She had to work harder than her White colleagues to prove her competence, and to be accepted as a Black school leader, she had to have superior credentials and be more positive than others. Nicholson (1999), who studied six African American administrators in a qualitative study in the U.S., quoted one Black female principal’s advice to aspiring administrators: “As black women you have to work harder because people are always watching you” (p. 74).

Three of the women in Russell and Wright’s (1992) study became behind-the-scenes mediators for people of colour in their schools. But they saw their assignment to schools in which students of colour predominated as a relegation to marginal administrative positions that would limit their career advancement. Lee’s (1998) qualitative study of six Asian American (five Chinese and one Vietnamese) female public elementary school administrators found that the “old boys network” and racial or ethnic stereotyping of Asian females as passive and lacking leadership skills were barriers to their becoming administrators.

In Nicholson’s (1999) study, organizational culture was cited as a barrier to a staff’s acceptance of a Black female principal. She reported that she was treated differently than she had been when she was a vice-principal. In her new role, staff undermined her and questioned her
actions. Another participant in this study was disappointed when she was not promoted to principal in a school where she had worked for a year as an acting principal performing the same duties. She did know the reason for her lack of promotion because she knew the students, staff, parents, and community, and had successfully carried out duties of a principal.

*K–12 studies*

The Asian American women in Pacis’s (2005) mixed methods study of 13 administrators aged 31 to 60 considered it necessary to assimilate into the dominant culture in order to succeed as administrators. One respondent expressed this view about assimilation:

I have seen some Asian women “sell out” or try to “act white” in order to “fit in”. This attitude seems to “please” some of the people in power, who usually tend to be Caucasian. It is a sad, but true reality and can only perpetuate the circle of prejudice and cultural misunderstanding. (p. 57)

Administrators in the same study not only viewed their role as challenging in itself, but also believed they needed to work harder to meet expectations, making their task even more difficult:

Women who are often more qualified for a position have to work twice as hard as their male counterparts to prove themselves. For Asian women there may be an additional layer added to their need to prove their abilities and stamina under pressure. (p. 60)

This constant pressure to prove their knowledge, skills, and abilities forced one of the participants in this study to relocate more often than men usually had to in order to gain a wide variety of experiences so she could secure the positions she desired. According to Spicer’s (2004) mixed methods study of nine female African American K–12 administrators in Massachusetts, aged 40 to 60+, the participants still struggled as they balanced parental expectations and direction with their own racial and cultural identities in a White and male-dominated environment. The Black female administrators in this study reported that they were
relentlessly scrutinized and their leadership was resisted. One of the administrators who worked in an urban district described an incident in which a parent questioned whether she could effectively challenge her child. In another incident, when the same administrator modified schedules in order to make them more rational, 50 parents arrived at the school demanding that she involve them in the decision:

“In hindsight, I could have structured a process that might have helped them understand why,” she stated. “I really think [the demands of the parents] were based on my race. It took me a while to convince [the superintendent] to look at it for what it was, [because] I don’t go around trying to make race an issue.” (Spicer, 2004, pp. 163–164)

Another obstacle the Black female administrators in Spicer’s (2004) study faced was trying to influence policy and procedures only to find that they could not get a hearing with central administrators. Also, when they tried to get more leadership experience and responsibility, they were disempowered and silenced. One of the administrators in this study summarized her experience working in a Massachusetts school: “The system [was] so racist….it’s worse than being in the South. ‘Y’all call me a nigger and make it sound real good’” (p. 171).

Intraracial conflicts were yet another barrier faced by the Black female administrators in Spicer’s (2004) study. Although a large number of the people of colour in one district had a positive effect on the lives of these women, others became their fiercest adversaries. In one incident, one of them was told by an African American colleague she had better “watch her back.” The lack of support from other African Americans underscored the lack of collaboration and trust the participant experienced in her workplace. Another research participant had the disheartening experience of being told by a Black male assistant superintendent that she should be “quiet,” that she was “known as a troublemaker” and “always complaining” (p. 173).
A Black female secondary school administrator from the south-eastern United States who participated in Taylor’s (2004) qualitative study described a situation in which some White parents wanted separate physical education classes for Black and White students. The White parents were disturbed by the large percentage of African American students at the school. When she refused to separate the students, some of the White parents withdrew their children from the school. “I have dealt with racism. I feel like there are invisible barriers for women. Yeah, especially black women, and we are really going to have to watch our backs” (p. 111). While this administrator did not experience racism directed at her, she did have to deal with racist parents, and asked herself whether the parents would have challenged her if she were a man.

A participant in Montgomery-Ennis’s (1996) mixed methods study of 15 African American K–12 administrators in Arizona, aged 30 to 46+, stated that, “being black and female decreases promotional opportunities” (p. 62). All three Black female middle and secondary school administrators in Bloom and Erlandson’s (2003) qualitative study also stated that hegemonic practices hindered their career advancement, for example, being demoted by senior administrators, who wanted to maintain the status quo, for creating change and improvement in a failing school.

In Pacis’s (2005) study of Asian American female administrators, it was found that they felt that the time commitment demanded of them to fulfill the duties of a school administrative position had a serious effect not only on their professional, but also on their personal lives. As one of the participants explained: “Once one decides to go into a leadership position, one makes that commitment and sacrifices professional and personal aspects of oneself. I believe this is applicable to all cultures, not just Asians” (p. 60). In Lee’s (1998) study, juggling certification
studies and volunteer work in the Chinese community was an obstacle for one Asian American participant.

A lack of English language skills was mentioned as a barrier only in Pacis’s (2005) study of Asian American women. The inability to communicate effectively and to understand spoken English was a barrier for those administrators whose first language was not English. Some Asian American administrators were afraid of being ridiculed for their accents and were ashamed of having some difficulty understanding English. One of the few administrators who had difficulty with English language acquisition revealed that this had a negative effect on her attainment of an administrative position. According to Pacis (2005), educational leadership programs rarely address the challenge of language acquisition, which further hindered not only Asian American women who were English language learners, but all women administrators who struggled to achieve proficiency in the English language.

**Higher education studies**

In his research study involving 12 Latinas studying for their doctoral degrees, González (2007) claimed that Latinas thought critically about how they were being socialized to think like the dominant culture and how this conflicted with their own Latina identity, which they felt was being suppressed. One Latina doctoral student spoke about the racism she experienced in the form of a White male professor refusing to let her write a paper based on Chicano theory because he was not familiar with the literature:

Professors still don’t know how to deal with students of color, or issues having to do with students of colour [in the classroom]. I remember I wanted to write a position paper, and obviously you can’t rely on mainstream literature to help you frame it. You need a lot of the Chicano theory, and I remember this professor was like, “I’m looking at your bibliography, and I’m not really familiar with these readings. Can you choose a different topic?”…But to me the irony of any
graduate program is that we teach students to teach and learn, but faculty are not critical of their teaching and learning. (González, 2007, p. 295)

Muñoz (2010) also cited racism as a barrier faced by 22 Latina community college presidents from 10 different states in the United States. One participant observed that her community college’s search committees limited diversity in hiring, that is, limited the hiring of members of racial minorities. The search committees: “are most comfortable with people that look like them, and talk like them. Therefore, anyone who is different [racially] has to have more to outshine and overcome that or people are not going to look [at] them” (p. 167). Vasquez-Guignard (2010) described the racism experienced by four Latina professors in securing their professorships at an university in Southern California as subtlety of bias, judgments, and perceptions based on ethnicity.

Bright’s (2010) study described racial discrimination and exclusion faced by Black female senior-level administrators in predominantly White community colleges located in five U. S. states. One participant said, “You can have an idea, you could state it at the table and then…somebody can repeat your same idea and then it gets accepted based upon the color of the persons” (p. 95). Another participant recounted that the faculty conducted their own survey on how they felt about working at their community college, and afterward, published it on the Internet: “They [the faculty] wrote statements about this turning into a Black community college. They talked about every Black administrator like a dog…It was the first time I have ever been attacked personally, ever” (p. 95).

One respondent in Nichols and Tanksley’s (2004) mixed methods study of 37 African American graduates of doctoral programs in social science, science, and professional schools reported that advisors tried to dissuade her from pursuing a doctoral degree:
My master’s degree advisors…advised me not to pursue the terminal degree, when I expressed my intentions. I was the only black in my graduate class…in (1963-64) [but the advisor’s attitude] made me more determined….Her level was at the master’s degree. I chalked it up to envy or sour grapes on her part. My attitude, “I’ll show her.” (p. 178)

In Sotello and Turner’s (2002) qualitative study of four Asian Pacific American females, 15 African American females, four Aboriginal American females, and eight Latina faculty members, participants reported that most female students of colour turn to faculty of colour for academic advice, to mentor them, and to chair their doctoral committees, which can be emotionally draining for female faculty of colour who are also under pressure to conduct research, publish, and prepare courses. Interviewees in Enomoto, Gardiner, and Grogan’s (2000) qualitative study of 14 female African American and four Latina educational leaders from Washington, Virginia, and Maryland found difficulties arising from being the only woman of colour in a predominantly White male-dominated administration. Even in urban school districts where persons of colour made up the majority of the principals, they were still viewed as a minority and assigned to lead schools to discipline members of their own race. One participant, the president of an educational association, commented that Blacks are in leadership positions when “it’s an all minority program or group….But if it’s an integrated group, you’ll never find a Black in a leadership role” (p. 571).

A Black senior administrator related a situation in which she was mistaken for her office administrator because she was the woman behind the desk. Both race and gender contributed to a lack of confidence in her ability to do her work and be a successful administrator, and she felt she needed to prove herself (Enomoto et al., 2000). Interviewees in Allen et al.’s (1995) mixed methods study of eight female African American directors of education in the U.S. noted they had confronted barriers in pursuit of their goals, citing active racism both while they were in
university and in the workplace. Women of colour had to make greater efforts than others to prove they knew the course content in order to earn respectable grades. As one interviewee said:

When I’ve been the only minority, you don’t know if the professor is going to “stick it” to you….You see others skate through with little effort or work. I feel it’s unfair because you are constantly striving and working hard to go that extra mile. (p. 417)

A Black senior administrator stated, “Sometimes the staff gives African American women a hard time because they don’t consider them as valid and [believe] that they only got the job because they were minorities” (Allen et al., 1995, p. 417).

A faculty member in Sotello and Turner’s (2002) study commented that accommodations need to be made to allow faculty of colour to actively participate in their race or ethnic community. One Aboriginals faculty member stated, “the social value and preeminent goal in life…is (p. 82). One Latina faculty echoed this sentiment by adding there is a need to, “maintain a strong affiliation with their community and feel a strong sense of responsibility to improve the status of other Chicanos in the larger community” (p. 82). Another woman stated that it is imperative for African American faculty to stay connected with the Black community, in part because of “the African heritage of communalism” (p. 83). Women of colour wanted time off work to celebrate their own cultural holidays with their family and community, but this was opposed by other faculty members. Women of colour were expected to only celebrate the traditional national holidays of the dominant culture, such as Thanksgiving.

**Sexism**

According to the studies reviewed, women of colour confront sexist attitudes and behaviour before and during their administrative posts. Elementary school administrators were found to have received little support from their superiors when they were teachers striving
toward an administrative role (Ross, 2000). In one reported instance, when a secondary school female administrator of colour worked as a teacher, she had better qualifications than her Black male principal, and yet she was not supported in pursuing administration (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Loder’s (2005) study found that the pre-civil rights and women’s movement cohort experienced sexist discrimination with respect to the rules governing maternity leave.

At the higher education level, in one study, four of 14 Black female senior-level administrators in predominantly White community colleges voiced their individual experiences with exclusion from networking opportunities, and verbal harshness (Bright, 2010). One of the participants in Vasquez-Guignard’s (2010) study of Latina professors in a Southern California university experienced sex-role stereotyping in the form of being addressed informally at formal meetings. Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison (2008) suggested that Black women’s experiences in the workplace are different than those of other women of colour because of the historic roots of slavery in the United States.

One participant in Nichols and Tanksley’s (2004) study, described being discouraged from pursuing her doctoral degree, another encountered tokenism (Bagwell, 1999), and a third felt marginalized (Russell & Wright, 1992). In addition, elementary and secondary administrators of colour reported being undermined by teachers under their supervision (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

Public elementary school studies

In Russell and Wright’s (1992) study, Black women aspiring to be leaders, or already in leadership roles, experienced being Black and female as a barrier because these made them outsiders to the White male norm. One of the female administrators of colour stated that men dominated the meetings and suggested that women had to learn to speak up more (Russell &
Wright, 1992). According to one participant in Ross’s (2000) study, in the view of administrators in east Texas in 2000 only men with prior coaching experience, whether Black or White, could be school administrators. Another participant in this study had to rush to get to a graduate class on time because her principal refused to adjust her schedule, and yet had made adjustments for a male teacher for the same purpose. A third participant felt she had to prove her capabilities by working harder than a man in the same position would have to work to show her staff, parents, and other administrators that she could handle the traditionally male job (Ross, 2000).

According to one participant in Bagwell’s (1999) qualitative study of three African American administrators, female staff undermined a Black female principal’s authority by suggesting things be done differently. Another Black female administrator in this study felt undermined when another female administrator, known for playing mind games with other women, sent some parents and their children to her school a day late to have their pictures taken. By allowing pictures to be taken a day late went against the rules the principal was trying to establish in her school and she felt sabotaged. One of the participants in Bagwell’s study felt like a token because she was the first young, Black female administrator to be hired in her predominantly White district, and was given a large school of 900 elementary students as her first assignment. Usually first year administrators in that district started in small schools of approximately 300 hundred students.

Another Black female principal in Bagwell’s (1999) study experienced fierce competition with an Asian American female vice-principal who left her out of staff meetings and encouraged staff to come to her, the vice-principal, with administrative concerns that were normally dealt with by the principal, leaving the principal feeling “discounted” and “pushed aside” (p. 135).
In Nicholson’s (1999) study, one of the participants described applying for an assistant principal’s position along with 92 other applicants. All were interviewed. The participant was interviewed several times and then was given the position. The next morning, the principal announced the news over the intercom to the whole school. The participant recounted what happened next, “I remember my assistant principal asking me in front of others in the front office, ‘Well Doc, who did you sleep with to get this job?’ A community and partner employee who was present demanded that he apologize to me” (p. 86).

**K–12 studies**

Sexism in various forms was reported in all six of the K–12 studies reviewed. Loder (2005) compared Black and White public elementary and secondary school administrator cohorts born before and after the civil rights and women’s movements (the older cohort before the civil rights and women’s movements, was born between 1931 and 1948; the younger cohort after the civil rights and women’s movements, was born between 1960 and 1972) in the United States. The mixed methods study compared 20 Black and 11 White administrators; all women aged 57 to 74 years. One form of sexism was a mandatory 1-year maternity leave when administrators became pregnant without credit toward their pension for that year. The time lost had a cumulative effect over their career. On the other hand, male administrators who were drafted during wartime were given credit toward their pension for the time they were absent from work. One of the participants in Loder’s (2005) study stated, “I’m not saying that maternity leave wasn’t a good idea. But we were forced to leave” (p. 756).

In contrast to their older counterparts, the young, Black administrators aged 33 to 45 years, who were mothers, were denied adequate maternity and family leave time when their children were born. All the mothers in this cohort, both Black and White, took issue with being
forced to return to work shortly after the birth of their children (Loder, 2005). The older Black female administrators in Loder’s (2005) study were discouraged from pursuing administrative positions early in their careers by their spouses’ traditional gender role expectations. To avoid work–family conflicts, these women chose to time their entry into administration after their marriages ended, or after their children became adults (Loder, 2005).

The younger Black female administrators experienced greater opportunities to advance into administrative positions. Unfortunately, taking advantage of these new opportunities created difficulties for them in balancing the demands of work and family life. Black administrators who were married and mothers expressed distress over their attempts to strike a balance in their work schedules that suited their spouses and children. In Lee’s (1998) study, time constraints arising from the juggling of certification studies and volunteer work in the Chinese community were an obstacle for one Asian American participant.

Pacis’s (2005) study of 13 female Asian American K–12 administrators, aged 31 to 60, found that the cultural norms of female Asian Americans were inconsistent with what are perceived to be successful leadership attributes. Because these women avoided self-promotion and their behaviour was judged based on White male norms, they were often overlooked for leadership positions (Pacis, 2005). As one of the participants explained:

Many women from the Asian culture are very respectful of authority figures. Sometimes this behavior manifests in silence or a form of controlled contributions at the decision-making table. This behavior could be perceived by the Western culture as an indication of weakness or an inability to make decisions. As a result, often times they are denied the promotion they so much deserve. (pp. 59–60)

In Taylor’s (2004) study of one Black female secondary school principal, the principal stated that she felt that Black parents lacked confidence in her leadership abilities. “I felt that
strongly….Even from female parents that feel maybe she doesn’t know what she is doing….I was challenged like that a lot the first year” (p. 112).

Bloom and Erlandson’s (2003) study of three female African American Grade 7–12 administrators found that male teachers had difficulty accepting direction from a Black woman. One of the participants in this study recalled the tensions that arose between a few male teachers and her:

Every time I received a grievance paper, it was from a man. The male teachers said I was too domineering or that I gave orders to them. I never changed my style. It was their perception of me that was problematic for them. (p. 355)

This administrator further mentioned that she had the certification for principalship while her male principal did not.

According to a participant in Bloom and Erlandson’s (2003) study, who taught in segregated public elementary schools from the 1940s to the 1960s, male teachers needed few credentials to teach Black students or even to become an administrator:

For years, I worked under a man who could not even spell correctly, let alone speak standard English. He was having affairs with the teachers and had less than three or four years teaching experience. Once a Black man was named to the position [of principal], nothing moved him out except retirement. Men ruled the schools...most principals were men. Only a few women were principals at any level. The first Black woman of a high school in the city had all kinds of trouble from female teachers. (p. 360)

In Montgomery-Ennis’s (1996) study of 15 female African American K–12 administrators, a Black female administrator reported that there were sexist hiring and promotional practices at her school. In fact, she was told outright she would not be promoted before a White woman: “I had one white male principal tell me that there was no way he could
promote me over a white female and indeed I had to wait until she was promoted first” (p. 63-7A).

**Higher education studies**

One Black senior-level community college administrator in Bright’s (2010) study recalled that she and another female colleague were discriminated against by their White male boss who excluded them from all-male lunches where important information was communicated. This participant was one of only two females who worked in this particular division:

> And, you, know, the other female I worked there with said, you know, how come we don’t get invited to all the guy lunches? Almost every day there were guy lunches…that we typically did not get invited to. There was information that was communicated and I was the next person in charge of this department, and sometimes my underlings would know, where they happened to be male, and I would find out later on. (p. 130)

The all-male culture of the department contributed to the two females being ignored and the failure to follow proper protocol (i.e., that information ought to be given to the administrator before subordinates).

Another Black senior-level community college administrator in Bright’s (2010) study had a problem with an African American male colleague at a historically Black college. This male, also a senior-level administrator, was verbally harsh toward her:

> You know, and he was yelling and fussing and so I had to yell and fuss back. And, you know, I, I thought, I, I’m not your daughter, I’m not your wife, I’m not your sister, I’m your colleague. …it highlighted some of the female, male tensions that could exist and did exist, in the senior leadership team in a historically Black college. …where I would have expected a little bit more affirmation. (p. 131)

The Black male scolding the Black female peer is evidence of an attitude of male dominance and the sense of power over females some men assume.
A Black senior-level community college administrator in a mostly White community college also related a sexist incident with a Black male in the workplace. She was promoted to assistant dean by a Black male dean upon her return from working on her doctorate. A White male was also promoted to assistant dean and given a $3,000 dollar increase. The Black male dean told her he would give her the title but he was not going to give her the $3,000 dollar increase until she completed her doctorate.

