

IN THE SILENCE OF HER FRIENDS:
A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE, AGE, AND
LEADERSHIP IN THE DISMISSAL OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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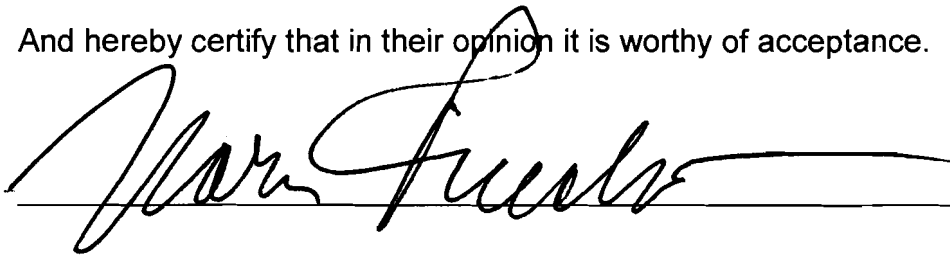
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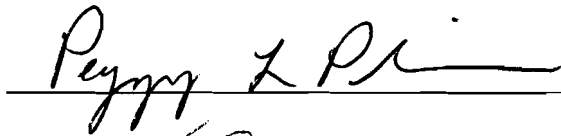
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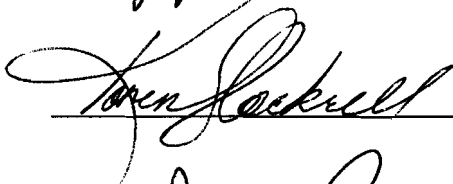
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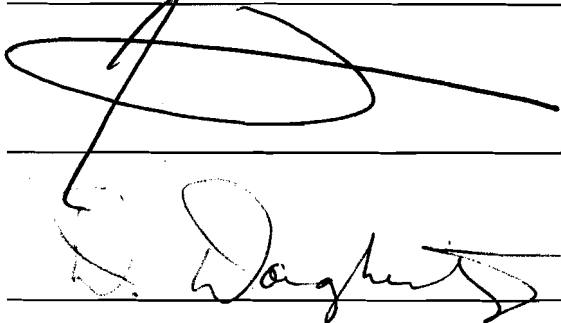












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DEDICATION

To my dear husband Paul: thank you for supporting me as I took 'my turn'!

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IN THE SILENCE OF HER FRIENDS: INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE,
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SUPERINTENDENT

Barbara Morrow Williams

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ABSTRACT

Research interests in social conditions of women in leadership roles underlie this case study which explores the scarcely published voices of African American women in the superintendency of public education. This case study of the career of Dr. Charlie Mae Knight and her experiences in an urban district in California may contribute to the knowledge and literature of the superintendent's social capital and her ability to exercise political power equally with primary stakeholders in her district and in her community. Interpreting Dr. Knight's experiences may increase knowledge about the challenges faced by African American women, and by women generally as they balance competing roles as educational leaders and as political leaders in urban communities undergoing ecological succession.

Chapter 1 Introduction

A research interest in representing the rarely-heard voices of African American women in leadership positions in public education, specifically those in the role of superintendent, motivated this investigation. The marked scarcity or total absence of the women in published research suggested that the few who have served as superintendents may be able to share experiences that are especially rich and deep. This study focuses on the career of Dr. Charlie M. Knight, whose experiences as superintendent in an urban California school district will contribute to the knowledge and literature about women, particularly African-American women, in leadership. The specific experiences of Dr. Knight in her role as the superintendent of the Ravenswood School District in East Palo Alto, California, suggested the need to fully explore the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership and its impact on her career, on a school district, and on the surrounding community.

As I researched the topic of women public school superintendents, the lost or missing voices of African American women in the published research literature was at once obvious and puzzling, even without the observations of Alston (in Brunner, 1999), Brunner (1999), Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000), and Jackson (in Brunner, 1999) to this effect. The thin representation of Black female voices suggested to me that their districts lacked the global importance of those of White superintendents, usually male; or perhaps as Brunner and

Peyton-Caire (2000) observed, Black women superintendents just did not exist in critical numbers and as a consequence, they were invisible for all intents and purposes. Jackson (in Brunner, 1999) noted it was not until the 1970's that women superintendents began to be appointed in any number. At the time of Brunner's (1999) text, White women were less than 10 percent of the incumbent superintendents, and Black women were incumbents in even lower percentages.

Black women are doubly marginalized in society, as females and African Americans, and the voices of marginalized people are seldom heard. For example, at the time of Jackson's research, at least 24 African-American women had retired from the superintendency, some having served in at least two districts, and at least 33 Black women were incumbent superintendents. Yet of that group of 56 women, only two of their lives have been the subject of recent studies on African American women in the superintendency (Jackson, 1999). The late Dr. Barbara Sizemore was the subject of two case studies, one by Arnez (1981) and the other autobiographical (1986) centering on her tenure in the Washington, D.C. public schools. Dr. Sizemore left the superintendency and became a professor, later retiring from DePaul University in Chicago. Revere (1989) wrote a case study of Velma Dolphin Ashley, superintendent in the Black township of Boley, Oklahoma from 1944 to 1956, probably the first Black woman superintendent (Brunner, 2000; Jackson, 1999, in Brunner, 1999).

For the remainder, history has been mostly silent on the roles played by women (Grogan, 1996), and by Black women in particular, as public school leaders. Jackson observed that in a field [like education] in which statistics on all

topics are routinely gathered, little official data was available on the gender of superintendents. Brunner noted that there was a "small, developing body of literature" (Brunner and Peyton-Caire, 2000) focused on women in the superintendency, although there was still little published specifically about Black women or other female superintendents of color. The research was more representative of white men who dominate educational administration programs and curricula with their perspectives, which often take precedence over the perspectives of others (Brunner and Peyton-Caire, p. 534).

It is important to note here that there are numerous *unpublished* dissertations about African-American women in the superintendency, although Alston's dissertation accepted in 1996 made the transition to publication. As a consequence of the exclusion from scholarship however, as Collins (2000) observed, Black women's realities, including those realities experienced as public education leaders, were negated and excluded from mainstream academic discourse, leaving Black women to exist in the 'both / and' or 'outsider- within' social location: inside and privy to the inner workings of the culture, but marginalized from the white female orientation of feminist scholarship, and marginalized as well from the Black male orientation of Black social and political thought (p.12).

Statement of the Problem

The initial research problem that this study addressed, therefore, was the dearth of research on African American women superintendents. I found intriguing the idea that too few Black women superintendents existed to create a

critical mass for research and publication. I grew up in California, attended public schools in kindergarten through high school, and I was aware not only of Black women teachers and principals, but also assistant superintendents who were women and a few who were African-American and women. For me and other girls and young women, these women were role models and leaders in our communities in a generalized context, not in education alone.

My study of Dr. Knight's experiences is the story of a unique African American woman in a social context that is unique yet represents broader issues in U.S. society. As associate state superintendent of public schools for elementary education, followed by positions as public school superintendent in two California districts in the late 20th Century, she negotiated some of the most treacherous political terrain a superintendent can encounter. Of particular interest at this place and time is how she negotiated the linkages between the school community and the community at large, which often played out as her ability to negotiate the linkage between education and politics. At the time of this writing, California continued to be the site of dramatic social and political changes brought by equally dramatic shifts in the demographics of the region. Public schools sit at the nexus of the social and political phenomena that all Californians experienced in one way or another, particularly in urban areas. Dr. Knight's experiences as an urban superintendent in an area of shifting demographics in the Peninsula may enlighten our knowledge of the role of the superintendent's social capital, including her ability to leverage that capital and her ability to exercise equal power with the primary stakeholders, particularly business and

government interests, in her community. By examining her social capital as an individual, we can learn more about the ability of African American women specifically and women leaders in general to manage and to sustain referent power in their districts and in their communities (Spillane, Hallett & Diamond, 2003). Finally, we can examine how all of these factors affected her ability to leverage her stocks of social capital in her community and in her profession.

Dr. Knight became the highest ranking Black woman in California education when she was named associate state superintendent of schools in 1978. The Lynwood School District, a public school k-12 district contiguous with Los Angeles, named her superintendent in 1981. She followed the Lynwood superintendency with the same post in the Ravenswood District in East Palo Alto, a small city on the California Peninsula in 1985. By far, her most lengthy and consequential experience as superintendent was in the Ravenswood School District, where she experienced two critical events which affected her career and the community around her. Amid the controversy that had come to characterize and to energize her experiences as superintendent, she left the district near the end of the 2003 academic year. The social construction of both of these critical incidents, however, was facilitated by the media and its relentless investigations of Dr. Knight and the Ravenswood School District for nearly five years. The role of the press, particularly the *San Jose Mercury News* must be considered as critical in Dr. Knight's, and the community's, experiences.

By the time she agreed to leave her post, Dr. Knight was seventy-one years old and still presented a vibrant image and a voice that expressed strong

opinions about the education of urban students (Retrieved on June 7, 2003, from <http://www.nsba.org/conference/daily/040603-12.cfm>). Her tenures as a superintendent spanned nearly 30 years, and through interviews with her, I explored the rich and deep experiences that would provide a significant narrative backdrop to the research on women, especially African-American women who aspire to the superintendency.