And when I did finish it, they gave me the rest of it, but at the same time it was like it was such an unfair thing...He should have given me the $3,000 dollars and then given me more money when I finished. And I had also wondered that if I were male at the point where he held that money back if he would have done that or would he have pushed me ahead and then given me more money. (Bright, 2010, p. 131)

Although this participant was compensated in the end, she wondered whether the situation would have been different had she been male. The same participant shared another incident where she was more qualified for an academic dean position but it was given to a less-qualified White male. She said:

I applied for it [the position in the Arts and Communications department] because the person who was in that job [before] was a social scientist. So that didn’t mean the person had to have a real background in that. The person that got the job had a Master’s in counselling. He had no experience. He was like the vice president’s friend who was losing his job or something. So I said you know this is real, real clear discrimination, there is no way around this. When I put it in writing [to the president] that it was discrimination comparing the backgrounds and the experience and everything, then they wanted to play let’s make a deal. (Bright, 2010, p. 131)

The experiences described by the participants underscore their view that sexism negatively affected their career trajectory. Women of colour cannot attain senior administrative roles in higher education as quickly as men if women are systematically excluded, scolded, and passed over for promotion.
The Latina CEOs of primarily Hispanic-serving institutions were introduced by a Spanish term of endearment or by their first name at formal and informal meetings, whereas men were introduced as “Dr. or Mr.” (Muñoz, 2010, p. 18). One Latina professor in Vasquez-Guignard’s (2010) study said that many Latinas do not have role models or do not know women academics; therefore, it is difficult for their families to see academia as a possibility for their daughters. Despite having high expectations for them, many families undermine their daughters’ efforts to take their studies seriously. For example:

I really want you to do well in school and become a teacher or something, but can you come home this weekend because we are having a baptism for so and so, or could you take your little sister next week because she’s off of school, or could you come home every single weekend from school or could you apply to the university that’s the closest to home so you could still live at home. (pp. 81–82)

The Latina professors explained there was always an underlying message from their families that although they want their daughter to get an university degree, “the most important thing you’ll do or be is a mother and a wife who hopefully looks pretty all the time” (p. 82). It is a kind of thinking, sex-role stereotyping that is counter-productive to being a scholar or a scientist (Vasquez-Guignard, 2010).

Sex-role stereotyping of Black women in corporate America serves to derail their climb up the corporate ladder, according to Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008). The stereotypes defined in the essay include: Mammy who is motherly and nurturing; Jezebel who is seductive, flirty, and manipulative; Sapphire who is loud and complains; Crazy Black Bitch who is angry, aggressive, and vindictive; and the Superwoman who is an overachiever, intelligent, articulate, and assertive (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Black women experience disproportionately more mental and physical health-related issues than other women, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (1991, cited in Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). This profiling impedes
their advancement to higher positions in corporations. However, some have succeeded despite the negative, sexist stereotypes due to their own work ethic, social support and networks, and ability to balance work and family life (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, & Johnson, 1997, as cited in Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Several participants in Nichols and Tanksley’s (2004) study of Black women in higher education administration recounted experiences of sexism. One participant was told that some of her male colleagues, instructors, and peers did not think she should attempt to obtain a doctoral degree. Another respondent thought there was a double standard in the university where she worked in that men could achieve an administrative post without a doctoral degree while women could not. One participant claimed that male administrators were frequently afraid of and disrespected women (Nichols & Tanksley, 2004). Because there were so few women of colour in administrative positions, those who did hold such positions encountered tokenism at both the elementary and higher education levels (Bagwell, 1999), felt marginalized in a White male-dominated culture, and were often mistaken for office staff (Russell and Wright, 1992).

One professor in Sotello and Turner’s (2002) study expressed the view that Black females, or any females, working in a field that was predominantly a White male domain would have problems. Until recently, “we had never had a full professor in [department name]. It’s changing, but it’s not changing fast. And then you add to that being the Black female who has to be superwoman” (Sotello & Turner, 2002, p. 80). This professor felt isolated and under extra pressure to perform as a Black woman.

Despite common gender discrimination, the female faculty of colour in Sotello and Turner’s (2002) study found they could not count on the support of White women. There was a sense that White women have done and are doing better than women and men of colour in
gaining faculty positions. Female professors of colour reported that students were more apt to challenge their authority than that of White male professors: “They challenge females more....Students think we are here because of our color” (p. 83).

A complaint about exploitation came from a Aboriginal female faculty member in Sotello and Turner’s (2002) study. Unlike White male professors, women of colour were expected to be a voice for issues related to race and gender:

Issues of pedagogy and cultural diversity and gender are not the province of just women or just faculty of color. I think that happens too often and that puts the faculty of color person or woman on the spot to kind of convince or persuade—be this change agent….The faculty members feel the added pressure, but are caught in a “Catch-22” because minority issues are also important to them. (p. 81)

Faculty women of colour felt undue pressure to be a model for their race, gender, and profession. This added demands on their time that were not placed on other faculty.

Limited finances were a fact of life for one woman of colour who tried to pursue advanced education as a single mother. This participant in Allen et al.’s (1995) study said, “You can always say there are financial barriers because I’ve always been a single parent….Aid and grants are limited” (p. 417).

The racism discussed in the previous section combined with sexism led to female faculty of colour feeling isolated and underrepresented in the workplace (Sotello & Turner, 2002). Participants revealed a lack of self-confidence and a greater need to prove their capabilities. Allen et al.’s (1995) study portrayed one African American woman who worked harder than her classmates to submit excellent work despite her sense that she was being assessed unfairly by her professors and being labelled by the false perception that African American senior administrators
obtain their positions through affirmative action, which affects their credibility among their co-workers and subordinates.

**Lack of Power or Access to Power**

In the studies reviewed, African American and Asian American female school administrators experienced a lack of social networks, mentors, and role models, both before and after entering into administrative positions. For elementary and secondary administrators, the absence of suitable formal mentors meant that they were not informed about promotions and lacked support in their advancement into administration (Lee, 1998). Asian Americans were passed over in the system and worked in school boards where there were no active recruitment and selection of women (Pacis, 2005).

In another example, even after landing administrative positions, elementary and secondary administrators of colour did not have the support of senior management or adequate resources to succeed in their roles (Spicer, 2004). One African American secondary school administrator was excluded from decisions about renovations in her school building (Taylor, 2004). A Black administrator in Montgomery-Ennis’s study (1996) described unfair hiring and promotion practices (Montgomery-Ennis, 1996).

The Latina participants in Muñoz’s (2010) study noted a lack of networking opportunities. One Latina participant claimed she did not receive the same level of recognition for her work as her male counterparts (Vasquez-Guignard, 2010). One Black woman professor stated that a lack of access to mentors cost her valuable time because she was steered into the wrong career path (Anyaso, 2008).
Public elementary school studies

In Lee’s (1998) study, a lack of suitable mentors for Asian American females was found to be another barrier to their promotion to administrative positions. Organizational research indicates that mentors choose those similar in race and gender in traditional mentoring relationships (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Johnsrud, 1991; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sherman, 2005). In Nicholson’s (1999) study, isolation, lack of support, and lack of role models were barriers to the promotion of female African American administrators. The absence of direct mentoring meant that the Asian American women in Lee’s (1998) study had difficulty finding support for their advancement into administration and had to learn by observation of the failures and successes of their superiors. The participants in this study stated that disunity among Asian American educators competing for the same jobs was also a barrier in situations where Asian administrators were deemed suitable only for schools with largely Asian student populations.

In Bagwell’s (1999) study, a Black female administrator, who had been hired to turn around a school by, among other measures, setting standards, refused a parent’s request to pick up her child’s report card earlier than the date the board’s policy allowed. The administrator did not want to set a precedent for other parents. When the parent complained to the assistant superintendent, the administrator felt her decision and point of view were not supported and, in fact, were undermined when the assistant superintendent sided with the parent and allowed the report card to be picked up early.

K–12 studies

The Asian American female administrators in Pacis’s (2005) study mentioned that a lack of role models and mentors who accepted them for who they are was a significant concern.
According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (in Pacis, 2005), the reason for this lack is that less than 1% of all administrators were Asian American. As one of the participants explained:

The continued underrepresentation of Asian American women in the ranks of educational leadership can be attributed to the combination of cultural patterns/programming and the non-existent formal or informal mentoring/recruiting practices of promising Asian American future administrators. (p. 59)

Inadequate or absent recruitment efforts meant that only a few Asian American women entered education administration; and those who did felt isolated which affected their ability to support the next generation of Asian American female administrators (Pacis, 2005).

The absence of mentors is also perceived to be a stumbling block among the African American female administrators in Montgomery-Ennis’s (1996) study. There are “not enough African American administrators or mentors making it harder to help each other,” one of the participants in this study stated (p. 62-3B). In addition, the women’s lack of access to power is ascribed to weak networking systems: “The ‘good old boy’ network system means that Black women are usually the last to hear about or be considered for promotions” (p. 63-5B).

The African American female administrators in Spicer’s (2004) study lacked the support and resources needed to succeed in their roles. One of the administrators noted, “For African American principals there is no scaffolding, no one to call, no support…you’re isolated” (p. 167). Although this administrator created a caring environment for her students, scanty resources dictated how much could be accomplished. Requests for assistance were viewed as complaints reflecting an inability to handle the job. This experience of a lack of support taught the participants in this study to solve problems on their own (Spicer, 2004).
Furthermore, ambiguity on issues such as budget allocations, salary, and personal evaluations added to the frustration and isolation of the administrators of colour as leaders in Spicer’s study. In both subtle and overt ways, the African American female administrators had their authority and abilities challenged, undermined, and disrespected (Spicer, 2004).

An African American administrator in Taylor’s (2004) study was excluded from the decision-making process about renovations at her school facility. When the male administrators in her district toured the state to observe other schools, they did not invite her to join them. “Even with the renovation project, I had to call so many times….They (other administrators in the district…all male) were going all over the state looking at schools and nobody had invited me” (p. 113). The African American administrator responded to the male administrators in her district by saying, “I am the principal and I need to see. I have a voice; I will have a voice in this” (p. 149). She wanted to look at renovated schools in her school district to get ideas for her school. Only when she stood up for herself and demanded to be included in the observation tour, the male administrators agreed.

A Black administrator in Montgomery-Ennis’s study (1996) described unfair hiring and promotion practices that were based on “how badly an African American female administrator is needed” (p. 63-9E). This participant was hired to work in inner-city schools with largely minority student populations. She was not given work in a variety of schools across the system with a range of the number of students, and therefore could not work at the system level. Since she worked in the inner-city environment only, she felt powerless because she lacked access to senior administrators who could help her advance into senior management positions.

According to one of the participants, administrative positions are decided before the interview, “Administrative positions are usually wired and the individual is usually picked before
the interviewing process begins. It’s not fair” (p. 64-11C). Further, it is important to know the right people, “because promotions are usually very political” (p. 63-9B).

**Higher education studies**

One Latina participant in Muñoz’s (2010) study observed there was no opportunity to develop networks and acquire mentors for women who wanted to obtain leadership positions in higher education institutions. This kind of network was a crucial resource because it provided access to people who had influence, and who could guide women in attaining the necessary leadership skills.

A Latina professor in Vasquez-Guignard’s (2010) study attributed the people in her institution’s lack of recognition for the amount of work she produced to racism and sexism. She revealed that she felt her work was not esteemed as highly as that of her male colleagues. She stated:

I’m not taking anything away from the quality of their work, but I think that a lot of it is tied into their race and it’s tied into their gender. And I feel like I have to work twice as hard. (p. 85)

She felt powerless as a Latina female in academia and believed she had to work harder than males to be considered legitimate. In addition to this, one professor in the study cited a lack of support from parents and siblings.

A Black female professor in Anyaso’s (2008) study insisted that a junior scholar needs access to mentors for guidance in writing her dissertation and in pursuing careers in academia. She believes mentors are essential for steering women to success in their chosen career paths. The lack of a mentor cost her valuable time spent in a dead end job until she figured out on her own that she had to leave it in order to get back on the tenure track. Had she been properly
guided and supported, she would have saved valuable time and achieved her goal sooner, that is, to become a tenured professor.

Motivational Factors for Female Administrators of Colour

In the literature surveyed, a major factor that supported female administrators of colour in their advancement into administrative roles was networks of support, including mentors, role models, sponsors, and family members. Additional factors that provided motivation for female administrators of colour were: (a) commitment to their own race/ethnic community, and (b) a belief in God.

Networks: Mentors, Role Models, and Familial Support

According to the studies reviewed, formal and informal networks played a critical role in paving the way for women of colour to advance into administrative positions in elementary, secondary, and higher education as well as to senior management positions at public district school boards. Although formal mentors—professor, colleagues in professional organizations, school principals, and superintendents—were difficult to find, they were crucial for securing administrative positions. They helped to sponsor participants to obtain administrative positions by guiding them through the system (Allen et al., 1995; Davis, Reynolds, & Jones, 2011; Lee, 1998; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Montgomery-Ennis, 1996; Russell & Wright, 1992). Formal mentors, whether culturally similar or not, taught women of colour how to be politically astute and helped them to make connections with people who could advance their careers, for example, superintendents. Frequently mentors were actively sought out when necessary by aspiring administrators (Enomoto et al., 2000). Informal mentors were maternal role models, other family
members, a variety of colleagues, support groups, and counsellors (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Loder, 2005; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Pacis, 2005; Ross, 2000; Spicer, 2004).

**Public elementary school studies**

In Lee’s (1998) study, it was found that sponsors intervened from a superior position, either directly or indirectly on behalf of the local community, or on the basis of affirmative action, and helped promote Asian American female administrators. Two of the participants in this study recognized male superintendents as sponsors in their career paths and one acknowledged a professor from her teacher education program. In Russell and Wright’s (1992) study, a participant identified her first male mentor as a young man new to the board who applauded her performance and continually added to her responsibilities.

For the six Latina American administrators in West Texas, aged 30 to 60 years, in Mendez-Morse’s (2004) qualitative study, mentors and role models were instrumental in their advancement into administrative positions. One participant in this study received traditional mentoring by a White male. However, for most of the participants, informal mentors found outside of the education system took the place of formal mentoring relationships inside the system. Successful Latina administrators considered their mothers to be important in their career advancement. One of the participants in this study recalled watching her mother, a single parent of four children, fix the family car. Her mother would frequently tell her that she “couldn’t use being a woman as an excuse” (p. 583). Other role models cited in Mendez-Morse’s study were parents, fathers, people in their community, teachers, counsellors, and school principals. In Ross’s (2000) study, women cited the trust and support received from parents and the community, and open communication with the school community as contributing factors in their promotion.
For three of the women of colour in Russell and Wright’s (1992) study, White female administrators served as role models. A Black male role model was significant in building the confidence of another participant in this study. When role models were lacking in Canadian society, role models from their own matriarchal communities served as reminders that women of colour could do anything they wanted (Russell & Wright, 1992).

**K–12 studies**

In Loder’s (2005) study, two of the Black pre-civil rights and women’s movement cohort cited spousal support as the factor that allowed them to focus on professional advancement. One of the participants in this study cohort described her marriage as “uncharacteristically nontraditional.” She and her partner worked together as a team to raise their children. Another participant was able to count on her spouse to attend their children’s school events because of the flexibility of his work schedule.

Two African American female administrators in Spicer’s (2004) study also mentioned strong spousal support. Both women were grateful to have supportive partners with whom they frequently spoke and from whom they received advice about minimizing the effects of White privilege and racism. Their spouses helped them to navigate the politics of their school districts wisely (Spicer, 2004).

For other Black female administrators in Spicer’s (2004) study, support came from other family members. Because of their belief in the importance of education, some relatives became mentors and role models. Family was a significant part of the lives of all the respondents. Family influenced who these women became as leaders and how they led (Spicer, 2004).
Participants from both cohorts in Loder’s (2005) study reported receiving immense support from women in their extended families—grandmothers, mothers, and mother-in-laws—who assisted with childcare and household responsibilities. The mother of one of the participants lived with her and helped with child rearing, allowing her to return to school to take principal qualification courses:

I was able to go to school and work. I was able to go back to school to get my Master’s [degree] and my mother was there. So she didn’t move out ’til my youngest daughter was in high school, ready to go on to college. (p. 766)

Other African American female administrators overcame barriers to advancement by finding mentors and developing strong professional relationships: “You need a mentor and/or a support system with power and influence” (Montgomery-Ennis, 1996, p. 81-2C). Strong support systems and membership in professional organizations provided role models for prospective administrators and facilitated networking (Montgomery-Ennis, 1996).

In Pacis’s (2005) study, one Asian American female administrator stated that a personal network of family, friends, and professional colleagues is important for success. However, out of a total of 13 participants, only three rated this as very relevant, six as relevant, three as somewhat relevant and one rated it as not relevant at all. Despite the claim of relevancy, the acquisition of mentors did not translate to application in real life. This points to the lack of mentors and support networks available to this population. One respondent noted, “I’m not aware of any mentorship occurring, if this exists, it needs to be advertised” (pp. 63–64). This statement underscores the challenges faced by Asian American administrators in developing the formal support systems crucial to their career success. But, despite the odds, a few participants in this study managed to gain valuable support that assisted them to be successful in their careers.
Higher education studies

Davis et al.’s (2011) research study highlighted one Black female faculty participant’s experience of the Sisters of the Academy (SOTA) Research Boot Camp, a professional development organization focused on Black female academics. SOTA leadership supports Black female tenure-track and tenured faculty by offering strategies for academic productivity and expanding professional networks. According to Davis et al. (2011), several positive outcomes resulted from SOTA for the Black female junior faculty in their study. After being paired with a senior Black female faculty member for a week through SOTA, the participant felt validated and completed her writing goals, the mentorship encouraged engagement with the profession at large, and it gave her confidence to forge her own way of being a professional academic. Support from mentors was also mentioned in Bright’s (2010); Montas-Hunter’s (2012); Turner’s (2007) and Vasquez-Guignard’s (2010) studies.

In Nichols and Tanksley’s (2004) study, most of the participants indicated that they overcame barriers with the help of strong network systems. For one participant pursuing a doctoral degree was made possible by strong family support and friendships. Meeting the needs of young children and finding reliable childcare were concerns for many participants. One offered the following advice:

Make sure you have the support of your family and close friends. If you have children, try to complete your studies before they reach early teens….Your social life must be put on hold and you will most certainly lose some “so-called” friends—your real friends will be there for you. (p. 180)

Another participant urged women of colour to, “Set realistic time-based goals. Consider strategies to merit these goals. Budget and use resources wisely in order to finance [your] education. Surround yourself with support, positive people. Get an excellent mentor” (p. 181).
In the Enomoto et al.’s (2000) qualitative study of 14 African American and four Latina American educational leaders, the participants reported searching for mentors to help them overcome the challenges they faced. They found mentors who taught them to be politically astute, and helped them to make connections with senior administrators. Some of the participants found female and male mentors who were culturally similar to themselves and who could help them to understand what they were experiencing in their encounters with the system: “We both knew what [back]ground we were from…and knew some of the barriers that occurred and how to get over those barriers” (p. 579). Others sought mentors who were different from themselves, sought more than one mentor, and secured informal mentors (Enomoto et al., 2000). Similarly, in Allen et al.’s (1995) study, mentors, sponsors, and a support group were found to be crucial for the career success of African American directors of education: “I have two African American women [mentors], both were an inspiration to me. They kept encouraging me….I had an interview once and I didn’t really have anything adequate to wear and they [bought] me a nice suit” (p. 418). Another participant stated:

My mentor is also my sponsor. I feel my sponsor has exposed me to a number of associations, awards. Because of who he is, he gives me additional points. When I tell people who my sponsor is, they pay attention. I would have never been able to succeed as I have without his help. (p. 418)

In Christman and McClellan’s (2008) mixed method study involving seven female faculty, Aboriginal, African American, Asian American, and European American, who worked in an education administration department in an American university, one participant reported finding strength in collegial bonds: “I was the only female in my unit for over a decade. There were numerous challenges—not to mention the feelings of isolation—and having female colleagues in other units and at other universities was very important to me” (p. 15).
Commitment to Race/Ethnic Community

According to the studies reviewed, elementary, secondary, and higher education female administrators of colour cited two compelling reasons for working in an administrative capacity. First, they wanted to improve academic scores of marginalized students through a school community effort that involved working together with students, parents, teachers, support staff, community members, and administrators (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; González, 2007; Taylor, 2004). Second, female administrators of colour wanted to give back to their own race/ethnic community with which they identified very closely (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Edwards, Beverly, & Alexander-Snow, 2011; González, 2007; Lee, 1998; Nicholson, 1999).

Public elementary school studies and K–12 studies

According to Ah Nee-Benham (1997), a strong motivator among female administrators of colour to enter administration was a commitment to children. Ah Nee-Benham (1997), Lee, (1998), and Nicholson (1999) found that female administrators’ motivation to help students from their own race/ethnic communities was a contributing factor to their seeking administrative positions. In Lee’s (1998) study, each Asian American woman had a strong sense of ethnic identity and a desire to advocate as leaders for the concerns of their ethnic group. One of the participants in Ah Nee-Benham’s (1997) study spoke of how she advocated for minority children and fought against limiting educational practices:

In my last job as a bilingual teacher, I witnessed monolingual kids being tested in English….The principal asked me, “Would you translate for this child?” I said, “What do you mean translate? He needs to take the test in Spanish”….The school wanted to categorize this child as retarded!… I took the parents aside and I said, “Your child is not retarded. Please!” (p. 294)
Throughout her career, this participant revised curriculum documents and differentiated instructional strategies to meet the needs of English language learners. She did this not only to address obvious needs, but also because the challenges students faced reminded her of her own experiences as a 5-year-old immigrant from Cuba who had no advocates (Ah Nee-Benham, 1997).

Visionary leadership was the stamp of one of the African American secondary school administrators in Taylor’s (2004) study. This participant embodied a strong commitment to the academic success of her students by garnering total parental commitment: “That’s what I am praying for, that our students and our parents will get on board. We don’t have to be what they said we are going to be. Our children are bright” (p. 145). This same administrator kept the parents and community leaders informed of all pertinent decisions and changes at the school, and pastored a church near the school.

Similarly, an African American secondary school administrator in Bloom and Erlandson’s (2003) study embraced a personal ideology to educate poor students. In her view, when making decisions about school policies or programs that would have a direct effect on academic achievement, one must adopt a nurturing attitude and create a culture of caring. This ideology and her deep personal belief in the ability of African American students to succeed helped her to improve academic scores—in spite of the presence of teachers who were indifferent to the students—and served to make her a strong leader. She would not let anyone keep her from her mission to give back to disenfranchised students from her community.

Higher education studies

Two of the six Black female faculty members at a public research-oriented university in the southeast United States who participated in Edwards et al.’s (2011) study defined success as
giving back to society. Participants in Turner’s (2007) study also defined success this way. One participant in Edwards et al.’s (2011) study discussed the significance of giving back in both her personal and professional life. She described helping her children and her students to be “able to go out and be independent and contribute back to society….It’s not all about getting but what you’re able to give back to” (p. 20). Another of the participants in Edwards et al.’s (2011) study described giving back as concern for family and researching the issues affecting diversity and people of African descent.

In González’s (2007) research study of 12 Latinas who were working toward obtaining doctoral degrees, the participants shared that their goal was to be able to help Latina students and to give back to their community. One Latina doctoral student complained that writing her dissertation was taking up so much of her time that she had little time to spend with her family and her community, but she continued to forge ahead because she believed the Chicana community needed more females who had PhDs. She recalled:

[When I was processing with my professor about my dissertation writing, I told her,] “I feel like I’m betraying my community. I feel like I’m wasting my time here. . . . I feel like I’m a hypocrite cause I’m not doing anything [for my community], and I don’t even spend time with my family.” And empecé a llorar [I started to cry]. . . . But I saw the process through because I knew that this was not only for myself, but for our gente [people]. (p. 297)

**Spiritual Connection**

From the studies reviewed it is apparent that for African American female administrators in elementary and secondary schools and higher education, their belief in God was a source of strength that helped them to overcome barriers that might otherwise have prevented their progress throughout their careers (Bagwell, 1999; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Bright, 2010; Nicholson, 1999; Ross, 2000). Her belief in God empowered one female secondary school...
administrator to become a principal designate and led her to treat the school as though it were a part of her ministry (Taylor, 2004). Spirituality and the church are important for African Americans (Spicer, 2004).

**Public elementary school studies and K–12 studies**

Women administrators of colour in Bagwell’s (1999), Nicholson’s (1999), and Ross’s (2000) studies cited belief in God or a spiritual connection to a higher power as a source of strength. One of the participants in Bagwell’s (1999) study stated:

> My personal philosophy as a black woman is that I believe that God didn’t make a mistake when he created me. I think he created all people equally and I believe we can achieve anything in life we want to. (p. 158)

A participant in Ross’ (2000) study credited God with her success. This participant asserted that God not only helped her to overcome obstacles and successfully obtain a degree from a mostly White university, but also guided her in her decision making at work.

It is interesting to note that in three of the K–12 studies African American female administrators, in contrast to those of any other race/ethnic group, identified spirituality as a crucial part of their work as public school leaders. Spirituality and the church have been staples for African American people since historic times. According to Spicer (2004), church attendance was a spiritual and social outlet, a safe place where African Americans could gather for encouragement, and for personal and professional development. For four administrators in Spicer’s (2004) study, spiritual conviction and spiritual practices provided comfort and helped decrease job stress. For these women, the power of prayer offered support when they were faced with difficult situations at work. Prayer was such an integral part of one participant’s being that she could not separate it from her administrative duties. In fact, she participated in before-school,
voluntary prayer group meetings despite the fact this practice was prohibited in public schools and was viewed as potentially explosive.

Indeed, a participant in Taylor’s (2004) study also stated that her spirituality and school leadership were connected. God gave her the strength, the courage, and the wisdom to be in command and to make many administrative decisions that laid the foundation for a future administrative position. Unlike teaching, which was a natural role for her, the principal designate position was, “something I’m being empowered to do” (p. 130) and, “God let me know…that the school was a part of the ministry…Almost like a missionary field” (p. 133).

Similarly, during challenging times an African American administrator in Bloom and Erlandson’s (2003) study turned to prayer and found encouragement in biblical passages. She rose as a leader of a National Blue Ribbon School, in a school that had been dogged by labels of incompetence, poor leadership, and mismanagement. Reflecting on her experience, she gave credit to the spiritual foundation that kept her strong:

The world owes me nothing: God has given me everything. My faith in the Lord never wavered. I went to church. I sought spiritual guidance from my minister. It was the most difficult time in my life. Without my church, I would have crumbled. (p. 361)

**Higher education studies**

Ten of the 14 Black female senior-level administrators in predominantly White community colleges in Bright’s (2010) study reported that their personal faith in God or their spirituality gave them strength to work through any obstacles they faced throughout their day. One participant said candidly:

I’m sustained by my faith. I have to tell you, there’s not a day that I don’t ask God’s anointing upon me and God to do through me what I’m expected to do here
every single day. And so I’m sustained by my faith… I pray. I pray without ceasing. I sit in meetings and I’m praying in my spirit. (p. 144)

Several of Bright’s (2010) participants talked about praying to God to give them guidance when they faced workplace challenges and their belief that God took care of them in their lives.

Discussion

The findings of the research studies on women of colour in elementary, K–12, higher education administration, senior management, and doctoral studies reviewed reveal numerous barriers and supports for advancement into administrative jobs.

The main barriers revealed are racism and marginalization, sexism, and lack of power or access to power. The studies reviewed here reveal the hegemony in the education system of individuals who are White, male, proficient in the English language, and have a variety of supports enabling them to concentrate on career advancement. This group understands and uses the “culture” of a normative educational world for advancement. Even with a female majority teaching population, only a few women of colour are able to overcome oppressive factors in the workplace and succeed. For every one who advances into administration there are many more who do not succeed.

However, it became clear that there are more supports than barriers, such as networks, mentors (both formal and informal), role models, family support, leadership skills and personal attributes, commitment to one’s own race/ethnic community, and spiritual connection that helped women to advance into administration. Some of these may be unique to an ethnic community, for example, Black women’s spiritual connection that helped to support them and give them self-confidence.
Factors not mentioned in the studies reviewed here that could also hinder progress into administration include: age, experience, sexual orientation, height, weight, professional appearance, cultural mannerisms, skin colour, and physical ability. Factors not mentioned in the studies that could support progress include district school board policies that are proactive in hiring more people of colour in teaching roles, and boards that are made accountable for increased hiring of people of colour. When there are more people of colour in the teaching pool, there will be more women of colour available to enter the administrative ranks.

Women of colour have many difficult barriers to overcome if they want to become administrators. The road is long and hard. Most American female administrators of colour are hired to lead schools with large populations of students of colour while majority White schools are usually headed by White administrators (Montgomery-Ennis, 1996). Negative attitudes and invisible walls in organizations are all real hurdles that prevent many from pursuing administrative positions. Part of the strategy for women of colour to succeed is to become aware of the barriers and develop a network of support for advancement into administration.

Women of colour can become administrators if they seek out mentors, acquire the necessary experience, do more and better work than others, and gather inner strength from their belief in God. Women of colour are motivated by their desire to increase the academic scores of marginalized students and to give back to their own race/ethnic community. If women of colour start to plan early in their careers to become administrators, they stand a fair chance of achieving that goal.

The social landscape in Canada and the United States is quickly changing as the proportion of people of colour is increasing in the population at large and this is reflected in the public schools (Ryan et al., 2009). It would be an advantage for students of colour to have
compassionate public school administrators of colour (and teachers of colour) who understand, identify with, communicate, and lead them (Ryan et al., 2009). As revealed in the studies, the motivating factors for female school administrators of colour are a commitment to their race/ethnic community and a desire to increase the academic standing of marginalized students. Ryan (2006) described administrators like these as having an emancipatory leadership style. These leaders work to improve the entrenched conditions of marginalized groups and to change the unjust patterns that maintain their subordination; and they empower others to become leaders themselves. Ryan (2006) asserted that leaders who adopt an emancipatory leadership style are one step closer to increasing academic scores of marginalized students and thus improving their life chances.

Underscoring the critical importance of leaders of colour, Boyle (2007) reported that students in England who fail academically tend to become marginalized adults who are unable to sustain themselves economically. This group forms its own class identity and class culture, one that is hostile to society and government. Public schools, especially in the inner city, are among the institutions that are hit the hardest by this hostility. The culture of this underclass permeates the school environment to create some of the toughest schools: “The underclass youth look at least as aggressive and threatening to classmates as they do to the staff who try to contain them” (p. 151). Boyle (2007) went on to say that children born under these circumstances have two options: academic success or crime. For this reason, it is crucial for the good of society that the schools they attend are able to facilitate their achievement of academic success. Furthermore, educated citizens are more likely to work toward social change because they know it produces positive outcomes, whereas the opposite is true of those citizens whose lives are enmeshed in crime.
Elementary school administrators of colour can have the most profound impact on the lives of marginalized students. For example, in Ontario, elementary principals know their students’ names, are in close contact with them, and are able to influence their success. According to Boyle (2007), by the time these students reach secondary school it is more difficult to influence, much less change, their academic achievement levels and their attitudes. In many cases, it is too late.

It is for these reasons that it is imperative for females of colour in public elementary schools to overcome barriers and become administrators. Along with compassionate and skilled leaders, there is a need to develop and implement policies that promote a flexible action plan to improve the combined skills of leadership, teaching, learning, and self-evaluation in school leaders.

What is required to facilitate the advancement of women of colour into administrative positions? A combined effort from university graduate programs, school board equity policies, board-initiated programs, and local and provincial Teacher Federation workshops could provide the information and support needed for women of colour to advance into administration. University graduate programs should include contributions made by people of colour to administrative theories or models (Mendez-Morse, 2004), educate graduate students about discriminatory practices that prevent women of colour from advancing into administrative positions (Montgomery-Ennis, 1996), provide administrative placement opportunities, and provide guidance for success in the interview process (Allen et al., 1995), and I think they need to feel safe and this could be accomplished by supportive mentors. There is a need for evidence that school board policies and practices are being implemented (Mendez-Morse, 2004), especially in the largest and most diverse school board in Ontario. School boards must offer
programs or courses that provide information about and help potential applicants develop the abilities, skills, and knowledge necessary to get through the interview process.

If barriers prove to be impossible to overcome and women of colour feel trapped in their public school system, they could consider moving to other public district school boards or to private schools. Focusing on a special interest group, for example, a school with a majority of students from the Caribbean, or a specific religious group, is another way for women of colour to provide leadership. By doing so, they could implement policies that are aligned with their own philosophies of education with much less interference from others.

In order to fill the gaps in the studies reviewed, answers to the following questions are needed:

- Are efforts being made to ensure that structures are in place to allow women of colour to advance into administration today?

- The elementary studies revealed that informal, rather than formal, networks helped women of colour advance into administration. What formal networks could be created for those who aspire to administration? What would a formal network look like?

- The elementary studies do not examine the effect of provincial and district school board policies on the barriers to and support for women of colour. Are the barriers and supports affecting women of colour different from those affecting White males and females?
Chapter Three
Theoretical Framework for the Study of Female Administrators of Colour

The three major themes that emerged from the literature review on female public elementary school administrators of colour—leadership skills and personal attributes, experiences (barriers to promotion), and motivations (successful strategies)—parallel the first two waves of Richardson’s resilience theory (Richardson, 2002; Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1996), the theoretical framework of this study.

Merriam (1998) stated that the purpose of a theoretical framework is to provide structure for a study. It influences the research problem investigated, the study’s purpose, choice of participants, the kinds of questions asked of participants, and the choice of methodology used to conduct the study. This research study is framed by resilience theory, a theory about how individuals respond to changes in their lives. The method used to explore this was a qualitative, life-history comparative case study designed to capture the experiences of individuals.

At first, I considered using the same theoretical frameworks I found in the studies on female administrators of colour reviewed for this thesis: womanism, critical race theory, and feminism. However, I decided against using these theories because their focus was largely on race, gender, and class oppression. Because the participants in this study are in white-collar, middle or upper middle class professions, that is, they had broken the glass ceiling and achieved more than other females whether they were of colour or White, the oppressed group label was not a good fit. Also, the focus on race, gender, and class issues in the studies reviewed was a very negative perspective and one with which the experiences and motivations of the participants in this study did not completely conform. There were many other issues discussed by the three
participants in this research study that are not mentioned in the framework of the other theories. Womanism, critical race theory, and feminism are used to analyze the collective negative experiences of women and/or people of colour whereas resilience theory is more appropriate to a study of the attributes of individuals who succeeded despite disruptions they encountered.

The first wave of resilience theory discusses attributes and the second wave discusses disruptions (negative experiences) and resilient reintegration (successful strategies to overcome disruptions). Table 1 compares the attributes found in the literature review with those of the first wave of resilience theory. Figure 1 identifies similar attributes found in the literature review to those of the first wave of resilience theory, and Table 2 compares the experiences found in the literature review to the second wave of resilience theory.
Table 1

*A Comparison of Attributes in the Literature Review With Those of the First Wave of Resilience Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review attributes</th>
<th>Resilience theory attributes: First wave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership skills and personal attributes:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal attributes:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sets and achieves goals</td>
<td>• positive self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• hard worker (strong work ethic)</td>
<td>• internal control and focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• persistent and determined</td>
<td>• self-discipline (self-control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• personable</td>
<td>• self-esteem (optimism, happiness, easy temperament)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strong sense of self</td>
<td>• wisdom (sense of purpose, hope, dreams and goals, good problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• believes in oneself</td>
<td>• determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• resilient</td>
<td>• morality (integrity, honesty, forgiveness, faith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• possesses values (e.g., integrity)</td>
<td>• educational commitment (achievement motivation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• credible</td>
<td>• social competencies (humility, caring, responsibility, gratitude)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• problem-solving skills</td>
<td>• creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• internal locus of control</td>
<td><strong>External attributes:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• independence</td>
<td>• support (from family, school, other adults, and neighbourhood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• high performance standards</td>
<td>• time management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• treated fairly by others</td>
<td>• knowledge of expectations and boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• develops networks</td>
<td>• feeling of empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• gains visibility</td>
<td>• competence (high expectations, excellence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• develops leadership skills</td>
<td>• confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• continues professional development</td>
<td>• positive school climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has an effective management style</td>
<td>• good health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• being female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar internal attributes found in the literature review (red text) and first wave of resilience theory (black text)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive self-identity: Hard worker (strong work ethic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal control and focus: Sets and achieves goals, strong sense of self, believes in oneself, internal locus of control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discipline (self-control)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem (optimism, happiness, easy temperament)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom (sense of purpose, hope, dreams and goals, good problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills): Resilient, problem-solving skills, independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination: Persistent and determined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality (integrity, honesty, forgiveness, faith): Possesses values (e.g., integrity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational commitment (achievement motivation): Continues professional development, credible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social competencies (humility, caring, responsibility, gratitude): Personable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar external attributes found in the literature review (red text) and first wave of resilience theory (black text)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support (from family, school, other adults, and neighbourhood): Develops networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of expectations and boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of empowerment: Gains visibility, treated fairly by others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence (high expectations, excellence): Develops leadership skills, high performance standards, effective management style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive school climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Similar attributes found in the literature review (red text) with those of the first wave of resilience theory (black text).*
Table 2

A Comparison of Experiences in the Literature Review With Those of the Second Wave of Resilience Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review experiences</th>
<th>Resilience theory experiences: Second wave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences (barriers to promotion faced by female administrators of colour):</td>
<td>Disruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• racism and marginalization</td>
<td>• stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sexism</td>
<td>• adversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of power or access to power</td>
<td>• life events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Motivational factors (successful strategies):

- networks: mentors, role models, and familial support
- commitment to race/ethnic community
- spiritual connection

Resilient reintegration (successful strategies used to achieve goals)

Christman and McClellan (2008) argued that since a masculine definition of leadership predominates in society, it is imperative to develop more knowledge about how women attain and maintain leadership positions. There are no studies that look at public school administrators framed by resilience theory. As Christman and McClellan pointed out, most early resilience scholarship focused on children; however, recently the theory has broadened to include adults (Smith-Osborne, 2007). In my research study, I continue to build on resilience theory as applied to adults by using it in this investigation of female public school administrators of colour in Ontario. I believe that use of a comparative case study method has allowed me to view the attributes, experiences, and motivations of the three participants to see what helped and what hindered them in achieving their roles as leaders.
Resilience Theory

Resilience refers to a person’s ability to overcome psychosocial stress or adverse environmental experiences (Rutter, 1999). Ungar defined it as “health despite adversity” (2004, p. 344). It has also been defined as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” by Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000, p. 543), and “the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors” by Richardson (2002, p. 308).

Resilience theory offers a reasonable theoretical framework for the study of female school administrators because it allows for a comparison among individuals who have used their support systems to overcome the obstacles they encountered. This framework sheds light on the experiences of women of colour and can be used to explain why some have succeeded in advancing into administration while others who have tried have failed to achieve this goal.

The Three Waves of Resilience Inquiry

Richardson (2002) presents his metatheory of resilience as three waves of inquiry: the first wave encompasses the extensive research done by others before 2002 and identifies many attributes of resilience; in the second wave, which is Richardson’s contribution in this area, is a model that illustrates how resilience is acquired; Richardson’s third wave characterizes the postmodern and multidisciplinary perspectives on resilience. In resilience theory resilient reintegration is defined as growth or assimilation through disruption, not just recovery or bouncing back from adversity. Resilience is a metatheory. A metatheory is a theory about theories, in this case a theory that explains or justifies Piaget and Kohlberg and others.
**The first wave**

Resilience theory originated not in academic theory, but through the identification of characteristics shared by young people who thrived in spite of their high-risk environments. The first wave of resilience inquiry developed out of the quest to identify the characteristics of such successful young people that distinguished them from those who succumbed to the negative influences around them. Most of the resilience literature in this wave described the internal and external qualities of resilience that enable people to survive in high-risk circumstances or recover from setbacks. The result of the first wave of resilience inquiry is a list of characteristics and support systems that foster social and personal success (Richardson, 2002).

The study cited most often in the resilience literature was a 30-year longitudinal study of 700 children in one community conducted by Werner and Smith (1992). This was a multiracial population of children 200 of whom were deemed to be at high risk because of four major environmental factors: perinatal stress, daily instability, poverty, or parents with severe mental health problems. It was found that 72 of the 200 children did very well despite the risk factors in their environments. Werner & Smith (1992) isolated the traits that enabled these children to thrive. These were traits such as being adaptable, socially responsible, tolerant, healthy, achievement-focused, a female, a good communicator, and having good self-esteem. Caring individuals, both inside and outside the family, also greatly helped the children to overcome their adverse circumstances.

Other studies preceding Richardson’s (2002) work identified similar internal and external resilient traits: wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000); morality and self-control (Baumeister & Exline, 2000); external support, feeling of empowerment, knowing boundaries and expectations, educational commitment (achievement motivation), and positive values (caring, honesty,
responsibility, and integrity) (Benson, 1997); confident, competent, and caring (Bernard, 1997); happiness (Buss, 2000); self-esteem (Diener, 2000); gratitude (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000); social competence, high expectations, internal locus of control, good problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, supportive family environment, external support system, and humour (Garmezy, 1991); excellence (Lubinski & Benbow, 2000); forgiveness (McCullough, 2000); faith (Myers, 2000); optimism (Peterson, 2000); easy temperament, being female, a positive school climate, self-control, self-discipline, time management skills, and support from an adult (Rutter, 1987); self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schwartz, 2000); creativity (Simonton, 2000); hope (Snyder, 2000); dreams (Snyder & McCullough, 2000), and humility (Tangney, 2000).

Thus, the first wave of resilience research identified characteristics that help people overcome adverse situations. The list of qualities and strengths in the literature is thorough and the change in perspective from focusing on risk factors to more beneficial personal qualities was a step in the right direction. Armed with this knowledge of desirable traits, some educators began to teach resilience on their own initiative. Teachers were taught how to create safe environments by these resources but not how to go further to foster the development of the desired traits (Richardson, 2002).