Moreover, although Dr. Knight was beleaguered by various forces during her tenures as superintendent, she nevertheless survived, and that survival is a road map for those women who would aspire to the superintendency. Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) noted also that the scarcity of information on Black female superintendents has had a chilling effect on the aspirations of Black female graduate students who aspired to that position. As a professor in what Brunner termed "our vastly white Department of Educational Administration" at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and knowing the importance of role models, Brunner asked questions such as: What is it like to be a Black woman who aspires to the superintendency? Where and to whom does a Black woman look when considering the position? (Brunner and Peyton-Caire, p. 533).

One critical area that Brunner documented for further study was the tension between the White male business community's priorities or interests and what is best for the urban, inner city community, especially the African-American community. Tensions often play out in criticism of the management of urban schools coupled with demands for privatization of schools and school services, and conflicts over governance and taxation. "In a time when urban districts are in

crisis this tension needs to be out in the open and understood for what it is." (Brunner and Peyton-Caire, 2000, p. 545) In a related passage, Alston (in Brunner, Ed., 1999) cited Barbara Sizemore's observation that Black superintendents' efforts to develop their communities are linked to society's treatment of Blacks and Black leadership, and these are challenges that remain for Black women superintendents (p.526). These observations from Brunner, Alston, and Sizemore informed the development of the research questions.

Research questions

I explored three primary issues in the dissertation:

- How, if at all, did the intersection of race, gender, age, and leadership style influence Dr. Knight's role as superintendent?
- What was the interaction between Dr. Knight's identity and leadership style and the social context (economic, demographic, political) of the community?
- How did Dr. Knight mobilize her social capital as a resource for the community generally and the school district in particular? For her personally, in the challenges she faced in the district and in the community as superintendent?
- What other dimensions of her identity and social context influenced her experiences as superintendent?

Theoretical frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks guide this study: Feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding 1991), including Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000), an

iteration of Feminist standpoint epistemology, and social capital theory. Standpoint provided the perspective from which to observe and understand Dr. Knight's actions and experiences; and it enabled the use of emotion in my research, a process that is not a purely intellectual exercise, but a process of exploration and discovery that is felt deeply (Gilbert, 2001). Social capital (Bourdieu, 1991, Lin, 2000; Spillane, Hallett & Diamond, 2003) provided the social context in which her experiences took place, in the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership. Equally important in the context of urban education, however, is the role of social capital in the civic capacity of the community and the ability of the superintendent to expand the stock of social capital in her role as leader not just of the district, but also of the community.

Women superintendents, especially Black women superintendents, are women of rank and power, yet Black women are still marginalized in the intersection of gender, race, age, and class (Collins, 2000; Jackson, in Brunner, Ed., 1999). Dr. Knight has a unique standpoint and serves as a voice for the experiences of women in the margins of higher levels of educational administration. To this end, the preliminary overlaying paradigms for the research include Feminist standpoint epistemology and Black Feminist epistemology (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1997; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Dorothy Smith (1999) noted, however, that exposing women's experiences alone often obscured the underlying structure of women's oppression to them, the oppressed. She argued that women's vision of the structure of their own oppression was obscured in modern capitalism: "The everyday world is not fully

understandable within its own scope. It is organized by social relations neither fully apparent in it, nor contained in it.” (Smith, in Gorelick, Ed., 1991, p. 464)

Hartsock suggested an interpretation of the effects of hidden oppressive social relationships that was perhaps more activist-oriented than Smith's. First, Hartsock agreed that if the ruling class and gender have the power to structure ideology, reality and perception, then every day material reality will obscure the causes of oppression, just as Smith noted. Hartsock argued, however, that these hidden oppressive relationships can and are discovered by the oppressed themselves when they struggle together to end their oppression and change their situation (in Gorelick, Ed., p.465).

The importance of a figure like Dr. Knight is that her experiences may lead to the discovery and exposures of the hidden oppressive relationships that restrain other women in their aspirations to the superintendency and serve as a key to the ending of the marginalization and oppression of female superintendents, particularly Black female superintendents. Women superintendents, those who are African American and those who are not, can become “...groups formed by their oppression and marginalization but sharing enough experiences to have the possibility of coming to understand their situation in ways than can empower their oppositional movement.” (Hartsock, 1997)

The second theory framing the study is social capital, which provided a lens to examine Dr. Knight's actions, including her social influence and her social leverage as a leader in her school district and as a leader in the broader

community. Social capital used here as a theoretical framework is appropriate because it enables insight into the critical relationship between Dr. Knight as superintendent and her ability to navigate in the community in which she worked and lived. Bourdieu (1991) analogized capital -- economic, cultural, and social -- to powers over a field. Together, these comprised the symbolic capital that results in prestige, reputation, fame, and the like, which in turn results in the holder being recognized as legitimate (p. 230). Bourdieu theorized that individuals acquire dispositions (*habitus*) that incline them to act or to react in certain ways in the course of their daily lives (p. 12). Training and learning from childhood are influential in structuring dispositions, he observed, and as a result, *habitus* was a reflection of a person's social class upbringing and perhaps more importantly, determined her trajectory in life. These durable dispositions became the cultural capital of the person, and the value of that capital was determined by the perception and recognition of it by others as legitimate in that field (p. 230). Social capital is a generalized construct that encompasses cultural and economic capital as well, and can be applied to the analyses of professional experiences in the superintendency and in the community at large.