**The second wave**

In the second wave, Richardson’s research in the area of resilience tried to answer the question: How is resilience acquired? Resilience is described by Richardson (2002) as a straightforward process (see Figure 2) of moving through the stages of achieving biopsychospiritual balance: how a person interacts with life events, how a person deals with upheaval, whether he or she is ready for reintegration, and, if so, whether a person chooses to
reintegrate with resilience, return to the status quo, or accept loss. Resilient reintegration refers to the coping process that culminates in self-understanding, development, increased strength, and awareness of the characteristics of resilience.

Figure 2. The Resilience Model (Richardson, 2002).

Biopsychospiritual homeostasis occurs when a person is physically strong, mentally stable, and at spiritual peace, and these three aspects of the person are in balance and interdependent. Then, if stressors, adversity, or life events cause a disruption in a person’s life, when the right internal and external factors are present, the person **reintegrates with resilience**. A person gains understanding or grows as a result of coping with the disturbing experience. The process is a reflective one in which one identifies, develops, and strengthens characteristics of resilience. For example, Mohandas Gandhi’s life as a privileged lawyer was disrupted after he was thrown off a train in South Africa when he refused to give up his seat for a European
passenger (Mohandas Gandhi, n.d.). This experience forced him to reflect on the meaning of justice. He grew from this experience, returned to India, and started the Indian independence movement that eventually led to the end of British rule.

**Reintegration back to homeostasis** occurs when a person develops the resilience necessary to cope with life challenges such that they are unlikely to disrupt him or her significantly. Thus, people learn to make a living, learn to drive, take care of personal needs, and make meals without major turmoil. Unfortunately, people tend to stay close to their comfort zones and often refuse opportunities for growth in order to avoid disruption. The aim of reintegration back to homeostasis is healing and moving beyond the stressful situation. In some situations—such as the death of a loved one, complete loss of one’s physical abilities, or moving one’s place of residence—reintegration back to biopsychospiritual homeostasis does not occur because people choose to stay in their comfort zone (Richardson, 2002).

On the other hand, **reintegration with loss** occurs when people become distressed after a serious disruption in their life, such as a job loss or marital breakdown, and are unable to recover from this loss. Disruptions can be negative or positive, and both offer the potential for growth. Disruptions evoke emotions that can lead to self-reflection. Emotions that are commonly caused by disruption are loss, fear, confusion, hurt, guilt, and insecurity. In these states, people may feel sorry for themselves, may require others to listen and sympathize, may feel self-doubt or question their ability to learn the new skills required by the change (Richardson, 2002).

People who lack the attributes of resilience experience **dysfunctional reintegration** after a disruptive event. When people experience dysfunctional reintegration they do not develop resilience. They recover with loss. They lose hope or ambition due to the demands of life’s challenges. People in this state succumb to destructive behaviours, such as substance abuse or
other harmful activities in an attempt to cope with the challenges they face. The majority of people who reintegrate dysfunctionally lack introspective skills and need therapy to acquire them (Richardson, 2002).

**The third wave**

According to Richardson’s (2002) resilience metatheory, resilience is spiritual energy that causes resilient reintegration and growth. Richardson (2002) acknowledges that discussion of spirituality is likely to be viewed sceptically. Ken Wilber (1998), as cited in Richardson (2002), observes that a multiplicity of fields, such as physics, biology, psychology, spirituality and theology, neuroscience, and Eastern medicine, describe human beings as possessing energy or resilience. The precepts of resilience theory (in particular the postulation of spiritual energy as a cause of resilient reintegration) is supported in a variety of disciplines, despite wide semantic variations.

In short, Richardson’s resilience metatheory asserts that a spiritual force within individuals drives them to pursue self-actualization, wisdom, balance, and a humanitarian outlook. This force is resilience, and is given different labels in different disciplines. For Lifton (1994), the resilience phenomenon is an example of how interdisciplinary exchange and inquiry can help deepen our understanding of how and where individuals access the desire and drive to transform through adversity.

The compelling questions that led to the third wave of resilience inquiry were: *What and where is the root source of the energy or motivation needed to reintegrate with resilience?* The quest to answer these questions has led the researchers to acknowledge that they are, in fact, the oldest questions, the answers to which may be found in centuries-old sources (Richardson, 2002).
I use aspects of the first wave, which identifies attributes of resilience, and the second wave, which describes disruptions and resilient integration, in my data analysis. It is interesting to note that in Chapter Six, in which I analyze the data, the themes of attributes, experiences, and motivations that emerge echo the first wave of resilient theory, in which attributes are discussed, and the second wave, in which disruptions and resilient reintegration are discussed.
Chapter Four
Methodology

Overview

This study is based on qualitative life histories, or “cases” of individuals used to illustrate the attributes, experiences (barriers encountered), and motivations (supports experienced) of Ontario female public school administrators of colour in their advancement into administration. I chose a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach because I wanted to study how these individuals overcame obstacles and identify the qualities that enabled them to succeed where others could not. I chose to do a comparative analysis in order to identify possible common themes among those who succeeded in administration. Interviews with individuals was chosen as the primary method of data collection in order to gather information about the specific traits, experiences (barriers the subjects overcame), motivations, and how these differ from those experienced by other public school administrators. Through the use of interviews and the development of case histories I also avoid portraying female school administrators of colour as an undifferentiated group. I chose to focus on this particular group—as opposed to White females, White males, or men of colour—so that I could explore the experiences of administrators who are also members of traditionally marginalized groups. Through analysis of the data I identify the traits these women had that allowed them to break through traditional barriers, and suggest ways in which these traits could be developed or incorporated into leadership training programs for women of colour aspiring to administration across Ontario public school boards.

Ah Nee-Benham (1997) contended that although the qualitative approach may be perceived as less academically rigorous, it is through discussion or personal perspective that
school leaders come to understand their own beliefs, values, behaviours, attitudes, relationships, traditions, and rituals.

Life-history research is an appropriate method to use to explore the attributes, experiences, and motivations of female public school administrators of colour. The epiphanies in peoples’ lives—the timeline and nature of individuals or events that influenced them to pursue a career in school administration and the obstacles they encountered and overcame—can inform academic research in education administration and provide valuable information to women of colour aspiring to administrative positions.

This methodology allows participants to reflect on their own lives, encourages the exploration of relationships in context of the participants’ lives, and has the flexibility necessary for a creative presentation of their experiences (Goodson, 2001; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In conducting my research, I took into account the items just mentioned in order to provide the quality of inquiry required by the life-history research method.

**Site Selection**

I chose to study Ontario public elementary school administrators of colour because I live in Ontario, Canada, and because the majority of research studies on this topic to date were conducted in the United States. Although the research may help American women of colour, as a Canadian woman of colour who has worked in the public school education system for the past 25 years, I saw a need for research to be conducted on this group in Canada. Moreover, research conducted in the United States is not always applicable to the Canadian context. Canadian-based research is needed in order to gain valid information that the identified group can apply to their particular situation. In order to ensure that my analysis reflects the perspectives of a variety of
women of colour in the public elementary school system, I interviewed three administrators, from African Canadian and South Asian Canadian backgrounds.

As there is at present one female public elementary school administrator of colour in the entire public school board where I work, I had a keen interest in finding out why there are so few female administrators of colour in public school boards in southern Ontario. Interviews with southern Ontario female public school administrators of colour allowed me to develop rich, descriptive case studies and make context-sensitive analytic comparisons between female public elementary school administrators of colour from different ethnic backgrounds.

**Identifying the Participants**

In order to effectively use my conceptual framework, it was important for me to interview administrators working full-time in Kindergarten to Grade 8 public schools. Given the methodological choice to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods and the goals of the study, I started with snowball sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Merriam, 1998). I began by emailing a letter (see Appendix A) to an executive assistant in professional services at the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) with whom I was acquainted, and who had given me contact information for a pilot study I did for a doctoral course on qualitative research methods. My letter explained the purpose of the research and asked who at ETFO could provide me with information on how I could advertise to obtain female public school administrators of colour for the study. This led to a dead end. So, I pursued purposive sampling and contacted someone at Advertising Rates & Specifications, a department of the Ontario Principal’s Council Register (see Appendix B) to help me find public elementary female administrators of colour who might be willing to participate in the study. I posted advertisements on most of the bulletin boards at OISE, University of Toronto. I also published advertisements in *The Ontario*
Principals’ Council Register, Professionally Speaking Magazine, and the ETFO Newsletter (see Appendix C). Of the seven responses I received, four were disqualified: a male, a head-mistress of a private K-12 school in Switzerland, a Catholic high school vice-principal, and one female public elementary school administrator of colour who withdrew 1 hour before our interview. Three potential participants, two principals, and a vice-principal were contacted by email and by phone, and informed that they were chosen to be interviewed. They were then sent an explanation of the purpose of the study, a formal invitation to participate, and a written statement confirming that their anonymity would be preserved (see Appendix D). All the interviews with the participants were guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix E).

I interviewed each participant twice. Most of the interviews were conducted at OISE, University of Toronto; one participant’s second interview took place in her home. With the permission of each participant, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The participants worked in large cities in south central Ontario. Two were principals of African Canadian and South Asian Canadian origins and one was a vice-principal of African Canadian origin. Their ages were late 30s, mid-40s, and early 50s. Two had taught middle school and one had taught mostly in a Kindergarten to Grade 5 school, and had gained middle school experience by teaching Grades 7 and 8 English Language Learners in summer school. At the time of the interviews, one participant had 22 years of experience in education, another had 21 years, and the third participant had 11 years of experience in education.

Data Generation

My primary source of data was life-history interviews (see Appendix E) based on a timeline constructed by each participant about major life events, the people who influenced her,
traits and experiences she had had that led her to enter administration, her successes and how she overcame any barriers that stood in her way. I asked open-ended questions, guided by some specific pre-determined questions, to generate discussion of the issues relevant to the study. Cole and Knowles (2001) stated life-history methodologies value individuals and the complexity of their experiences and narratives in a larger historical context. Dollard (1949) described life history as a tool in social science that arranges or analyzes an autobiographical or biographical document from a systematic perspective. The purpose of life history is to provide an adequate understanding of a person’s life, and to show how an individual fits into a group and represents the features of that group.

Studying the lives of successful Ontario female public school administrators of colour provided me with insight into the motivations, individuals, and events that led them to enter into administration. Because the participants were each interviewed twice, they had time to reflect between interviews, and I had time to consider the phases of their lives, what made a difference at different points, what experiences they identified as significant in different phases of their life before speaking with them again. After the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, the participants were promised a copy of the final dissertation if they so desired.

Data Analysis

The primary data used for analysis were the transcribed interviews of the study participants. Data analysis was based on the case study methods of Yin (2003). Using the conceptual framework and research questions that guided this study (see Figure 3), I began with open coding, a process whereby concepts are identified and developed through a process of questioning the data, and then labelling and grouping them (i.e., the concepts) into categories.
Research stages | My study
---|---
Conceptual framework (CF): best way to focus most central dynamics at play in phenomenon of interest. | 1. How have the attributes, experiences and motivations of female public school administrators of colour contributed to their entry into administration?
2. How does resilience theory fit with their responses?

Data collection that will provide data to answer the CF and research questions. | Interview three people for cross-case analysis; life-history interview and timeline; two interviews for each.

Data analysis strategies that compare and contrast data in such a way that CF questions can be answered. | Cross-case analysis re: attributes, barriers, similarities, differences (see Tables 1–7 and Figure 1); also, motivations, goals, interview questions, and life paths.

Answering CF questions directly. | Answers to research questions; implications for ongoing research; additions or unexpected data.

*Figure 3. Alignment of my study with four research stages.*

The data was coded using the following descriptors: internal and external attributes (see Figure 1, p. 76), experiences (reintegration, see Table 2, p. 77), supports and barriers in early years, young adult years, and work life (motivations). I read through each page of the transcribed interviews for examples of the descriptors and took notes under each of the headings. Following the open coding of all transcribed interviews, subcategories were developed and patterns identified. These patterns were then analyzed through the components of the conceptual framework in order to further develop the major themes and findings of this research.
Findings are presented as three case studies of female administrators of colour. The case studies were used to answer the research questions and demonstrate (a) how the attributes and experiences of the participants contributed to their entry into administration and (b) how resilience theory explains their responses to disruptions in their lives. Further consideration was given to the factors that motivated them to seek an administrative position (the supports and barriers they encountered on their path into administration).

Chapter Six contains cross-case analyses of the data that elaborate the major themes. This includes, for example, discussions of the relationship between adversity and the motivation to enter administration, and the impact of internal and external resilience traits throughout their lives.

**Ethics**

As part of the research process, I was required to undergo a formal ethics review by the University of Toronto. I abided by formal requirements to ensure that the needs of the individual participants were met, and that confidentiality was preserved. I avoided judging any participant’s responses or evaluating her effectiveness as an administrator. My greatest potential ethical dilemma was that the three participants would be identified by the critique of the challenges they faced in entering administration due to systemic discriminatory practices. This dilemma was resolved by ensuring the anonymity of the participants through the use of pseudonyms. It has been my intention to highlight separate elements of the participants’ attributes, experiences, and motivations rather than give detailed descriptions of their lives in order to decrease the probability that participants will be identified by those with whom they work.
Once the audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed, the raw data were stored under lock and key at my home. In the transcripts, names and other identifying information, such as workplace or school board, were changed. Identifying codes that could link them, their workplace, or their organization with their pseudonyms are also kept under lock and key. The digital files and raw data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of my oral dissertation defence. All raw data stored as paper documents will be shredded at that time.

**Scope of the Study**

This study is simple in scope as it looks at 3 women’s life histories and timelines and provides understandings of their experiences and motivations which could be used as a basis for a broader generalization in a larger study. By focusing more on the attributes, experiences (barriers), and motivations, and less on other aspects of the participants’ lives, I may have missed ways in which a participant’s life history contributed to her choice to become an administrator. Apart from the level of analysis, the decision to use timelines to develop life-history interviews as a data gathering strategy places heavy reliance on participants’ memories of people and experiences; this may mean that some details are highlighted and others overlooked because of the vagaries of memory. In retrospect, additional qualitative data sources I could have collected but did not are photographs, certificates, and journals that could have served as evidence to support what the participants said. Each participant’s timeline that highlighted the major events in their lives helped me to understand their overall biographies, which I think could be considered qualitative data.

Interview one informed interview two, in that, after the first interview was over and I listened to its audio recording, certain questions arose for which I required answers and further explanations about events. After the interviews ended, I did not formally member check but did
so in a roundabout way. Before the second interview, I summarized interview one for each participant and probed for more information if I needed clarification on specific events. If I had any questions after the second interview, I emailed the participants and received more comprehensive answers at that time.

As an educator and leader of colour myself, I never considered placing myself into the study as a researcher-participant because I work as a System Itinerant English as a Second Language/English Language Development (ESL/ELD) teacher. Since the focus of this study was practicing female public elementary school principals and vice-principals of colour in Ontario, I did not qualify as a participant.

My data collection technique, methodological choices, and sampling methodology were neither exhaustive nor random. Thus, I am unable to make decisive generalizations beyond the individual or organizational contexts of this study. Instead, I hope that my analysis of how female Ontario public elementary school administrators of colour succeeded in their advancement into administration has revealed patterns common to all of the women’s lives that will provide insight for women aspiring to administrative positions.
Chapter Five
Biographical Profiles of the Participants

April: The Striver

Until she was a young adult, April lived in India with her four sisters, one brother, and parents. Her father was a government worker and her mother was a homemaker. Education was stressed at home and April attended public and Catholic schools throughout her elementary school years. She learned that hard work and a good education are means to a good standard of living. Competition was a way of life and it helped motivate her to earn a Bachelor of Science degree, which she completed in 1980. For 4 years after that she studied French at the Alliance Française. She worked as an interpreter, translator, and private French tutor until she met her future husband, a Canadian, who was on a spiritual retreat to India. In 1987, at 27, she married him and moved to Toronto.

In Canada, April taught first in a private school for 6 years while simultaneously pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in French and a Bachelor of Education. When she qualified to teach in the public elementary schools, she applied to the largest public district school board in Ontario and obtained a position as a homeroom teacher, then subsequently as a French teacher, and then a literacy coordinator. During this period (1993–2002), she earned a Master of Education in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at a university in Toronto and pursued additional qualifications. She became a vice-principal in one school where she remained for 2 years. Then she moved to a smaller suburban district school board where she also worked as a vice-principal for 1 1/2 years in two schools. From 2006 to 2010, April headed public elementary schools in the suburban district school board as a principal. At the time of our interview, October 2010, April
had been a principal for 5 years and was considering a superintendency in the future. At the time, April had a 15-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter.

May: The Overcomer

Born in the early 1970s to Caribbean immigrant parents and raised in Toronto, May was the youngest of three sisters who lived among other Caribbean immigrants in an inner-city neighbourhood. Here she attended elementary and middle school. She attended various secondary schools, the last of which featured a mix of working class, middle class, and upper middle class students. In that school, where affluent students formed the majority, she learned to appreciate higher education and the middle class lifestyle. Because of personal difficulties, she decided to attend community college where she would be treated as an adult. Community college proved to be a waste of time for her, so she applied to a university in Toronto as a mature student and fast-tracked through a 3-year degree, completing it in just 2. Immediately after completing her Bachelor of Arts degree in September 1998, May started her Bachelor of Education degree at another university in Toronto. She was most anxious to launch her career in education so she could support her then 8-year-old daughter.

Upon her graduation, she got a job by applying directly to a school in the largest district school board in Ontario. Both the school boards and the Ontario College of Teachers (2013) requested applicants not to send their applications to the schools but directly send them to school boards as they were streamlining the hiring process. In her first elementary school, she was a special education teacher for 5 years. She was a co-chair in the special education department and also working toward her Master of Education degree. She was also an elementary chair in her second school for a year, and with the encouragement of her principal, she started the Principal’s Qualification Program. She stayed in the second school from 2004 to 2007, engaging in many
leadership activities. She remained for a year in her third school, where she was a teacher and a chair, and the following September, accepted her first assignment as a vice-principal. She remained a vice-principal for 2 years, during which she completed her Master of Education degree and immediately started her PhD. In 2010, at the time of her interview, she was assigned to her second school as a vice-principal.

June: The Organizer

June, the elder of two sisters, was born in Jamaica in 1966 and lived in an upper middle class neighbourhood. She was known as “the smart one” in her family. At age 10, she accelerated to Grade 6, passed the common entrance exams, and at 11, was accepted for Grade 7 to a private, girls’ high school. However, at this time she moved with her parents, younger sister, and live-in grandmother to the Bahamas, where they lived until she was 13. Then the family moved to a western province in Canada where her parents found good job opportunities and settled into a middle class, immigrant life. At 17, June attended a local university, from which she graduated 2 years later. Subsequently, she lived in a small francophone community in Quebec for a year, and then returned to the western province where her family lived. At 22, she attended teachers college at a Quebec university, and at 23 began to teach middle school in the western province where her family lived. At 25, she moved to Ontario and taught in a medium-sized public school board west of Toronto for a year. The following year, she secured a job teaching in the largest public school board in Ontario, where she was working at the time of the interview.

June’s first teaching assignment in this large board was in a middle school, where she taught for 5 years. She then advanced to a vice-principal-in-training position for a year. In this position, she taught half of the time, and did administrative work as a vice-principal the other
half. She found she really liked this new role. At the end of the school year, she had to decide whether to return to the classroom or apply to become a vice-principal: she chose the latter. She also married that summer. That fall, June passed the interview to become a vice-principal and was placed full-time in a school. By December of that year, she had become pregnant and was off the following year. When she returned from her maternity leave in March of the following year, she finished her second year as a vice-principal. In the fall of her third year as a vice-principal, she applied for a principalship, passed the interview, and was assigned to her first school as principal in February of that same school year. Two years later, June was assigned to her second school as principal. A year later she gave birth to twins, worked at the Ontario Ministry of Education, and the following year, at the faculty of education at a university in Toronto. After 2 years at the university, she headed her third school as a principal, and in January 2009, was promoted to a central coordinating principal (a system principal) position where she was working at the time of the interview, December 2010. At this post, she is responsible for literacy, numeracy, ESL/ELD, and Grades K–12.
Chapter Six
Cross-Case Analysis

This chapter analyzes more fully the lives of April, May, and June briefly described in Chapter Five. These three resilient administrators who have lived very different lives are similar in attributes, their ability to overcome barriers and achieve their personal and professional goals. The chapter discusses similarities and differences in attributes, experiences, and motivations throughout the early, young adult, and working years of April, May, and June, and how their lives may be viewed in light of resilience theory.

Attributes

According to the findings, all three participants demonstrated resilient attributes as defined by resilience theory.

Early Years: Focus

As children, the only attribute all three female public school administrators of colour had in common was the ability to focus on achieving a desired goal: April and May were willing to sacrifice fun and friendships, respectively, in order to achieve theirs. April and June reported being ambitious and having a strong work ethic. They both worked hard to excel academically. They also attributed their early success in school to their intelligence. In fact, June accelerated to Grade 6, and both women had high expectations of themselves. April and May stated that they persevered when times were tough, and that they were socially competent.