The literature supports the general notion that social capital is distributed differently across gender and ethnic groups as well as other social groupings of individuals. Lin (2000) observed that men and women participate in organizations with differently embedded resources, resulting in network diversity and size which can, in turn, be brought to bear upon the resolution of issues and challenges in a district. Pitner and Ogawa (1981) observed that while

superintendents were vehicles who translated community preferences into elements of their districts' structures, they had to possess the judgment and the wisdom, the cultural capital if you will, to interpret and to prioritize those preferences. Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) noted the importance of cultural capital in particular, to teachers' attribution of legitimacy, power, and respect to school administrator; they found, for example, that the higher the attribution of 'ways of being' attributed to principals, the more they were perceived as leaders. Similarly, Petersen and Short (2000) found that board president and superintendent relations were enhanced by the board president's perception of the superintendent as high in social style and social influence.

In one of her last public speeches as a superintendent, Dr. Knight held that board members needed to dedicate themselves to children, and they needed to persevere. "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for just about anything," she said (Retrieved on June 7, 2003 from <http://www.nsba.org/conference/daily/040603-12.cfm>). Alston (in Brunner, Ed., 1999) observed that Black women superintendents "make community" wherever Black people live, and the same spirit is evident in the districts that Black women lead. Making community means creating the institutions, the social networks that children need to survive.

Study Methodology

The design of the study was the introspective case study, which discloses how events are interpreted by the person experiencing those events (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). The case study design is appropriate because it is the study of

the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995). Dr. Knight's story as superintendent occurred in the social context of urban public education, urban politics, and the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership. The case study approach facilitated the complete telling of her story, the descriptions of the circumstances in which it unfolded, and the important lessons that are inherent in her experiences.

I gathered preliminary narrative data from Dr. Knight under a University of Missouri, Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board ("IRB") approved feasibility study. I decided to use the techniques embedded in narrative analysis because I anticipated that as a researcher, I would be confronted by incredibly diverse and voluminous amounts of information about Dr. Knight's experiences as superintendent and as a Black woman from those who know her, those who wrote about her, but especially from the woman herself. Her personal stories about her life as a superintendent and as a woman of color are not merely a way of telling me and others about her life. As a respondent, her narratives particularized experiences in her life.

...the meaning of what someone says is not simply its content (ideational); how something is said (textual) in the context of the shifting roles of speaker and listener (interpersonal) is critical also. Narrative analysis provides methods for examining, and relating meaning at all three levels (Riessman, 1993, p. 2).

Under a new IRB specifically tailored for the dissertation, I conducted additional face to face, audio-recorded interviews with her to gather more narrative information, including names of additional people in the community who provided insight into her standpoint. While I asked her to identify people she believed to be relevant to understanding her standpoint, I identified other participants myself through newspaper accounts and interviews with state and local education officials who had been involved in some of the litigation with her, as well as community members. The additional Informants who were interviewed enabled me to gain a fuller picture of Dr. Knight's experiences and to triangulate the information I receive from her, from the other Informants, and from the media accounts of the events in Ravenswood and in East Palo Alto. I used public documents, including legal documents, to triangulate the information that I receive through narratives and interviews, which enhanced the validity and reliability of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I used telephone interviews to member check the information I gleaned from her narratives, and I met with Dr. Knight in person for member checks. I also asked other sources to agree to member check my recollection of their responses.

Role and identity of the researcher

My own personal connection to Dr. Knight is that we share the experience of being Black women often objectified as the “other” (Collins, 2000). Treating Black women as “other” denies them the full status of human subjects. Black women have occupied the position where a series of binary constructs converge: for

example, restricting access to opportunities for leadership mentoring or preparation and then claiming that Black women do not have enough experience to lead. As an African American woman who has experienced the “other” social location, I can conceive the research questions that are suggested by her experiences and those who have experienced working with her. I can apply my intellectual and personal knowledge from my own experiences with marginalization and power to my research with her.

As a researcher, I also may play a role that allows me to have an “angle of vision” (Collins, p.11) not seen by the participant, in this case, Dr. Knight. I found this “angle of vision” particularly helpful as I explored the role of the press in socially constructing reality not only for Dr. Knight, but for the school children of Ravenswood School District. Feminist standpoint and Black feminist thought paradigms, coupled with social capital theory, create a framework to access those social relations that create the structure of oppression faced by African-American women aspire to the superintendency and those who now work as superintendents. Working with Dr. Knight, I was able to explore, question, and test theoretical understandings that revealed the hidden underlying structure of oppression that acts as a barrier to ambition. For example, I understand that even though Black women may encounter issues based on gender that are similar to women from other race or ethnic groups, Black women will experience the superintendency or leadership differently, and their standpoint will derive from those experiences as African Americans (Collins 2000, Alston 2000). Further, I was able to explore the genesis of the conflict-of-interest charges against her:

Were they the product of bad judgment on her part, or were they part of what Collins refers to as the dialectics of oppression and activism of Black women (Collins 2000, p. 3)? That is, were the allegations against her the county prosecution's attempts to silence her activism in the community on behalf of the impoverished urban community and the education of its children? Or perhaps the prosecutions were simply politically motivated, ham-fisted attempts to force her to retire from her long tenure in the district? Through her narratives, I was able to probe her theories on how society works for Black women and for predominantly and historically Black communities. Social capital theory provided the context and the perspective from which to analyze her actions and their outcomes in her community.

Significance of the study

In her recommendations for future studies, Jackson (in Brunner, Ed., 1999) suggested that there is a need to do in-depth studies of some of the Black women who, absent from America's history, have pioneered nevertheless in the superintendency. She contends that there are stories to be shared with a larger audience because they are the needed role models in education, especially in public school positions of power and authority. I believe that Dr. Knight's is such a story. Only one version of this story was shared with a larger audience through the relentless coverage by the media, which constructed a nearly inescapable reality for Dr. Knight. I expected to find that the controversy that surrounded her in her leadership role as superintendent can be viewed from the lenses of her actions not only as a superintendent, but also because of her gender and race.

Experiences of a superintendent like Dr. Knight will provide invaluable lessons to women aspiring to be superintendents.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

To better interpret the professional life of Dr. Charlie Mae Knight and how the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership led to the critical events that shaped her last position as public school superintendent, I reviewed the literature in two spheres. These writings also provide theoretical scaffolding for qualitative case study methodology (Creswell, 1994; Stake, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The first sphere of writing is the theoretical framework provided by *Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies*; and the second is found in a collection of writings from the perspective of *Social Capital Theory*. These epistemological and theoretical frameworks were chosen because they enrich, enlighten, or inform interpretations of Dr. Knight's knowledge and story. In this chapter I will explain how I integrated these two different perspectives into a coherent conceptual framework for understanding Dr. Knight's career as an educational leader.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies

To operationalize the case study methodology, I used Feminist Standpoint Epistemology (Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 1997) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989), an iteration of standpoint theory which influenced and informed the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data. Feminist standpoint epistemology is appropriate as a theoretical scaffold to examine the life of an African American woman leader because it generates knowledge based upon the experiences of women; it also allows the examination of the similarities of women leaders, for example, while at the same time acknowledging their

differences in identity. This all-inclusive view of Black women professionals allows the examination of multiple perspectives of professional life, and through its expansive description, creates linkages to the experiences of other women. In particular, these epistemological and theoretical frameworks supported the idea that one woman's life could be the starting point for scientific inquiry, and feminist research into women's lives could produce knowledge based on "...more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations than does conventional research" (Harding, 1991, p. 119).

Starting with Dr. Knight's life as the objective location, Feminist standpoint epistemology as a theoretical framework gives voice to the "outsider within" (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1991), the woman who is marginalized from the mainstream, yet an integral part of it. Giving voice to the outsider within enables us to access the knowledge she has gained from her strategic position. Dr. Knight's perspective on her life, her *feelings* about her life and all that affected it, including conditions that oppressed and liberated her, are brought into the center of analysis in feminist standpoint epistemology. Dougherty and Krone (2000) observed that feminist standpoint epistemologies should theorize similarities, material reality, and communal agency while being sensitive to differences, multiple realities, and individual agency (p. 18). Feminist scholarship is reflective of the experience that comes from marginalization (Cirksena & Cuklanz, 1992). That marginalization is embedded in dualisms that legitimize all women's subordination in social institutions and relegate women to peripheral, secondary, or inferior status: reason and emotion, public and private, nature and culture,

subject and object, and mind and body (p.20). My investigations into the life of Dr. Knight, influenced by feminist standpoint epistemology, unearthed the marginalization and dualisms that contextualized her professional life and impacted her personal life, and suggested that they may be at the root cause of the critical incidents that ended her last superintendent's position. Further, Feminist standpoint epistemology provided a framework for giving voice to her interpretations and perceptions of her experiences and to mining important knowledge that can be shared for the benefit of other women leaders, as well.