April said that she was “good with people,” she “cares about people” (Interview 1). May described herself as able to read social situations and modify her behaviour accordingly. Both
were resourceful. May pointed to a time when she enlisted the aid of a friend to help her improve her mathematical ability:

The minute I came home, finished my food…or snack, then caught that friend who was good in math and worked with her. You know, develop friendships and find the resources that can get you where you want to go. (Interview 1)

May and June both revealed a strong sense of justice and a willingness to argue for their point of view if they felt unjustly treated. June described an incident that occurred when she was 3 years old:

I remember when I was 3 or 3 1/2; it’s one of my earliest memories. My father thought that I had done something and I didn’t. He wanted me to say I was sorry and I wouldn’t. And he spanked me and told me to stand in the corner and I wouldn’t. I stood in the corner and faced him and I would not turn around and he was just getting more and more angry and my mother intervened and she said, “Okay, just leave her.” I stood in the corner, I cried, but I was not turning around because I said I didn’t do it and I am not saying, “Sorry.”…I can’t remember how it was resolved but it was not resolved with me standing in the corner. So, these are the memories I have of being pretty firm about if something is right, it’s right. If something is wrong, it’s wrong and I’m not bending on it. So in terms of attributes, the sense of justice was definitely one that I have had for all of my life. (Interview 1)

April was the only one to say she produced high quality work in school, received family support, and flourished under pressure and competition, whereas May was the only person who mentioned having courage and being an independent thinker and actor. May recalled:

I think I was very independent when I didn’t do that [did not terminate her pregnancy at age 18]. I remember a lot of my teachers and a lot of my friends and
strangers saying, “I can’t believe you’re going through with the pregnancy.”
(Interview 1)

Only June claimed to have had leadership skills as a child: “I am first born as well. My sister and I joke all the time that I’ve always been the caretaker of us” (Interview 1).

Young Adult Years

Resourcefulness

All three women demonstrated resourcefulness. April earned a lot of money working several jobs before she entered the teaching profession: French interpreter at the Alliance Française, translating for corporations and conferences, and tutoring children of famous politicians (Interview 1). May kept her options open when she applied to university. During the day she studied for her Early Childhood Education diploma at Humber College and she took high school courses at night: “I think I was just trying to prepare my path to make sure that I had my options of applying to university” (Interview 1).

June also showed resourcefulness, especially when she moved to New Brunswick and successfully adapted to her new environment after she had completed her Bachelor of Arts degree. She created networks, found pertinent, helpful information, and found work that enabled her to pay for teacher’s college. June described it this way:

When I left [a city in western Canada] and went to live in that little town of 3,500 people in the middle of New Brunswick, they’d never seen a Black person before. I was Anglophone, right, and it’s a Francophone community. I liked learning to speak French when I was there and, you know, Francophones are not always readily embracing an Anglo. You know what? You go with the flow, you learn the way, and you know, it was a huge learning curve for me. But it was something
that not only did it go well, but at the end of it, they asked me to stay for the summer and run their summer program, which I did. (Interview 1)

June returned to western Canada to attend teachers college, which she paid for by working as an educational assistant during the day, working part-time at Sears and Canadian Tire, and by procuring a student loan.

April and May demonstrated focus by, for example, completing their undergraduate degrees. April also demonstrated her capacity for hard work and perseverance by going on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree and then learning French and attaining her Bachelor of Arts degree at the Alliance Française. May fast-tracked her 3-year degree and completed it in 2 years. May recalls people saying: “you should enjoy your experience, and I was, like, I have to support my child: I can’t take my time” (Interview 1). May focused on obtaining her degree, applying to teacher’s college, and raising her child. She left a lot of her friends behind.

**Independence**

May and June both described themselves as independent people. May cited two instances demonstrating her independence. First, by not heeding the advice of her high school advisor that she should have fun while studying for her undergraduate degree. Second, although personnel from the boards of education and the Ontario College of Teachers came to her faculty of education and told students not to send their applications to individual schools:

That is exactly what I did. I sent my applications to each school I went in and then I had a few calls and they said, “I was impressed by your application,” and that is how I got into the system. It was very few of us [who] were employed at the time. (Interview 1)
June defined independence in terms of her achievements. She achieved her Bachelor of Arts degree at 19. She moved to a small francophone community in New Brunswick and was successful in learning French there. Upon her return home, she worked for a year to put herself through teachers college.

**Work Life**

**Social competence**

Three attributes the women had in common were social competence, the ability to work hard, and self-discipline. All three described social competence as manifest when a woman of colour is able to successfully fit into a Eurocentric work environment. April reported that it was easy for her to fit into the Indian community as well as Western and other non-Western communities. She knew how to look for the right people, “People who are deep and thoughtful,…truly care about kids, who care about the world” (Interview 1). April knew how to find and affiliate herself with people and groups who would provide support, encouragement, and strategies that would help her reach her professional goals:

> Your resilience continues to build when you have people who understand you.
> And you have to find those people who will understand you, who will understand your journey. (Interview 1)

May also described her ability to negotiate, navigate through different [social] cultures, and understand that there are certain things one just cannot say if they want to succeed: “You need to play the game” (Interview 1). May was coached by a retired principal who helped her understand the expectations of the hiring committee. She heeded the advice she was given and made the necessary changes, and she became a vice-principal the second time she applied. June also
described social competence as the “ability to successfully navigate a dominant culture” by understanding the rules of the game (Interview 1).

**Hard workers**

All three women demonstrated a capacity for hard work. April brought a strong work ethic to her job which she attributed to her Indian upbringing and family values. May agreed she was hard working after it was brought to her attention that most female vice-principals who are raising a daughter do not simultaneously pursue a PhD, participate in two doctoral study groups, return to their schools to work on weekends, and make time to be interviewed for another candidate’s doctoral thesis. June pointed out that the work of an administrator requires commitment because the work is demanding. It is crucial to know the job, be committed to what one stands for, be decisive, and be able to make decisions in the best interest of students.

**Self-discipline**

All three women described themselves as self-disciplined. April and May used the word “determined,” and May added that she was “focused.” “If I have to get it done, I am going to get it done and just know how to prioritize” (May, Interview 1). Both April and June referred to the importance of time management skills for getting several tasks accomplished in a short time. June stated in a matter-of-fact way that, out of necessity, she thinks in an organized way because she has to balance family life and her job:

Yes, I come with my things all prepared on my computer. I know where I can find things. I know what I am looking at. I know here are the timelines, you know, I will be the one to go to a meeting and say, “Okay, we are supposed to end at 4:00 and here are the outcomes that we need to get to and at 3:50 here is what we have
at this point. Here is what my understandings are, here are our next steps.”
(Interview 1)

**Optimistic, positive, and teachable**

Both April and June referred to themselves as optimistic and June added that she has a positive disposition and is teachable. Demonstrating their self-confidence, both April and June described their solid belief in their ability to succeed in any situation. April and June attributed their success to past successes. They developed a repertoire of skills, they know they are good at what they do and they know they can succeed again. June assumed she would succeed when she started her journey into administration, but she also described humility as an important quality:

Humility, I think, is a very important asset. I think I have it and I think that, you know, one of the things as a leader in every role that I’ve had, I’ve been prepared to say, “You know what? You need to teach me this because I don’t know.” When I started as a principal in a school that had primary grades, I’m trained as a secondary educator so I had a school with kindergarten. What did I know about kindergarten? I had an 18-month-old at home: that’s the closest I got to primary. So, I would sit in the classrooms of the primary teachers and learn and say, “Tell me how you did that?” and “Tell me why you did that?” I noticed this and I would read and I would ask questions and I wasn’t pretending that I knew everything there was to know about primary education because I was the principal.
(Interview 1)

**High standards**

One extraordinary attribute of April’s is her quest for high standards, which she said she learned from the Indian education system. She values this attribute immensely; she has little tolerance for low-quality work:
I can get frustrated if somebody sends me a letter or an email in lower case. You’re writing me a letter in lower case; what is that about? Or if someone is using poor language in a letter that is being sent home….How can you be a model for children in an educational system if you’re not holding standards to a high level? What are they [students] aspiring to? (Interview 1)

April became a strong advocate of raising the bar, of having high expectations, and she built rigor into everything she did for students. In concert with this, April described herself in the classroom as a reflective practitioner who strived to create high quality programs for her students: “I’m not just good in languages; I’m good in delivering high quality curriculum and education through the languages” (Interview 1).

**Perseverance**

A special attribute of May’s is perseverance. When she wants something, she works until she gets it. May waited in a principal’s office while she was preoccupied doing other tasks, for 4 or 5 hours, to be interviewed for her first teaching position and was rewarded when she got it and started teaching the following September. When May did not succeed in gaining a vice-principalship the first time she applied, she sought feedback, sought the assistance of a coach, made the necessary changes, and succeeded on her second try. At the time of the interview she was making the necessary preparations to become a principal.

**Independence**

June’s distinct attribute is the importance she places on independence. To her, it signals achievement and it is manifested as ambition with respect to her career. She credited her parents for stressing this throughout her life. After her first university degree her father asked:
“When are you getting the next one and when are you getting the next one?” You know, “When are you starting your Master’s, when are you finishing your Master’s? Oh, your Master’s is finished: When are you starting your PhD?” For him, if you can, why wouldn’t you, is basically his principle. (Interview 1)

Therefore, it is not surprising that June became a vice-principal after 9 years of teaching, a principal 2 1/2 years after that, worked at the faculty of education at a Toronto university, had children in between all these job assignments, and managed three schools before her promotion to Central Coordinating Principal for Literacy, Numeracy, ESL/ELD, K–12, which she held at the time of her interview. June thinks:

The ambition is linked to the whole idea of continuing to create a professional life that affords you the financial stability and the financial independence that, you know, having a partner is incidental, it’s not a necessity. (Interview 1)

**Application to Resilience Theory**

The first wave of resilience theory emphasizes attributes of resilient people. Studies on resilient attributes, mentioned in Chapter 3 in the *First Wave* section (pp. 79–80), mention internal and external attributes that April, May, and June share. In other words, all of the attributes mentioned by April, May, and June are also found in resilience theory. Some of the attributes the women described they had from childhood and others were acquired later on. There were two internal and three external attributes that April, May, and June did not mention; however, they do apply to them. The two internal attributes not mentioned by the three participants are: responsibility and creativity. The five external attributes not mentioned by the three participants are: knowledge of expectations and boundaries, positive school climate, good health, being female, and humour. Table 3 summarizes resilience theory attributes, participant attributes, the similarities between them, and the attributes for which there was no match.
Table 3

*Resilience Theory Attributes, Participant Attributes, Similarities Between Them, and Attributes for Which There Was No Match*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First wave of resilience theory attributes</th>
<th>Participant attributes</th>
<th>Participant attributes similar to resilient theory attributes</th>
<th>Attributes for which there was no match</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal control and focus</td>
<td>Focus on achieving a desired goal / independence in thought and action / capacity for reflection</td>
<td>Internal control and focus: focus on achieving a desired goal / independent in thought and action / reflective practitioner / confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem (optimism, happiness, easy temperament)</td>
<td>Optimism / positive disposition</td>
<td>Self-esteem (optimism, happiness, easy temperament): optimism / positive disposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom (sense of purpose, hope, dreams and goals, good problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills)</td>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>Wisdom (sense of purpose, hope, dreams and goals, good problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills): resourcefulness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Determination: perseverance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First wave of resilience theory attributes</td>
<td>Participant attributes</td>
<td>Participant attributes similar to resilient theory attributes</td>
<td>Attributes for which there was no match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality (integrity, honesty, forgiveness, faith)</td>
<td>Strong sense of justice / fairness</td>
<td>Morality (integrity, honesty, forgiveness, faith): strong sense of justice / fairness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational commitment (achievement motivation)</td>
<td>Ambitiousness</td>
<td>Commitment to education (achievement motivation): ambition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social competencies (humility, caring, responsibility, gratitude)</td>
<td>Humility / teachability</td>
<td>Social competencies (humility, caring, responsibility, gratitude): humility / responsibility / teachability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support (from family, school, other adults, and neighbourhood)</td>
<td>Support from family</td>
<td>Support (from family, school, other adults, and neighbourhood): support from family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management skills</td>
<td>Time management skills / organized</td>
<td>Time management skills: time management skills, organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of expectations and boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of expectations and boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of empowerment</td>
<td>Leadership skills / decisiveness / strength under pressure and competition</td>
<td>Feeling of empowerment: leadership skills / decisive / strength under pressure and competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the second wave of resilience theory, the first part of Richardson’s (2002) resilience model illustrates the process involved when people face stressors, adversity, and life events that cause disruptions in their lives. These disruptions cause an imbalance in their biopsychospiritual homeostasis. Similar to the disruptions mentioned in the resilience model, throughout their lives, April, May, and June had experiences that, for the most part, put barriers in their way that caused delays in the achievement of their goals. Both April and June experienced bullying as children, and as new Canadians both struggled to find their own way in their new homeland. One struggled to upgrade her qualifications, and the other to find important information and resources in an unfamiliar Canadian system with no one to assist her. May had an entirely different experience growing up compared to the other two. She became pregnant at 18, while she was still in secondary school.
In their adult work lives, April and May faced common barriers during their preparation for the interview process that would determine whether or not they would be given administrative posts. April also faced hardship in her efforts to enter the teaching profession. Unlike April and May, June did not plan to become an administrator but eventually took that path because she was strongly encouraged by Black female administrators. This brought its own set of stressors.

**Early Years**

**Bullying**

Both April and June were bullied by other girls their age when they were in elementary school. Sisters from a very wealthy and privileged family enrolled in April’s school during her middle school years. April recalled the impression these girls gave: “They wore very stylish uniforms in the school and they spoke beautiful English” (Interview 1). They became very popular with the other students and everyone wanted to be their friend. One of the sisters became a “leader” of a large group of 12 to 15 girls. However, she had a mean streak and used her social status to psychologically bully other girls. One day the girl humiliated April by pointing out that April could not speak as well as she did. At this juncture in her life, April was terrified of public speaking: “I was very shy and couldn’t stand up to anybody” (Interview 1). Finally, the bully was reported to a teacher, and when April and the other girls were asked why they had not reported the bullying earlier, they replied that it was because they were afraid of her.

June described learning that “shadism” was alive and well among Jamaicans of all skin colours. As early as Grade 1, she was aware that she was one of the darker children in her classroom: “I remember that there were girls who actively excluded me because I did not look like them. I didn’t have hair down to here…and I was too dark” (Interview 1). She received a
clear message that her colouring was undesirable and she saw this attitude in action too. June remembers how people reacted to her sister, who had fairer skin and longer hair than June did, and the comments they made about her sister with the two of them present: ‘Oh, look at her hair. Isn’t it beautiful?’ And the comments that were not made to me and I remember registering that” (Interview 1). This was something of a hardship for her, and she realized she had to embrace and develop her intellect in order to feel validated: “Essentially, I can’t do anything about the way that I look, but I certainly can do something about what or where my intellect will take me” (Interview 1). This was the strategy she had used throughout her life.

Other barriers April, May, and June experienced in their early lives were different. April faced economic disadvantage, May was placed in a special education class and became pregnant at age 18, and June experienced stress preparing for the 11-plus exam and moving frequently.

**Economic disadvantage**

April’s family situation as she grew up in India is best described as materially poor. Her family consisted of two parents and six children, and did not have many resources. Since her family could not afford to donate money or goods to the Catholic convent where April and her five siblings attended school, they were treated differently from other children. April’s friends brought jars of oats for the nuns, which were appreciated because oats were an expensive item, and their parents would donate money. April observed: “My parents didn’t have the donation so the nuns gave us a bit of a hard time. They would say, ‘Your parents haven’t done anything for the school,’ so it was not so good” (Interview 1).

Because of their economic hardship the children did not have common items such as bicycles or toys, which April’s friends did have, and April did not have new clothes, but wore hand-me-downs from her older sister. On occasion her uncles visited from overseas and took her
parents to a restaurant to thank them for accommodating them in their home. This created a problem because there was not enough space in the car for all the children. So her parents would put the children’s names in a container, draw out one name, and that child would go with them. If the same child’s name was drawn twice in a row, they would pick someone else to go. April’s parents reassured their children by telling them that if they worked hard, studied, and got a good education, no one could take that away from them.

**Special education class**

When May was in Grade 8 she refused to do the work assigned by her teachers. She knew she could do it but rebelled against it and she was subsequently put in a special education class. Her father was livid when he heard about the placement and came to the school to try and get her out of it but to no avail:

I remember being very disappointed in my dad because I felt that he was very powerful…and I was surprised he couldn’t get me out of the class. (Interview 1)

May was embarrassed by the placement so she started to produce satisfactory level work in the hopes of being readmitted to the regular class. She remembers in the first few months after leaving the regular class other students taunted her by saying:

“You’re in Special Ed.” and other similar things. (Interview 1)

Eventually she was integrated into regular academic classrooms in subjects such as science and geography. This experience taught May to do her work so as not to find herself in such a situation again. This experience affected her adversely throughout secondary school and beyond as she was always playing catch up for the time she lost gaining the crucial academic skills and knowledge necessary for continuing her education.
**Eighteen and pregnant**

May became pregnant at the end of her Grade 12 year: “I was pregnant at 18” (Interview 1). She attended one semester at a school for teenage mothers while her daughter was in daycare. At the same time, she was trying to learn how to parent her daughter and was still living at home with her mother who was not happy about her situation. Her mother constantly criticized her and tried to get her back on the educational track. May did not complete secondary school despite attending summer and night schools. She was under a lot of stress:

> I would go to school, deal with my daughter, deal with my academics and I would come home and listen to, “You got pregnant, you got yourself into this situation, blah, blah, blah.” (Interview 1)

May spent some time trying to figure out what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. Her early years could be described as having many twists and turns; however, as she matured, she became aware of what was important to her, and made her decisions accordingly.

**The 11-plus exam**

June was in Jamaica in Grade 6 and, as in other British Commonwealth countries, she had to write the common entrance exam, the results of which determined the quality of one’s secondary school education. The program of choice is a grammar school, an academic secondary program equivalent to the Canadian Grades 7 to 12 academic program that prepares students for university. In the Jamaican system at the time, students submitted their top two grammar school choices, and then, if they performed well on the examination, they were ranked accordingly and given their first choice of school. June was told that only 15% of the students who took the examination got into a grammar school, so one had to rank in the top 15% of all Grade 6 students in Jamaica. Consequently, preparing for the exam was a very stressful time for June.
Fortunately, June’s parents had the financial means to send her for supplemental lessons on Saturday mornings. Her father, who was a math teacher, coached her in mathematics, and she had a tutor who worked with her after school. This was a very crucial time in her life and one that influenced her even as an adult. She remembers all the anxiety, writing the exam, and how she found out how she placed. The results were published in the newspaper in May: “You look for the school that you chose and see if your name is there” (Interview 1). June’s name appeared under her first choice of grammar school.

**Transient lifestyle**

While June’s privileged upbringing in Jamaica and the Bahamas had its advantages, it also had its disadvantages. She found moving around as much as her family did very hard: “I had a number of changes of schools, I moved communities. I wasn’t always accepted” (Interview 1). One cause of difficulty was the conflict she encountered between the behavioural expectations at home and the expectations in the new community to which the family had moved. The way she was taught to behave at home was not necessarily socially acceptable in her new milieu. A positive outcome of this was that June developed the resilience she needed to hold onto who she was:

> I remember having a conversation with someone and saying: “You know what? If having a sense of what is right and what is appropriate and what is conducive to success makes me a snob, then I will wear the badge ‘Snob’ and that will work for me because I am not changing that.” (Interview 1)

Although it was a hardship having to deal with many different social rules and expectations, it allowed her to develop a strong identity and a core belief in herself, which allowed her to thrive in any situation in adulthood.
Young Adult Years

The new Canadian experience

After receiving her Bachelor of Science degree in India, April continued with her studies in French for 4 more years at the Alliance Française and became an interpreter. She met and married a Canadian and then immigrated to Canada in 1987. She found leaving a successful career behind in India to come to Canada where everything was different and she felt like a “nobody,” very difficult (Interview 1). She felt it was a grave inequity that none of her previous university education or work experience was recognized in Canada and she had to redo her undergraduate degree: “So when I came here, you know, it’s starting from scratch” (Interview 1).