Collins (2000) identified a specific perspective, an "angle of vision" that Black women bring to discussion of women's lives not only as females, but as African Americans. Centering the discussion of Dr. Knight's life *in* her life necessarily meant that the experiences which relate to her color must be included as essential to understanding how she arrived at her standpoint. She described herself as political, and Black feminist thought enabled a more complete perspective of Dr. Knight's political reality, and the social reality she experienced as a consequence and as a benefit. Black feminist thought also created a framework and brought a fresh perspective that clarified the leadership experiences of women who experience a diversity of social and political realities (hooks, 2000).

Critical to a feminist standpoint analysis is the emotional context of women's lives that "distinctive content", as Harding refers to it (p. 122). In this review of the literature, I included those works from among a growing body of research which opened the door to explore the particular forms of emotion

shaping both Dr. Knight's response to the circumstances that engulfed her, and those that shaped my own response as a researcher to her situation: during the research interviews and field work, for example, sometimes I tried to objectively observe these emotions as they worked for her or against her, and sometimes I empathetically revisited them with her through dialogue and questioning. I included those works that specifically acknowledged the role of emotion in qualitative research about women and conducted by women researchers. Those writings that acknowledged the role of emotion in research, but at the same time did not use feminist methodologies were excluded from my consideration in this review of the literature.

Social capital theory was important to understanding the social and political contexts of urban education. Superintendents do not work in a vacuum but they work instead within a vast, complex arena of social class, race, and organizational politics and local, state and federal politics which affect how their organizations function, and how they function within their organizations. Especially in the instance of urban education, superintendents also work within the context of urban politics. Social capital theory provides a framework to make sense of urban education and urban politics from both the individual and the collective levels.

Review of the Literature

Feminist Standpoint Theory and Black Feminist Thought

"...standpoint theory requires causal analyses not just of the micro processes in the laboratory but also of the macro tendencies in the social order, which shape scientific practices" Harding (1991, p.149). Sandra Harding's (1991) writing,

Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's lives, foregrounded the discussion of objectivity among feminist scholars that lies at the core of Standpoint epistemology. It provided an overview of Feminist standpoint epistemology as a theoretical framework that not only supported new concepts of objectivity, but also reaffirmed the idea that the opposing perspectives of women like Dr. Knight have value as a source of general social knowledge. The dyadic concepts of "women and knowledge", and "women and authority" were unknown, or at least unspoken in Western thought prior to what Harding referred to as "distinctively feminist theories of knowledge" (p. 105). Conventionally, woman was not considered to be the source of information, authority, or knowledge, about other women, or even about her own condition. Historically, perspectives of women's lives had never been considered a source of general social knowledge (p. 106). Harding articulated the challenge to the dominant epistemology and philosophy of science held by those who still questioned the existence of differences between men's perspectives and women's perspectives of objectivity, rationality, and scientific method, and who questioned even the legitimacy of women's perspectives (p. 105).

Feminist theories of knowledge arose from several sources, sparked perhaps by the frustration felt by women social scientists and biologists who tried to add new or nontraditional ideas of women and gender to the existing knowledge in their fields (p. 105). Harding distinguished the emerging feminist empiricism by focusing on discussions between two major approaches to a feminist epistemology: 1) those that had begun to identify *Feminist standpoint*

epistemology, which had a Marxian influence and 2) those that followed the *Spontaneous feminist empiricism*, which came from the conventional scientific realms of biology and the social sciences. Harding articulated the two positions by first exploring exactly what *scientific objectivity* was and how could it be geared to recognize women's lives as sources of knowledge; and second, she explored the issues around the possible taint to the legitimacy of feminist epistemology when many considered the feminist perspective to be *politically* guided.

Harding observed that Spontaneous Feminist Empiricists reflected their origins in the scientific realms of the social sciences and the biological sciences; they argued for more scientific rigor and care in existing norms and methods of research as a way of eliminating what they saw as the "bad science" that led to the *nonobjective*, sexist and androcentric biases in research. Feminist empiricists perceived feminist empiricism to be "an epistemological strategy for justifying the challenges to traditional assumptions" (p. 111). Harding noted that their conservatism illuminated the importance of feminist research in biology and the social sciences, but did not address gendered differences in the production of knowledge.

In contrast, Feminist Standpoint empiricists using a Marxian analysis explained how the structural relationship between men and women had consequences for the production of knowledge. "The assertion is that human activity, or 'material life,' not only structures but sets limits on human understanding: what we do shapes and constrains what we can know" (p.120).