Doing everything for herself

With no established networks, friends, or resources available to her in Canada, June learned that if she wanted anything she had to get it for herself. After June completed her 3-year Bachelor of Arts degree, she decided she wanted to learn French. So she spent a year in New Brunswick, travelled to the University of Laval in Quebec to attend its French for non-francophone’s certificate program for 4 months, and then returned home to earn money for teacher’s college because she knew her parents could not fund it. Right away she obtained work as an educational assistant in an elementary school during the day, part-time work at Canadian Tire and The Bay, and secured a loan. That September, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Education program in Quebec, and then taught for 2 years in western Canada before moving to Toronto to begin her career as a teacher in southern Ontario. For June, the hardship of having to do everything for herself and not having a wide circle of friends served her quite well as a young adult. She learned to be independent, resourceful, and to work hard for what she wanted.
The long way into teaching

May took a longer route deciding what she wanted to do with her life. People from her community believed that pursuing a university education was a White thing to do. Ironically, it was the predominantly White, middle class students from the wealthy neighbourhood with whom she attended secondary school who eventually influenced her decision to attend university. Those students made her aware of the benefits of a university education and all it had to offer. She was impressed by their attitudes toward their studies: “It was the expectation of the students at that high school to go to university” (Interview 1). However, in her sixth year of secondary school, she felt as though she was wasting her time and did not like the fact that teachers would not try to understand that her parental obligations, at times, interfered with her schooling:

I was also parenting so I had to drop my daughter off at daycare, and daycare was open at a certain time, and I had to be at school at a certain time, and I just couldn’t do it. And they don’t care. You are a student. (Interview 1)

She wanted to be treated like an adult and to be in an adult setting. Her ultimate goal in attending secondary school was to go to university.

In an effort to fast-track her education and to be with her peers, May did not complete secondary school. Because she was not aware at the time that she could apply to attend university as a mature student, she enrolled in two programs at a community college: one during the day and one in the evening. She soon discovered that community college was not where she wanted to be: “I was okay with it, but it wasn’t what I wanted” (Interview 1). After a year, she applied to and was accepted at a university. She fast-tracked through university in order to complete a 3-year degree in 2 years. She then attended teachers college to obtain her Bachelor of
Education degree and started work the September following the completion of her program. May did not waste any time because she had a daughter to feed. She found her stride.

**Work Life**

*The interview process*

Because she was not born and raised in Canada, April found the interview process to be a huge barrier to entering administration. Because the Indian education system and culture are very different from those in Canada, she found that she was lacking some of the skills necessary to get through the application process. For example, she had to learn to write a resume and develop and write a convincing cover letter. In the interview, April found self-promotion especially difficult: “You are supposed to be humble and Hinduism teaches you all of that” (Interview 1). For the first time in her life, she had to learn how to do autobiographical presentations, speak in public, and refine her speech so that it conformed to that of the interviewers: all these things were much greater challenges for her than for her Canadian-born colleagues. After the principalship interview, she was told her speech was too formal. She did not understand jokes told during the interview, and she would not have laughed even if she had: “My colleagues would come back and say, ‘I joked and they laughed’” (Interview 1). For April, interviewing for the principalship was a serious matter, one in which there was no room for jokes. She would never consider joking during the interview process, unlike her colleagues.

April had to work twice as hard to accomplish the same things as her colleagues. She also felt the absence of another person of colour on the interview panel. Had there been one, she would have been put at ease because she would have felt that they would understand her. She felt that her accent and the colour of her skin were additional barriers. She understood she lacked the
cultural capital her colleagues had. They seemed to know what to say during the interview and to say it with ease.

The first two times May sat for the vice-principalship interview, she failed to obtain the position. The principal with whom she worked at the time said: “You’re in a system that is very Eurocentric, and I think you need to find someone who understands the system” (Interview 1). So she worked with a White, Jewish, former principal who coached her on how to present herself professionally. The coaching included how to sit, how to shake hands, how to look someone in the eyes, and how to dress. Her coach provided valuable advice her Black mentors could not, such as how to talk about certain topics. For instance:

No, you phrase it like this, when you talk about equity; you’re not just talking about race, you’re talking about special education, gender, and you’re talking about religion and you’re talking about learning differences. (Interview 1)

May felt at ease with her coach and learned how to sell herself in a way that made White interviewers feel comfortable hiring her:

They judge you from the moment they see you....I made sure I wore a skirt, I made sure I put my hair back, I made sure I wore my glasses, and I made sure that I wasn’t too sexualized, and I made sure I wasn’t too ethnic. I definitely had to practice enunciating, definitely boasting, and I was successful. That was the barrier, just getting through that interview. (Interview 2)

May learned to modify her presentation to be acceptable to the gatekeepers who interviewed her. She learned to play the game.
The struggle to obtain Canadian educational equivalency

The first month after April arrived in Canada, she found a job teaching French in a private school in Toronto. She faced inequity in that her undergraduate degree and work experience from India were not recognized. She had to redo her Bachelor of Arts degree in order to obtain Canadian credentials, and did so part-time while working at the private school, in order to qualify to teach in the public school system in Ontario. She left her employment for a year in order to complete her Bachelor of Education degree as a full-time student, went back to teach at the private school, and pursued her Master of Education part-time before she left to teach French at a public elementary school. Her start in the Canadian education system was a struggle and a lot of hard work. Part of her struggle was working with people who were not open to difference. For example, once, after she had been speaking French with a visiting French teacher in the office of her private school, the office administrator told April: “I really take offence to that,” and “You need to speak only in English in the office” (Interview 1). April felt it was an explicit message that you speak English and nothing else. April did not tell anyone at that school she could also speak Hindi and Urdu because she understood that it would not be accepted.

Politics

After a year as a vice-principal, April decided to apply for a principalship. However, she faced several barriers along the way. Unlike the large school board from which she had come, the medium-sized school board she was in at the time had no network of colleagues who could provide support and with whom she could discuss racial issues. There was no forum for expression and no board equity personnel: “You had nothing” (Interview 1). She felt that White superintendents supported White candidates for principalships and did not support or advocate for her. For example, during weekly meetings with the superintendent, she observed that most of
the vice-principals who attended were highly professional in their words and actions, brought experience to their role, and worked hard at their schools. However, there was a young vice-principal whom, according to April, no one respected because she did not present herself well:

She would talk like a Grade 7 [student] in meetings. She giggled, dressed provocatively, had little experience, didn’t know about instruction and had a license plate with a sexual word on it. She was the one from the group of vice-principals appointed to be the equity coordinator by the superintendent even though she didn’t know the meaning of the word “equity.” (Interview 1)

This particular young vice-principal lacked crucial skills; however, the appointment gave her exposure to the board and it opened all kinds of opportunities resulting in her being nominated for the principal leadership process.

April was shocked by this and lost confidence in the system for a while after this incident. However, the principals she worked with gave her verbal support:

“Don’t worry because it was a very stupid move on the part of the board and we can do nothing about it.” I thought to myself had they been two Black principals, they would have gone and spoken to the board and asked, “What is going on? What’s happening? Where is the justification?” But they were two White principals. Why would they advocate for me? It’s not their business. They didn’t even see it the way I saw it. (Interview 1)

When April was told that she would not be given a principalship because her interview was not strong enough, she wanted to ask whether public speaking was everything and whether experience and demonstrated competence had anything to do with promotion to administration.
Leadership skills acknowledged

Unlike the other two participants, June considered her lack of personal readiness to be a barrier to entering administration. Despite the encouragement of others, she initially lacked a vision of herself as an administrator. She declared out loud that she would never become an administrator. Others saw her abilities: dedication, passion, and personality.

From the very beginning of her teaching career, June focused on equity. She worked in a large school board with the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators, taught academically challenged students on Saturday mornings, led the African heritage club, and established a Black girls’ mentorship group. When she saw a need in her school, she filled it without asking permission. Often, there was resistance, but she would stand her ground and argue her point.

June was an unconventional teacher. She challenged the status quo in ways that made some people uncomfortable. She did not toe the line. Often she argued with her school principal. “She would say to me, ‘Okay. Just listen, just listen,’ and I would say, ‘No, I’m not listening’” (Interview 1). She had no intention of becoming an administrator. In fact, she felt:

Who is going to have me as a principal, because all I ever do is become argumentative and give people a hard time. But I am going to [continue to do what I do] because that is what the kids need. (Interview 1)

However, administrators with whom she worked saw her leadership qualities and pushed her to enter into administration. The first time she was considered for a promotion, her principal simply put a yellow application in her mailbox and said to June:

“Fill it out. I need it by 4:00.” I said, “I’m not doing that.” She said, “Yes, you are.” I said, “I don’t have my papers.” She said: “Fill it out and give it to me by 4:00.” (Interview 1)
After a full year as a vice-principal, June went on maternity leave. While she was on leave, in March of that year, her school principal told her to apply for a principalship. She said, ‘‘Get your stuff ready,’’ and I said, ‘Absolutely not. I don’t even know how to open a stroller; you think I’m going to do that!’’ (Interview 1). June waited until her third year as a vice-principal and then, upon the insistence of her White, female school principal, applied and was promoted to principal.

June was motivated by what she felt needed to be done for students rather than what she needed to do in order to become a principal. As a principal she empowered students and staff. In a relatively short time, she had done a lot. After her second principal placement, she worked for the Ontario Ministry of Education for a year, taught at a faculty of education for 2 years, returned as a principal in her third placement for half a year and then was promoted to central coordinating principal. This is a system position in which she oversees Literacy, Numeracy, ESL/ELD, and Grades K–12. Every position she has held, including the position as central coordinating principal she held at the time of her interview, she did not seek out. In each case, somebody else suggested she consider a position with more responsibility based on her performance in previous positions.

**Application to Resilience Theory**

To summarize, the second wave of resilience theory illustrates how stressors, adversity, and life events act on and disrupt a person’s internal balance and peace. April’s, May’s, and June’s experiences can be classified under these headings because they disrupted the homeostasis of both their internal and external lives.
**Stressors**

The activities, events or other stimuli that caused stress in the women’s lives were: bullying, politics, and Eurocentrism.

**Adversity**

Situations marked by unfortunate events or circumstances, calamities, or distress were: economic disadvantage, transient lifestyle, and finding the long way into the teaching profession.

**Life events**

Important events that changed the course of the women’s lives were: pregnancy at 18, the 11-plus exam in Jamaica, the administrative interview process, the immigrant experience, which includes doing everything for oneself, the struggle to obtain Canadian educational equivalency, and the acknowledgement of one’s skills by superiors and their encouragement to pursue administration.

According to the first part of the resilience model (Richardson, 2002), stressors, adversity and life events act upon biopsychospiritual homeostasis and cause disruption in people’s lives. All three participants experienced disruptions in their lives. However, the disruptions served to bring out and reinforce these women’s strengths instead of bringing about their downfall.

**Motivations**

The disruptions experienced by April, May, and June came in the form of barriers and delays to achieving their goals. However, they were able to cope successfully with their hurdles and break through to achieve resilient reintegration, the second part of the resiliency model (Richardson, 2002).
Racism and other barriers in the workplace make it uncommon for women of colour to become administrators in education in Ontario. However, when they were children, the women in this study had parents who expected them to achieve academically, so they competed with other students. One of the women learned from more affluent students in her school that by achieving high marks she would be able to enter a university of her choice.

It is not surprising that all three women completed a university education, earned their undergraduate and Bachelor of Education degrees, and obtained work as teachers. However, they differ from other women of colour in that their ambitious personalities drove them to achieve even more through encouragement from others, follow their passion, and continue to work toward administrative positions despite unsuccessful attempts. These three women overcame many adversities and triumphed in the achievement of their goals.

**Early Years**

**Competition**

April grew up in a home where the atmosphere was very competitive. Her parents criticized, condemned, and compared her to others so she worked very hard to do her best to gain their approval. She realized that encouraging children to compete is frowned upon in North American society; however, competition motivated her to continue to try and not give up. She explained that this was in the nature of the society she grew up in and she learned to become a little less sensitive growing up: “You know parents would compare, ‘Oh, look at your friend, she just got an A+ and you just got an A’” (Interview 1). Each time she fell down and failed, she lifted herself up higher: “You work harder. Now I’m staying up all night to study for that math test” (Interview 1). She worked long hours and sought help in order to master difficult lessons. It
was also important that she had teachers who encouraged her and commended her when she did particularly well on a task.

A part of June’s privileged upbringing in the Caribbean was parents who nurtured her independence. She soon realized that independence meant achievement in school, and from an early age she was expected to succeed in school. For example, competing with ambitious friends for marks, she achieved high marks, was fortunate enough to accelerate through Grade 5 to Grade 6, and passed the 11-plus examination and entered a grammar school. All this led to a university education. Her tendency was to choose as friends girls who were like-minded, ambitious, hard workers, achievers, and leaders: “Birds of a feather flock together, right?” (Interview 1).

**Middle class students**

May grew up in Ontario housing in the inner-city section of a large city. Most people in the neighbourhood, mostly Blacks from the Caribbean, were streamed into applied programs in the nearby secondary school, which led them to blue-collar jobs. Fortunately, May passed an audition to attend a school with a music program in another area of the city. A bus transported her to a mostly White school populated mainly by Italian and Jewish students. She acknowledged her teachers for their guidance during secondary school. They helped her to decide which university was best for her. She went on trips they organized to universities. May felt that the teachers in this school cared about students and about equity: “I had [a] teacher who taught us about Martin Luther King Junior” (Interview 1).

May definitely appreciated the guidance and caring of some of her secondary school teachers. However, it was the students from whom she learned the benefits of obtaining a university education. Her parents spoke about their wish for her to attend university, but it was
not until she was in the middle class environment where students who came from wealthy homes were focused on doing well that she fully comprehended the benefits. Many students and teachers who liked her and whom she liked were Jewish: “They understood the racial issues and through them I learned about the Holocaust and issues around what Jewish people face” (Interview 1). It was expected that students from that secondary school would go to university. The school was set up such that students had only academic courses that led to a university education to choose from: “We didn’t have general courses. We didn’t have basic courses” (Interview 1). She also had the opportunity to meet middle class Black people: “Their parents have it, they are living it, so I could definitely get this” (Interview 1).

**Young Adult Years**

*Get an education*

A common motivational goal for all three participants during their young adult years was to get an education. However, each had a different reason for wanting a university degree. April received her Bachelor of Science degree and learned French at the Alliance Française for two reasons: First, she loved languages and always wanted to know one that nobody else around her understood. Her uncles had PhDs and that inspired her to continue her education. One uncle and aunt took French courses and left their books in her home: “I would flip through them a little and thought I would love to learn French. And that’s how it happened” (Interview 1). Second, April believed a good education would get her a job that would provide a decent living. She grew up poor and as an adult she wanted to change that. She wanted to earn money to support herself and to have a lifestyle that permitted her to buy what she needed. She taught French at the Alliance Française, interpreted for business people during conferences, and tutored politicians’ children in her home on the side.
When April arrived in Canada she was fortunate to be hired to teach in a private school immediately even though she did not have a Bachelor of Education degree. She also tutored part-time. However, she wanted to teach in the public school system: “I knew distinctly why I was exploring the public school system. Because of all my experience with inequity between public and private in India” (Interview 1). April hoped to get into the public school system because she believed that public education was the best education for the masses. April disapproved of the private system in which if people have money they are admitted to attend, and if they do not, they are not permitted entry. She did not agree with that system because when she was growing up her family did not have enough money to pay for her private school education. As a result, she knew firsthand the feelings of powerlessness and injustice to which this could lead.

June had a goal to earn her university degree because she knew that a good education would open the way to a lucrative profession and that would garner independence. Her mother insisted that she do it right out of secondary school. As a result, she moved across the country to learn French:

I was young when I graduated from high school. I was still 16…I remember that spring saying to my mother, “You know, I don’t think that I want to start university right away. I want to take a year and maybe go away,” and she cried and said, “You won’t go back.” She said, “You must do your degree first and then do that.” She said, “You must have your degree. You must have your degree.” So, I did. I went and I did my first degree, and then I did go away before I did my Bachelor of Education. (Interview 1)

Her mother believed in the importance of a university education as the basis of an independent and secure life:
So when I think back...for her [the mother] it was a sense of knowing that you were going to have a roof, knowing that your kids could be in school, knowing that you were safe and secure. (Interview 1)

May’s main goal entering university was to complete her Bachelor of Arts degree as soon as she could so she could enter teachers college. She completed her entire undergraduate education and was ready to teach in just 3 years. She did not have the luxury of time because she had to repay OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) loans and find a job to support her daughter.

**Work Life**

*Encouragement from others*

April did not go into teaching with the idea of becoming an administrator. However, after a while she was no longer feeling challenged by classroom teaching. Her experiences and encouragement from others led her to think bigger. She thought if she could make a difference in the lives of students in her own school, how much more then could she make on a larger scale. This led her to work toward becoming a leader who could make a difference in the lives of students beyond her classroom or school.

When April was working as an intermediate core French teacher in the inner city in a large metropolitan school board, the school community recognized her hard work and dedication to student success:

I was an emotional social worker, an advisor, and talking to the parents regularly and bringing them in...I kept in touch with their home life and their home family, intensely. (Interview 1)
She held information sessions for parents about the advantages of bilingualism. One parent told her she was making a difference in the lives of students in one school and she should consider doing it for many schools. Administrators and colleagues pointed out to April that people with less experience who spoke well were moving forward into administration and that she needed to get there. The final push came when a White principal said, “Like it or not, you are going to administration” (Interview 1). He was very supportive and introduced her to the superintendent. The board she worked in at the time was very progressive, proactive, action-oriented, and focused on equity. She succeeded in becoming a vice-principal in that board.

Persistence pays

After April’s unsuccessful attempt to secure a principalship in the medium-sized board to which she subsequently transferred, she was told by the superintendent there that her interview needed to be stronger, and given no other details. This angered her. She was disheartened not so much because she wanted to become a principal but because the students’ needs were not being met and she wanted to be in a better position to make a difference. She was motivated to become a leader so she vowed to make herself known and demonstrate her value to the board. Several months after the principalship application process, the principal at her school took a medical leave of absence. It was a school with a large South Asian population and none of the other vice-principals in the district wanted to be there:

It was a joke among my colleagues. All the Whites were teasing each other, “You are going to be placed there.” “No, I’m not.” (Interview 1)

April was angered that they talked about a school heavily populated with South Asians in this way. This inspired her to make a bold move and confront her superintendent:
“You don’t see vision. You don’t understand what the system needs. You hand-picked a lady that doesn’t know the meaning of the word equity and the minute she became principal she dropped the equity portfolio. So now that whole piece is gone… There are two suggestions that I would like to bring to your attention.” I said to him, “I would love to step into the equity leadership portfolio.” He said, “Sure, you can have it.” The second thing was, “I am aware that a particular school is becoming available for principalship. I represent that community. I would like the opportunity to be principal there.” (Interview 1)

After the superintendent consulted with other people, he placed her in that school as principal.

**Determination to succeed**

On May’s third try to secure a vice-principal position, she succeeded. Her hard work and determination finally paid off. From the first two unsuccessful attempts, she learned she had to find someone who understood the culture of those in power. She found a former principal, a White, Jewish woman, to advise her. From her May learned how to look, behave, and speak as a professional, and how to communicate all she had done as a leader and why her skills would be an asset in the administrative role. She focused on the work she had to do to prepare for the interview, she did the work, and on her third attempt she succeeded. It also helped that May had a principal who advocated for her:

The fourth principal that I had…was a… half White and half South Asian lady and we got along…she really advocated for me and I got a VP role. (Interview 1)

**Followed her passion**

June loved teaching and wanted to do whatever she could to help Black students as she noticed they were falling behind academically. When she found a need that students had, she worked to meet it. She did whatever it took to meet students’ needs. This came from the passion
she had for what she did. She empowered disadvantaged students and later empowered staff who worked with these students for the sole purpose of providing students with a quality education. If her activities were questioned, she provided reasons for what she did. It was easy for principals with whom she worked to see her passion, leadership, dedication, personality, and abilities. They not only encouraged her, they insisted she belonged in administration. June was pushed to apply for every position she obtained, and she always succeeded the first time she went for the interview:

Every one of those opportunities, it was now the network of Black leaders and a network of Black educators who, we worked together and, “Here is an opportunity, apply for it. I’m going to help you to prepare.” You know, the push but every time it was a push, you know, these were not things that I went looking for. (Interview 1)

June rose to central coordinating principal in a brief span of 9 years since she had entered the profession as a teacher.

**Application to Resilience Theory**

The second wave of resilience theory describes the process of disruption and recovery. After a person’s balance is disrupted, he or she will either reintegrate with resilience, return to homeostasis, reintegrate with loss, or reintegrate dysfunctionally (Richardson, 2002). All three participants faced internal and external barriers or disruptions throughout their lives. However, protective factors existed in the form of their parents, teachers, fellow students, their own ambitious tenacity and passion to persevere when they failed, focus on what needed to be done, and pursuit of the education that allowed them to succeed (reintegrate with resilience). June’s swift rise to central coordinating principal demonstrates her capacity for understanding and
growth through resilient reintegration. April and May also demonstrated resilient reintegration in their lives by overcoming cultural differences and a teenage pregnancy, experiences that have kept others from being successful. They continue to grow and to overcome even greater challenges: April is in the process of becoming a superintendent, and May, a principal. Table 4 compares the participants’ motivations with resilient reintegration.

**Table 4**

*A Comparison of Resilient Reintegration With Participants’ Motivations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resiliency Model: Second wave</th>
<th>Findings: Participants’ motivations (successful strategies used to achieve goals)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilient reintegration</td>
<td>Early Life: Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fellow students who value education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young adult years: Get an education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work life: Encouragement from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Persistence pays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Determination to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Followed her passion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Seven
Conclusion and Discussion

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study in four sections. The first section provides an account of my own journey and a summary of the study. The second section contains a summary of the recommendations made by the study participants for women of colour aspiring to be in education administration. The third section outlines policies that, if implemented, could benefit women of colour. Then the chapter concludes with suggestions for further research in the area of female public school administrators of colour.

My Own Journey and a Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the attributes, experiences, and motivations of female public school administrators of colour contributed to their entry into administration. It was intended to highlight the views of three female administrators of colour, through the use of a life-history approach, with respect to their successes, barriers they overcame, and what motivated them. Their narratives demonstrated the resilience of each woman and what they had to say provided rich data that adds to the study of education administration.

There is only one female public elementary school principal of colour, to date, in the medium-sized public school board where I work. When I began my academic journey at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in 2001, there were no administrators of colour, male or female, in my school board at any level. There has been limited progress, there are three men of colour in education administration as of 2014, but there is a long way to go before there is equitable representation of the diversity of the student population and the overall population of our city at the administrative level in our education system.
This lack of people of colour at the administrative level is also seen at the board of the participant who works at another medium-sized public school board in southern Ontario. However, it is not the case at the large metropolitan public school board where the other two participants work.

A review of the literature in the area of education administration revealed only seven research studies that specifically focused on female public elementary school administrators of colour. More than half of these are unpublished doctoral dissertations from the United States that focus on the experiences of African Americans. Nevertheless, these studies revealed the most common personal attributes of female public school administrators of colour (listed in Chapter 2, pp. 25–26). Analysis of the data in the current study reveal that the three participants had most of the internal and external attributes mentioned in the studies discussed in the literature review. My participants had only two attributes not mentioned in the literature reviewed, which were reflective practitioner and confidence. Table 5 shows a comparison between the attributes found in the literature, those found in this study, and the one attribute found in this study for which there is no match in the literature. The attributes identified in the studies in the literature review and those found in this study are a function of, and reflective of, the individuality of each study’s participants.
### Table 5

*A Comparison Between Attributes in the Literature and Those Found in This Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review attributes</th>
<th>Data analysis attribute findings</th>
<th>Data analysis attribute findings not in literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard workers / strong work ethic</td>
<td>Strong work ethic / hard worker</td>
<td>Reflective practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set and achieve goals / strong</td>
<td>Focused on achieving a desired goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense of self / believe in themselves / internal locus of control</td>
<td>• Follows personal passions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time management skills / organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Changed presentation style and speech to conform with interviewers’ expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient / problem-solving skills / independence</td>
<td>Independent in thought and action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent / determined</td>
<td>Perseverant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possess values (e.g., integrity)</td>
<td>Strong sense of justice / fairness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued professional skills / had credibility</td>
<td>Continued professional development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personable</td>
<td>• Optimistic / positive disposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Humble / teachable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop networks</td>
<td>Resourcefulness / support from family / encouragement from others who saw certain leadership traits</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain visibility / treated fairly by others</td>
<td>Ambition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop leadership skills / high performance standards / effective management style</td>
<td>• Leadership skills / decisive / strength under pressure / competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has high standards / does and expects high quality work from self and others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings on the negative experiences of the three participants in this study can be grouped under the following headings used in the literature review: Racism and Marginalization and Lack of Power or Access to Power. For example, Racism and Marginalization includes: bullying (for example, the “shadism” described by June), politics, Eurocentrism, and the lack of recognition of foreign credentials in Canada. Lack of Power or Access to Power includes: economic disadvantage, the administrative interview process, and the immigrant experience. The participants in this study had barriers connected to their immigrant experience. Before entering teaching, one experienced a transient lifestyle and another a convoluted journey. As there are barriers connected to the immigrant experience, there are barriers connected to being people of colour. The participants had both factors influencing them. Not all immigrants are people of colour and not all people of colour are immigrants. Although these factors are separate from each other, these participants had both at play in their lives. None of the participants in this study mentioned sexism as a barrier. Barriers that the participants mentioned other than those described in the literature review are: transient lifestyle, convoluted journey to entering teaching, teenage pregnancy, the 11-plus examination, and lack of readiness to apply for administrative posts when urged by administrators. See Table 6 for a comparison of negative experiences found in the literature and found in this study. The significance of this comparison is that it shows that the negative experiences of my study’s participants did not deter them from continuing to pursue their goals. They overcame the obstacles they faced and focused on becoming administrators.
Table 6

*A Comparison of Negative Experiences (Barriers) in the Literature Review With Those in This Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review</th>
<th>Data analysis findings of participants</th>
<th>Data analysis findings not found in the literature review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism and marginalization</td>
<td>• Bullying (“shadism” June’s definition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Eurocentrism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Obtaining Canadian educational equivalency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of power or access to power</td>
<td>• Economic disadvantage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The administrative interview process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The immigrant experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transient lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Convoluted journey in entering teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teenage pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The 11-plus examination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of readiness to apply for administrative posts when urged by administrators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supporting factors mentioned by the three participants in this study can also be categorized under headings used in the literature review: Networks: Mentors, Role Models, and Familial Support, and Commitment to Race/Ethnic Community. For example, under Networks:
Mentors, Role Models, and Familial Support there is encouragement from fellow secondary students, competition (achievement of high marks and passing the 11-plus examination), a postsecondary education, and encouragement from others (study French, uncles with PhDs).

Under Commitment to Race/Ethnic Community: persisted in obtaining an administrative position even after unsuccessful attempts. It was important to obtain this position because it would allow them to better meet the needs of disadvantaged students. The only theme found in the literature review not mentioned by any of the participants in this study is Spiritual Connection. See Table 7 for a comparison of motivations found in the literature review and in this study.

**Table 7**  
*A Comparison of Motivations (Successes) in the Literature Review and the Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Literature review</th>
<th>Data analysis findings</th>
<th>Motivation (success) not found in the data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networks: Mentors, role models, and familial support</td>
<td>• Encouragement from fellow secondary students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Competition (achievement of high marks and passing the 11-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plus examination)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A postsecondary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouragement from others (to study French, uncles with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PhDs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to race/ethnic community</td>
<td>Persisted in obtaining an administrative position even after</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unsuccessful attempts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the larger picture, this research demonstrates that resilient women can and do overcome what are challenging odds for those lacking resilience despite hardships, barriers, unfortunate life events, stress, and being of a minority race or ethnic background. The participants in this study have shown that resilient women turn around disruptions and unfavourable circumstances in their lives to make them work for them rather than against them. The resilience of the participants is demonstrated by their intelligence, problem-solving skills, and focused determination to accomplish their goals despite what the world around them tells them about what they can or cannot do. One lesson I took away from studying the three participants is that people who are not born with resilient attributes can develop them by studying those who have succeeded. Another lesson is that people can overcome any obstacle they face if they believe in themselves, are committed to their goal, use successful strategies, and have a strong desire to persevere until they reach their goal.

One of the reasons I used resilience theory is because it allowed me to use life-history methodology to observe how the three participants overcame disruptions and moved toward resilient reintegration throughout their lives. Resilience theory and the use of life-history methodology does not just allow the researcher a snapshot view of attributes, experiences, and motivations in a participant’s life; it also allows for a movie-length view of how a participant’s attributes interplayed with their experiences and motivations that tells a story about who they are and what enduring qualities they have that make them behave the way they do.

Participants’ Recommendations for Aspiring Female Administrators of Colour

One of the questions asked in the interview was what recommendations the participant would make to aspiring female public school administrators of colour in southern Ontario. What should they be cautious about? What should they avoid? What should they pursue?
What They Should Be Cautious About

May cautioned that one should keep one’s desire for an administrative position from colleagues, as they might treat one differently or even sabotage one’s efforts. Only tell your mentor or one close friend of your intention to become an administrator:

Because people, maliciously, will try to block you or they will try to make things difficult, or they will talk about you and say, “Who do you think you are?” Everyone has their preconceived notion. I didn’t tell anyone, only my mentors, that I was taking the [Principal’s Qualification Program]. Not one teacher knew because you sit in the staff room, you sit in the classrooms, you hear how they talk about people. I would just say to people, “Keep it to yourself.” Only tell the mentors that you are taking the course, because you don’t want to deal with that extra barrier of people putting that self-doubt on you. (Interview 2)

May described her experience:

You will have some teachers that support you and you will have some teachers who won’t support you. So, what happened to me when they had a hint that I was getting into administration there was a chair position up and they definitely blocked me, the teachers, from trying to get that position because they said I would be on the side of administration, I wouldn’t be on their side. (Interview 2)

The process of becoming an administrator is lonely as is the job itself, according to May:

Some administrators will treat you well; they will give you a lot of responsibilities and they will keep it very professional and some will treat you crappy and not prepare you to become a principal. It’s a very lonely job. It’s not a job where you can vent and say something. You can’t be flippant and you can’t be a little bit loose and say, “Oh, my principal did this,” the minute you do that to the wrong person, that’s it. You have to be tough skinned and you have to be prepared. (Interview 2)
For May, men of all ethnicities can make the preparation process lonely. Men “will try to minimize your ability whether they sexualize who you are, or how you do things or whether they talk down to you” (Interview 2). In addition, May cautions, it is important to know that if one files a complaint against a senior administrator or principal one is working with, one most probably will not be hired as an administrator at that school board (Interview 2).

Be forewarned, the administrator’s role is not one of “power and status....It’s a lot of responsibility and it’s a commitment to service” (June, Interview 2). When you arrive there you may not find it fulfilling because it is a huge responsibility. June said: “Before you apply to the administrative role, you need to understand what the work is and be sure that it is the work you are prepared to do” (Interview 2). May echoed this advice, if you want to become an administrator for the power, you will be disappointed because there is none in the position.

The administrator of today has to collaborate with staff in order to get things done. If your staff is not behind you, you are not going to get things done. So, if you think it is going to be better for your ego, really, it’s not a very ego-pumping job for the VP, because you do a lot of paperwork, you do a lot of discipline; you do a lot of listening. And if you complain, that may or may not work in your favour. (May, Interview 2)

**What They Should Avoid**

According to April, you do not want to give the impression that you are a “ghettoized thinker.” She added:

Sit with a diverse group of people at principals’ meetings, not just with Asians, with whom you feel comfortable. Hire teachers who are most qualified for the position, who will be an asset to the school community and who best represent the student population. (Interview 2)
June cautions women of colour to avoid using their race or gender as an excuse for their lack of success in entering administration. She urges women to avoid saying, “I wasn’t successful in the first round because I’m Black and…all of the people at the table were White” (Interview 2). The reality is that the school board personnel will continue to function with their own set of criteria as they have in the past. There is no denying that racism and bias exist, but it will not help you if you dwell on it. June says the challenge for women of colour is to strategize how they are going to navigate through and around that because:

Nobody’s coming with a red cape to save you. If one of the things is you recognize that as a Black woman that there are certain perspectives that people have, you just need to decide, well, you know, that’s a perspective, this is how I’m going to navigate it. (Interview 2)

June continues to say, if a woman of colour is unsuccessful in obtaining an administrative position, it is much more productive for her to be proactive in finding out where she was weak by asking the people on the interview team,

“So what did I say, how did I say it, what have I done, what do I need to do?”

Women of colour need to take responsibility for themselves, for their goals, listen to what people are telling you are your shortcomings and address them. (Interview 2)

May advises women who are applying for an administrative position to keep their options open and not to limit themselves to one school board. “So, if you are leaving teaching, be open to leaving the board. You can take your seniority with you in terms of your sick days and your pension” (Interview 2).

Avoid making statements that could be perceived as categorical. Avoid asking questions among people who do not support you. “So I think that a lot of times people who are aspiring
leaders feel like they have to be heard all the time; it’s safer not to be heard. It’s safer to be quiet and to listen and to observe” (June, Interview 2). It is wiser to think things through quietly and discreetly and then choose your actions very strategically.

June put this into practice early in her career. She recalled an incident that occurred when she was working on the Principal’s Qualification Program: a much older woman in the course actively tried to marginalize June by silencing her. June did not react. Somebody else who observed it said, “You know, I can see what’s happening and I can give you some suggestions” (Interview 2). However, June declined the offer and instead thought about how she would handle the situation on her own. In this situation June kept calm, which showed strength, and she solved her dilemma by thinking and acting independently, which showed she could handle difficult situations on her own.

In another situation, June was in a meeting with a much older, White male teacher who ended up shouting at her:

“That’s not how we do things. This is how we do things and this is how we’re going to continue to do them.”

I remember just discreetly saying: “Well, then, that is the position that you have, then I don’t really need to continue to be at this meeting. I obviously have nothing to contribute,” and I closed my books and I left. I mean, I left because I was horrified, but I tried to maintain my dignity. And I remember the administrator, one of the administrators finding out about it because somebody else at the meeting went and shared what had happened and the administrator called me at home and said, “That was appalling and I’m really sorry that that happened. I can’t believe it. Would you like me to address the issue?” I said, “No. I will address the issue, but I needed to take time to think about it.” (Interview 2)
June emphasized a woman of colour must avoid “playing into other people’s dramas” (Interview 2). Women of colour taking on administrative roles do not have the advantage of invisibility that can be used as protection by members of the dominant race. In many situations, June finds herself to be the only person of colour:

So, if I say something people are going to remember it, right, and it’s not because it was brilliant. It’s simply because of, “Oh, that Black lady who was there.” (Interview 2)

She is easily identified and she is aware of that.

What They Should Pursue

April advised that South Asian women need to be able to identify barriers, be supportive of other South Asians, no matter what language they speak, and learn strategies to overcome the barriers (Interview 1):

The strategies would be to network, to be resourceful, to find people that really matter in the process, to inform yourself thoroughly....To inform oneself thoroughly of the process, the information, and the data—whatever it might be—so that there is no excuse not to be selected. (Interview 2)

April suggested that one make oneself indispensable by mastering a specific skill. She recommended that candidates develop a balanced approach when they present themselves, one that does not rely on their ethnic background too much, and adopt a North American perspective (Interview 2). “Networking, reading, and research. You know, developing your knowledge base always. And continue to seek opportunities where you can present” (Interview 2). April further suggested that aspiring candidates use the media to showcase their school, or their practice, or whatever else can be highlighted:
Include the media because the board has no control over that. I can call the media to my school to showcase an event. You go through the process, but really, the board has no control over that, and to include how and what you are doing in school. Write about your practice, write about your exemplary practice and find spaces to write. (Interview 2)

April recommended that aspiring female candidates of colour write about their practices, the initiatives that make sense for the students:

I mean be true to the profession through dedication, commitment, and hard work. And surround yourself with people who are your supporters whatever colour background they might be. Find an advocate who recognizes your skill set and speaks about it in a public forum or to superintendents. (Interview 2)

April continued by saying that aspiring female candidates should develop professionally and attend the most current vice-principal sessions.

For May it is crucial to know and to stay current of the educational jargon in one’s school board and in other boards because it constantly changes. For example, in an interview with another school board she was upset to realize:

They don’t even use “family of schools” and I said that, and they used a term and I was embarrassed because I should have done my research to know that they don’t use the same lingo....One needs to know what authors are quoted by the leaders in one’s board so that when one talks with superintendents or principals, they know you are knowledgeable, especially during an interview. (Interview 2)

For aspiring administrators of colour May recommended:

Do a self-assessment, you research the role, you talk to people, and you research the path to get into the role....Get appropriate additional qualifications in primary, junior, and intermediate levels or a Master’s degree, take the principal’s course
one and two, teach in all three levels....Make up your mind and start preparing for an administrative position as soon as possible....If you don’t start early and you are starting late, don’t get caught up with, “I am old,” because every year you say that I am too old you’re wasting time. (Interview 2)

May recommended finding mentors to help guide you along your path. She is in favour of both male and female mentors because each gives a different perspective on how to achieve entry into administration:

I think it is important to have a balance of different types of mentors....You need to know who you are working with. Get to know who is in your building and who is outside your building within your profession. You have to have a skill you can share with others. People who interview want to see what you have done at the family of schools. They want to see what you have done for community, culture, and caring. They want to see what you have done for numeracy and literacy. And you have to prove for each one what you have done and what it resulted in....You have a four-page resume to fill, so you need to start from the get-go, and you have to keep updating your resume....If someone doesn’t invite you to do a workshop, you create your own workshop; you put flyers out there and you keep that in a portfolio so you can prove that you have done these things. (Interview 2)

May also recommends enrolling in workshops for aspiring leaders and groups such as African Heritage Education Network (AHEN) for support to prepare for the interview process (Interview 2).

According to June, it is very important to build a strong portfolio “that is wholesome and fulsome” (Interview 2). Avoid resume padding, “by that I mean any work that you do has to be done with commitment and passion to the work for itself, not how it contributes to your ultimate goal,” (Interview 2). One needs to be very committed to the work one is doing. It was her
passion and commitment to students that caught the attention of her principals and it was they who tapped her on the shoulder to apply for administrative positions (Interview 2). She also urged that women must have integrity.

For June, mentorship is important. For her, mentorship is based on someone one respects, someone whose work ethic and values are similar to one’s own, a guide who achieved the same goals, who has the respect of senior administrators, other principals, teachers, and the community. Holding a position does not necessarily mean being successful in that position. One can determine how others view an administrator by how people “respond to them” (Interview 2). Pursue “a network of not only mentors but of colleagues who you can trust and colleagues who can trust you” (Interview 2). It is important to have a reciprocal relationship.

See Figure 4 for a summary of recommendations made by April, May, and June for aspiring female administrators of colour.
Be cautious about:
- who you tell about your ambition; tell only your mentor or one friend
- the administration process is lonely as is the job itself
- understand what the work entails
- be sure you are prepared to do the job
- there is no power in the position; you need to collaborate with staff to get things done

Avoid:
- interacting only with people from your own race/ethnicity
- using the race or gender card
- only applying within your own school board
- reacting immediately to perceived discriminatory behaviour of others; think things through quietly, then choose your action strategically

Pursue:
- the necessary qualifications
- start to prepare early in your career, work at the school, board, and district levels
- engage with a variety of mentors
- network
- stay connected to people who support you
- make yourself indispensable by mastering a specific skill
- be resourceful
- keep current with the educational jargon
- continue to develop professionally
- write and present at workshops
- use the media to showcase your school and your practice
- support quality women of colour

Figure 4. Summary of the participants’ recommendations for aspiring female administrators of colour.

My Thoughts on the Participants’ Recommendations for Aspiring Female Administrators of Colour

I agree with most of the recommendations that the participants shared in Figure 4. These are good strategies for those seeking to enter into administration. However, there are some
strategies I disagree with. For example, May cautioned aspirants to tell only a mentor and one friend of one’s intention to become an administrator for fear of sabotage. Yes, in her hostile school culture it was wise for her to keep her ambition to herself. People have to gauge the political environment in their school. Sometimes people who are not open are perceived as unfriendly, calculating, or selfish and are, therefore, disliked. When people who are perceived in this way do succeed in attaining a leadership position, many people do not wish them well. In some schools, colleagues are friends who meet socially outside the workplace, who support and encourage one another to pursue leadership positions. They also continue to meet former colleagues who have become district leaders and who, in turn, have provided skills, resources, knowledge and help for their friends and colleagues with the same aspirations. In this kind of workplace environment, secrecy about one’s intention to pursue an administrative post would be inappropriate.

June cautioned women of colour not to use the race and gender cards as the reason for their lack of success at the administrative interview and instead to ask the interview team what their weaknesses are and to address them, and I agree with her. Women of colour need to take responsibility for themselves and not use excuses to justify their failures. However, I also think that one’s race, for example, could be an asset during the interview. April told this researcher that she attended a session with vice-principals at which she heard that there was a principal’s position open that no one wanted because of the large South Asian student population in the school and its location in an unsavoury part of the school district. She really wanted to be a principal, so she decided to apply for the principalship in this school using her South Asian ethnic background to her advantage. She argued that she understood the mentality of South Asian students, was a role model for them, and could work with parents to help their children
achieve academic success. April felt she was a good fit for the school’s needs, and because she was she succeeded in the interview and successfully landed the principal position using her ethnicity as one reason for the promotion.