If the context of human activity is constructed, for example, as the dominator and the subservient, then those in the opposing groups (like men and women) will see things from their points of view, "...and in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse" (Hartsock, *Feminist Standpoint* in Harding, p. 120)

Harding (1991) observed that a feminist epistemology may have seemed to be a contradiction in terms when one considered the dominant meaning of epistemology in Western thought:

Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of claims to knowledge.....The epistemologist...is concerned not with whether we are justified in claiming knowledge of some whole class of truths, or, indeed, whether knowledge is possible at all. (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in Harding, p.106).

The general reliability of knowledge claims in Western thought was based on an idea of scientific objectivity, but Harding questioned the suppositions of the taken-for-granted knowledge implied in the conventional meaning of epistemology. She observed that conventional epistemology inherently constructed a false dichotomy that would, on its face, discredit feminist inspired research as biased, political, or ideological. Harding noted instead that *Feminist* epistemology argued against the idea that *feminism* was a political movement

that produced biased opinions or ideology rather than “scientifically objective” knowledge from research motivated by women’s concerns. She questioned the idea that only men (and men from the dominant races and classes, at that) could be the subjects or agents of socially legitimate knowledge, and suggested the idea that socially situated truths, historical truths, could count as knowledge, and they need not require “point-of-viewlessness” on the part of the researcher. She questioned further whether there can be “disinterested knowledge” in a society that is deeply stratified by gender, race, and class. (p. 109). She refined this argument in a later, related essay:

The starting point of standpoint theory is that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other such politics shaping the very structure of society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them (Harding, 1993, p. 54).

Harding observed that women’s situation in a society that is stratified by gender produced “distinctive resources” for the new feminist research (Harding, 1991, p. 119), and they in turn produced more distinctive, new ways of looking at women’s lives, ways that were ignored by conventional researchers. Standpoint feminists posited that women were “strangers” or “outsiders” to the social order dominated by men in dominant groups who found a closer fit between their life needs and desires and the social order (p.125). The logical result perhaps of

being excluded from the design and production of the social order, standpoint theorists were not afraid to use social values and political agendas in new ways to examine women's lives, particularly from the perspectives of race and class.

The feminist theory of knowledge met with criticisms of essentialism or universalism, from two opposite perspectives. One group of critics failed to see the value of feminist standpoint; they asked how it could provide any distinctively feminist analysis at all if it purported to consider the many distinctive kinds of social experiences, perspectives, activities, and struggles of women across their many cultural groups (p. 175). The other group, critics of postmodernist thought, suggested that standpoint theories reinstated the Enlightenment-inspired notion that a homogeneous women's experience, or activity, or struggle, or perspective served as the grounds for feminist claims. That Enlightenment construct of the socially "homogeneous," unitary, willful, and autonomous subject of Western science, reason, ethics, and history was one society was better off without, they argued (p. 174).

Harding acknowledged the apparent contradictions in feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint borrowed from Marxist theory, but Harding distinguished and compared major tenets of the two theoretical frameworks. Marxist theory focused on the uneven power differential between the proletarian worker who sells his labor and the owner of capital who buys it; Marx marginalized the gender, racial, and other cultural or superstructural differences among proletariat workers (p. 175), although followers of Marxist theory would apply its analysis to a variety of relationships that supported imperialism, class

oppression, and racism. Harding emphasized that while Marxist theory turned on the differences created by the relationships between workers and capitalists, similarly, standpoint focused on the differences created by the relationships between women and men (p. 176). As a result, Harding further observed, standpoint epistemology appeared to be persuasive and to resonate with those theorists who centered their analyses and searches for the knowledge located in the differences of various women's lives (p. 176).

Again, as Marxist theory focused on the difference in the relationship between the worker and the capitalist to the exclusion of other distinguishing characteristics among proletariat workers, according to Harding's analysis, so the logic of standpoint epistemology was attractive to so many "alternative sciences" (p. 177) because it allows an oppressed group to center the view of the world that it has developed, or its *standpoint*. In apparent contradiction, Harding conceded the essentialist *aura* of standpoint theory:

...one can see that standpoint theory contains within it tendencies to both ignore and to emphasize differences within the groups on which it focuses---in our case, differences between women or between men. Feminist analyses do tend to slide away from focusing on differences between women as long as actual analyses from the perspective of lives of marginalized women are not specifically under way. General statements about the standpoint of women or the feminist stand point feel as if they

must be assuming gender essentialism, and some people who use the language of standpoint theory may well be essentialists. (p. 177).

She also observed, however, that adherents to standpoint theory reprised the same single focused energy displayed by Marx, and centered their analysis on the differences between the genders, and not on the differences between men or between women. At the same time, Harding observed further,

...standpoint theory also provides important resources for meeting the challenge to emphasize differences between women.... the logic of analysis that accrues to starting research from the lives of the dominated gender requires acknowledgment of the similar advantage to be gained by starting from the lives of dominated groups in oppositional race, class, sexuality, or cultural relations (p.178).