May urged aspiring administrators of colour to start early in their careers to prepare for an administration position, which sounds like wise advice at first sight. Younger candidates have more energy and will work as administrators for a longer period of time. However, there is something to be said for candidates starting their careers as administrators after having acquired a breadth and depth of experience throughout the school system. Mature candidates who have worked in various positions over the course of 20 years, developed contacts, helped many people, and done so without an eye for becoming administrators, I believe, are perceived as having more integrity than those who strategically calculate their every move to obtain an administrative position. A mature candidate who has developed many skills, gained a vast array of experiences, enjoyed her career, reflected on her practice, continued to develop professionally, and learned how to handle resistance strikes me as having more to offer than someone who starts carving the quickest path to administration in her first 5 years of teaching. If someone stays in teaching just long enough to qualify to become a vice-principal, how much integrity, knowledge, and understanding does she have as an education professional? If a person has not spent enough time teaching and in leadership roles as a teacher, how effective would she be as an administrator? I think interview committees should look closely at the quality of the candidate and what he or she can contribute rather than just at the superficial markers of qualification. Sometimes, depending on their experience, older candidates are a better choice and should not be overlooked.
Participants’ Policy Recommendations

The last question of the interview was, What provincial or school district policies, if implemented, would help aspiring and current administrators of colour reach their goals? Their recommendations focus on three categories: transparency, accountability, and practicing equity.

Transparency

Recommendation: Opportunities for leadership growth and positions need to be communicated in a transparent manner and open to all.

As April stated:

The opportunities for leadership growth and leadership positions need to be communicated in an open and honest and fair manner versus insiders getting the news. (Interview 2)

Accountability

Recommendations:

1. The Ontario Ministry of Education needs to articulate protocols such that every school board should ensure that interview committee members reflect the demographics of the board.

2. An ombudsman should be hired to be an objective third party and to mediate conflicts that arise between an employee and school board personnel.
April made the following suggestion:

There should be some type of mandate that on every interview team in a public school board there must be representational Black and South Asian if those are the demographics. (Interview 1)

In April’s view, policies for school districts will not be fully implemented unless the Ontario Ministry of Education articulates some of these protocols; only then they will filter into the practices of school boards. In Interview 2, she asked: “What motivation do school boards have?” By this April meant that school boards need to be accountable to the Ministry of Education and ensure that equity is an integral part of the school board mission and practices. Otherwise school board personnel, who are largely from the dominant culture and not directly affected by inequity, might not be aware of the urgency to implement it.

May suggested that an ombudsman should be hired to be an objective third party to mediate when a conflict arises between an employee and school board personnel. May said that although there are equity and employment equity policies in her school board, they are there in name only (Interview 2).

**Practicing Equity**

Recommendations:

1. Senior administrators have started to build a culture of inclusion in decision making. However, more work still needs to be done.

2. People are changing their language and asking, “What kind of demographic should the new principal come from?” This needs to continue.
All three participants talked about how equity would be more of a reality in their workplaces if provincial or school district policies were implemented.

June referred to a 2009 Ontario Ministry of Education document that talks about creating equitable opportunities. If people adhered to the strategies outlined in it, this would help both aspiring and current administrators of colour. She also pointed to the Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993) which mandated that Ontario school districts draft and implement their own policies on ethnocultural equity and antiracism by September 1995 (Young, 1994). PPM 119 still stands as a viable document even though the Progressive Conservative government rescinded employment equity and multiculturalism programs after coming to power in 1995 (Joshee & Johnson, 2005). Every school board in Ontario must have an equity policy in place. These policies do not only apply to students, but also to staff and to the community.

According to June, in her school board, the policy is not just about making sure the right books are in place but, “it’s a whole protocol of behaviour for how it is that we engage with students, with their parents, with the community and with other members of staff” (Interview 2). For June, if these kinds of policies were practised, “it would create a more open trajectory for administrators of colour” (Interview 2). When June compared her school board with other boards and how they deal with issues of equity, she said that her board had done very well. When equity policies are enacted, people are “cognizant and aware” (Interview 2). For example, when a position of added responsibility is to be filled, she asks:

How many people of colour were interviewed, right? That’s a question that will be put on the table. Did you select people that represent diverse groups? How is diversity evident? (Interview 2)
June said that superintendents have actively pursued her advice when they needed to place a suitable principal in a school. In another example, when she was leaving one of her roles, a superintendent asked her:

“Given the community that you’ve been serving… what kind of demographic should the new principal come from? You know, does it matter? What needs to be represented? Let’s have that conversation.” (Interview 2)

June reported that the senior administrators in her school board have started to build a culture in which people are not just asking the question about colour, but about whether multiple perspectives are represented in conversations and in decision making. People are starting to change their language, and there is a constant conversation about how to talk to parents, guardians, and caregivers. In conversations such as these, June found a cognizance of the importance of bringing different kinds of perspectives to serve different kinds of communities. When an individual raises a red flag about a situation where she or he feels maligned, people are open to engaging in conversation about it. However, June also admitted that although they are heading in the right direction, there are still things that are overlooked and there is more work that needs to be done at her school board.

**My Thoughts on the Participants’ Policy Recommendations**

When asked about provincial or school district policies that could be helpful to aspiring administrators of colour, all three participants acknowledged specific ones. One participant from a large district school board thought that senior administrators mostly adhered to the equity policies, however there are issues that are ignored and more work that needs to be done. Unfortunately, the other two participants pointed out that although equity policies exist in their respective district school boards, they were not taken into consideration in practice. One
participant suggested that if a grievance arises between a vice-principal and a principal or senior management an ombudsman should intervene. However, if a grievance were to go this far, the participant was also certain that the administrative aspirant would not be hired at that district school board. I think that the Ontario Ministry of Education needs to put protocols in place to ensure equity policies are acted upon, otherwise people will have no motivation to carry them out.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research on this topic could include repeating this study in 5 and 10 years to determine how the experiences of women of colour in public school boards change over time. A longitudinal study into the changing numbers of women of colour in public elementary school administration in southern Ontario would also be valuable. A study examining the quality of leadership structures in place in public district school boards to inform, mentor, and counsel aspiring female public elementary school administrators of colour, and an investigation of the rate at which the women who attend leadership workshop sessions, courses, and meetings are hired as administrators would also increase our insight into the situation of women of colour in the education system. Yet another study could compare the attributes, experiences, and motivations of women of colour with those of men of colour, White females, and White males to identify the similarities and differences in order to see how to make the system more equitable.

In the final analysis, despite a weak adherence to provincial and school board equity policies by board hiring committees, the female public elementary school administrators of colour in this study were found to have formed informal and formal networks among themselves. In particular, the three participants in this research study have shown remarkable resilience in the face of long odds. They have worked with difficult situations and people and unreasonable rules,
and they have triumphed in their journey to become administrators where others who faced the same challenges have failed. That there are such a small number of female public elementary school administrators of colour in southern Ontario points to a bigger issue with the school board hiring committees. The boards have yet to fully appreciate the gravity of the matter and to respond by putting meaningful structures in place for aspiring female administrators of colour in their employ. The information provided in this study could benefit senior administrators in Ontario public district school boards making hiring decisions, incorporating “critical awareness and reflexivity” (Wallace, 2007). In the very near future, students of colour will be in the majority in southern Ontario’s student population. School boards will have to consider increasing the number of administrators who represent the majority of students in their care. The quicker this happens the better off our society will be.

**Final Thoughts and Reflections**

There are a number of items that could be highlighted in the final chapter of this study that were reinforced given the findings and conclusions. The importance of equity and social justice, where opportunity is available for all regardless of background, cannot be overstated. Certainly, in terms of looking at these women’s experiences, one can find this issue, that regardless of their immigrant background or their colour, they have the right to equal opportunity and representation. Since provincial or school district policies and programs were not readily available, these women found a way to do that for themselves. Hopefully, in the future more support programs will be available.

Further, I could have studied this issue from different perspectives, for example, using a systems perspective as the theoretical lens instead of using resilience theory. I might have found slightly different outcomes and different information items would come forward, but it wouldn’t
have had the power as did these women’s personal experiences. A systems perspective is “management thinking that emphasizes the interdependence and interactive nature of elements within and external to an organization” (BusinessDictionary, n.d.). A systems perspective would mean looking at how people interact with managers and interact with policy through quantitative methods. If I studied this issue from a systems perspective, I would have sent out a survey to principals, vice-principals, and department heads and asked them to list policies, initiatives, programs, and workshops that were geared to females of colour. I would look at how many women of colour attended these functions and how many were placed in administrative positions. I would explain the low number of placements in terms of sociological factors, lack of cultural capital, lack of economic resources, and a lack of English language proficiency, in some cases. After all is said and done, I believe it is the qualitative perspective, and no other approach that gets to the heart of issues. It is human and academic. The qualitative perspective allows participants to talk about who they are and tell their personal experience. We learn from people’s stories which helps us look at the bigger picture as opposed to a quantitative, numbers only approach.

Having had this experience with these women myself, I was influenced in several ways. First, I gained great respect for the female administrators of colour in my study and the barriers they overcame to become administrators. Second, as an outcome of my research, I would like to see school boards collaborate with universities to find answers to rectify the situation of low numbers of women of colour entering administrative positions. Third, I would like to share my work by presenting my findings at “The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario’s Annual Leadership Conference for Women...And Still We Rise.” Fourth, as another way to share my work, I want to produce a handbook that is informative and interesting, which includes vignettes
from my participants’ stories. I want aspiring female teachers of colour who are considering administration to know that they are not alone and it is possible for them to become leaders.

I work as a System Itinerant English as a Second Language/English Language Development (ESL/ELD) teacher. When I started to read the studies on female public school administrators of colour, I connected their experiences with the parents of the students I teach, knowing that if parents are involved and engaged in the school their children will be helped to succeed academically. I realized that immigrant parents have special needs: they were stressed, had difficulty assimilating, and were concerned about their children’s success at school, so I started to get these parents involved. I held presentations explaining the Ontario Provincial Report Card, with interpreters. I did presentations on healthy eating, and how parents can improve their children’s reading and writing skills. I connected traumatized families to counseling services. I also connected parents to Settlement Workers in Schools to help with finding housing, transportation, filling out job skills training program forms, and English language classes for adults.

It is important to note that this study is a Canadian story, in the sense that it includes race, immigration status, and ethnicity as part of the fabric of a multicultural Canada. Rather than focus my research on one specific ethnic group, such as African-American or Asian-American, my study is an example of the unique Canadian experience in that the female participants reflect recent immigration status, barriers faced by women of colour, and differences in ethnic backgrounds, as does the Canadian population as a whole. Leadership in this study is an example of how these women (and others) have used their personal and professional skills to become leaders, above and beyond their backgrounds, and to offer guidance to others with similar interests.
It is my hope that this study has shed light on the positive attributes, negative experiences, and strategies of successful female public school administrators of colour. It was my goal to demonstrate the resilience, knowledge, and capabilities of women of colour to show that they are a largely untapped resource who should be considered for leadership positions. The 3 female participants in this study are role models of success for students of colour and for female teachers of colour interested in advancing in their careers. The research was also intended to inspire a deeper appreciation of women of colour who lead in public district school boards in Ontario. In the words of Pittinsky, Bacon, and Welle (2007), women who embody softer leadership traits such as “collaboration, cooperation, personal contacts, encouragement, participation, interaction, sensitivity, communality” (p. 116) are uniquely prepared to be effective leaders. Finally, it was my intent to add to the literature on the absence of women of colour in administrative positions in public elementary district school boards in Ontario. If more people read about the lack of female administrators of colour in public elementary schools in Ontario, then perhaps school boards will make greater strides to rectify this situation and create a more equitable workplace.
References


Appendix A

Information Letter:

Jennifer Mitchell, Executive Staff,
Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO),
Professional and Protective Services

(on OISE/UT letterhead)

DATE

Re: Doctoral Thesis: Exploring the Attributes, Experiences, and Motivations of Female Public Elementary School Administrators of Colour in Ontario

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

My name is Anjili Pant and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. As you may recall, I was an internship student taking the TPS 3044 course: Internship/Practicum in Educational Administration, when you supervised me at the ETFO.

I am presently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis entitled, “Exploring the attributes, experiences, and motivations of female public elementary school administrators of colour in Ontario,” and plan to examine how have the attributes and experiences of female public school administrators of colour contributed to their entry into administration. I have a strong interest in this group of school administrators, as I am currently working as an educator in the public school system and find there is a lack of information available for female aspirants of colour. I would like to make more information available to assist them, as well as make an academic contribution in this area.

When I did my internship with you, you very kindly allowed me to interview you for my field research pilot project. I would appreciate it if you would give me contact information with regard to advertising for participants in the ETFO newsletter or suggest other ways to acquire participants. In order to maintain confidentiality, voluntary female public school administrators of colour will read the advertisement and contact me, the researcher, directly. I am looking for administrators who are currently working and who represent a range of racial/ethnic backgrounds, years of experience, and ages. Your assistance will enable me to find the participants I need to conduct my research.
With deepest gratitude to you for considering my request, I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours very truly,

Anjili Pant

**Student Researcher:**

Name: (Ms.) Anjili Pant

Ed.D. Candidate, OISE/UT

Phone Number: [personal phone number]

Email: anjili.pant@mail.utoronto.ca

---

**Thesis Supervisor:**

Name: Dr. Suzanne Stiegelbauer

Professor, OISE/UT

Phone Number: (416) 978-1181

Email: s.stiegelbauer@utoronto.ca
Appendix B
Information Letter
Marlene Kirkup, Advertising Rates & Specifications,
Ontario Principal’s Council Register

(On OISE/UT letterhead)

DATE

Re: Doctoral Thesis: Exploring the Attributes, Experiences, and Motivations of Female Public Elementary School Administrators of Colour in Ontario

Dear Ms. Kirkup:

My name is Anjili Pant and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

I am presently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis entitled, “Exploring the attributes, experiences, and motivations of female public elementary school administrators of colour in Ontario,” and plan to examine how the attributes and experiences of female public school administrators of colour contribute to their entry into administration. I have a strong interest in this group of school administrators, as I am currently working as an educator in the public school system and find there is a lack of information available for female aspirants of colour. I would like to make more information available to assist them, as well as make an academic contribution in this area.

I would appreciate it if you would give me contact information with regard to advertising for participants in the OPC Register or suggest other ways to acquire participants. In order to maintain confidentiality, voluntary female public school administrators of colour will read the advertisement and contact me, the researcher, directly. I am looking for administrators who are currently working and who represent a range of racial/ethnic backgrounds, years of experience, and ages. Your assistance will enable me to find the participants I need to conduct my research.
With deepest gratitude to you for considering my request, I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours very truly,

Anjili Pant

**Student Researcher:**  
Name: (Ms.) Anjili Pant  
Ed.D. Candidate, OISE/UT  
Phone Number: [personal phone number]  
Email: anjili.pant@mail.utoronto.ca

**Thesis Supervisor:**  
Name: Dr. Suzanne Stiegelbauer  
Professor, OISE/UT  
Phone Number: (416) 978-1181  
Email: s.stiegelbauer@utoronto.ca
Appendix C
Advertisement for ETFO Newsletter,
OPC Register and Professionally Speaking Magazine
Seeking Participants

Must interview female administrators of colour (principals and vice-principals) to study factors that contributed to your entry into administration. Your confidentiality will be upheld throughout the process. For more details, please contact me at: anjili.pant@mail.utoronto.ca and/or my home phone number: [personal phone number].

Ms. Anjili Pant
Ed.D. Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Program
Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix D
Information Letter and Consent Form:
Administrators

(on OISE/UT letterhead)

DATE

Re: Doctoral Thesis Research: Exploring the Attributes, Experiences, and Motivations of Female Public Elementary School Administrators of Colour in Ontario

Dear ________:

My name is Anjili Pant and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

I am presently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis entitled, “Exploring the Attributes, Experiences, and Motivations of Female Public Elementary School Administrators of Colour in Ontario,” examining how have the attributes and experiences of female public school administrators of colour contributed to their entry into administration. I have a strong interest in this special group of school administrators, as I am currently working as an educator in the public school system and find there is a lack of information available for female aspirants of colour and I would like to make more information available to assist them, as well as make a contribution to research in this area.

As you are well aware, I received your name and contact information from yourself when you responded to the advertisement in the OPC Register. By responding, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in interviews. Your contribution would greatly assist me in carrying out my research. The interviews will focus on your motivations, what contributed to your success and how you overcame barriers encountered entering into administration.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy.

If you wish, I would be pleased to provide you with a copy of my proposed interview questions before we meet.
Confidentiality. All documentation and communication regarding this research project will be held in the strictest confidence with respect to your identity, the identities of other administrators, schools, and district school boards. All will be given pseudonyms in the documentation process and in any published work that might emerge from this research. The information provided by you, the administrator in the interviews, will be used exclusively for research purposes. Your Director of Education will not have access to the data. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the research data which I will store in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years, after which all hard copies will be shredded and audio-recordings erased, once transcribed. You will have access to the final report, which will be located in the OISE/UT thesis collection in the R.W.B. Jackson Library. If you would like additional feedback, I will email you a brief summary of results upon completion of the project.

Duration. There will be up to three interviews with you that will last for about 90 minutes each. The interviews will be conducted at a mutually convenient place and time that does not interfere with your normal work duties.

Refusals. You are not under any obligation to participate in this research study. Participation is totally voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any interview questions or withdraw from the study at any time. The refusal to participate in the project will not result in any adverse consequences for you. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any time, I will destroy all data pertaining to you at the time of your withdrawal.

Inquiries and Concerns. If you are willing to assist me, please feel free to reply by email or by telephone. I am happy to answer any questions you might have about the research. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I look forward to hearing from you. For information about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca / 416-946-3273.

With deepest gratitude to you for considering my request, I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours very truly,

Anjili Pant

____________________________

Student Researcher:

Name: (Ms.) Anjili Pant
Ed.D. Candidate, OISE/UT
Phone Number: [personal phone number]
Email: anjili.pant@mail.utoronto.ca

Thesis Supervisor:

Name: Dr. Suzanne Stiegelbauer
Professor, OISE/UT
Phone Number: (416) 978-1181
Email: s.stiegelbauer@utoronto.ca
Consent:
Please complete the following consent document keeping one copy for your records and returning a copy to Anjili Pant in the attached self-addressed stamped envelope. Your signature below indicates that you have carefully read the information provided above. You understand that participation in this research is voluntary, and that you have willingly consented to give contact information such as your name and school phone number or email address if you want to participate in this project. Your signature also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. You may withdraw your consent at any time without any consequences.

Please check the appropriate box for each line:

I consent to:

[ ] Participate in this study.

[ ] Be interviewed for this study.

[ ] Be audio-recorded for this study.

[ ] I do not give consent to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____________________________________________

Position: ___________________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________
Appendix E
Semistructured Interview Questions:
Administrators

Research Questions:

*How have the attributes, experiences and motivations of female public elementary school administrators of colour contributed to their entry into administration? Specifically:*

1. What attributes did the women of colour have to become administrators?

2. How did women of colour overcome barriers they encountered entering administration?

3. What motivation did women of colour have to become administrators?

*Questions to be asked of participants in the study* (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 30)

1. **Tell me about your early life and family:**
   - Where were you born? What is your birth date? Where have you lived throughout your life? What was your family like?
   - What experiences in your early life do you identify as important in becoming an administrator?

2. **What were the attributes you had in your early life that you identify as important in becoming an administrator?**

3. **Were there any older women of colour in your early life that you looked up to and who gave you a sense of aspiring to be as successful as they were?**

4. **Were there any hardships you overcame in your early life? If so, how did you overcome them? What did you do? What happened as a result?**

5. **Tell me about your adult life:**
   - What experiences as an adult do you identify as important in becoming an administrator?
• Was there a particular individual or individuals, or event that influenced your choice to enter administration?

6. What attributes do you have that you identify as important in becoming an administrator?

• Do you feel you have resilient qualities such as - determination, self-discipline, optimism, social competence, family or mentor support, time management skills, confidence?

7. What motivated you as an adult to consider becoming an administrator? How did this impact you into taking action to enter into administration?

• Some studies I have examined have identified supports that may or may not have influenced you – networks (mentors, role models, family support), leadership skills and personal attributes, commitment to race/ethnic community, spiritual connection.

• What do you think? Do any of them fit in some way?

8. Were there any barriers you overcame entering into administration? If so, how did you overcome them? What did you do? What happened as a result?

• I’m going to mention a number of factors identified in studies I have examined, that might have influenced you or not – racism and marginalization, sexism, lack of power or access to power.

• What do you think? Do any of them fit in some way?

9. What recommendations do you think will help aspiring female school administrators of colour?

• What should they be cautious about?

• What should they avoid?

• What should they pursue?

10. What provincial or school district policies, if implemented, would help aspiring and current administrators of colour reach their goals?