Harding's work provided the theoretical backdrop for understanding the relationship between sexism and racism, which from the view at the center of Dr. Knight's experiences, would severely impact her professional career and her private life. Harding recalled that "those policies and practices which discriminate against women will usually, perhaps always, discriminate in different ways against women in different races (p. 179). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) in her book *Black feminist thought; Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, defined Black Feminist thought as consisting of theories or specialized thought produced by African-American women intellectuals designed

to express a Black woman's standpoint epistemology, *her* way of knowing. The ethic of caring, an important dimension that Collins added to the construct, suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process. Collins argued for the socially situated knowledge of African-American women and for Black women's agency. A sociologist, Hill drew from the perspective of standpoint theorists. She used the notions of "outsider / within" or both / and" to distinguish the unique marginalization of Black women in the dominant social order which allowed for a new "angle of vision" on oppression: women who are inside and privy to the inner workings of dominant White society, yet who are not a part of it (p. 13). Black feminist thought is important to the telling of Dr. Knight's story because it encourages the researcher to elicit her narrative, from her standpoint developed from her position as the "outsider / within" the social order as superintendent and as a woman of color. It is another way to access the knowledge gained from her angle of vision on oppression.

Collins challenged the suppression of knowledge produced by Black women by White, Black, males, and females in mainstream scholarship and political thought, while setting out a compelling argument for the scholarship of Black women intellectuals. Black feminist thought criticized the White patriarchal society for its triple oppression of Black women by gender, color, and class, but it also criticized the influence of White women's scholarship which often glossed over economic and social differences experienced by Black women and suppressed their ideas by attempting to co-opt and depoliticize Black feminist

ideas. Collins argued for the “thematic consistency” of collective, political thought and activism by Black women by raising the question, “Why are African-American women and our ideas not known, and not believed in?” (p. 3).

Collins noted that the dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of African-American women's ideas and intellectual activism in the face of that suppression constituted the political contextualization of U.S. Black feminist thought (p.3). Significantly, like Harding (1993), Collins noted how knowledge produced by Black women was suppressed for the advantage of the dominant culture.

Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absent of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization (p. 3).

Nevertheless, and in spite of genderized and racialized oppression, Collins (2000) observed how Black women have been able to produce intellectual work which has been the foundation of political activism, both as Blacks and as women. “The power of Black women was to make culture, to transmit folkways, norms, and customs, as well as to build shared ways of seeing the world that insured our survival.” (p. 210) Collins’ writing helped draw a strong connection between the idea that Black women have been able to sustain a culture that ensured survival and Dr. Knight’s efforts to lead not only an extremely impoverished school district, but to use her “power to make culture” to improve the lot of the community as well. Collins' own intellectual work articulated the way

in which African-American women's oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions: *economic, political, and ideological* (p. 5), three dimensions which she develops over the course of the book. She described the historic and economic dimensions of oppression through the gendered wages and working conditions of Black women across several historical eras.

Interdependent with work throughout these eras was the importance of education to improve working conditions for Black women and to "uplift the race" (p.210).

Again, I was able to draw parallels with Dr. Knight's efforts to improve the educational opportunities for families and children in her district. Collins' angle of vision through standpoint feminist epistemology enables another understanding of Dr. Knight's role in her community.

In Collins' analysis, an expectation of Black women's "appropriate" roles extended into the larger society through economic, political, and ideological dimensions. She drew together the intersection of the economic and the political dimensions of oppression with the ideological dimensions to complete the socially situated knowledge of Black women. Ideology refers to the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people (p. 5), and Collins takes on those who would suppress and depoliticize Black Feminist ideas. She noted the "symbolic inclusion" of Black Feminist writings in White dominated institutions or Women's Studies programs while Black women themselves were excluded or "othered" from the classrooms (p. 6). She also noted the attempts by U.S. Black intellectuals to limit Black women's political and social thought by relegating it to secondary status behind a male-defined ethos (p. 7). She argued that it was

illogical to think that Black women would exchange one type of oppression for another.

The importance of Collins' theoretical perspective to my work was threefold: first, she identified the intersection of race, gender, and class in the everyday, ordinary lives of Black women. Second, she articulated the interdependence of the economic, political and ideological dimensions of oppression in their lives. Third, (perhaps most important) Collins observed that it was an act of power for Black women to insist on self-definition. Collins, like Harding (1993), added another dimension to studying women's lives, especially the diverse lives of women like Dr. Knight residing in an urban context. Harding (1993) and Collins (2000) both offered Feminist standpoint epistemology as a critical and fresh way of listening to women tell about their lives and experiences, and the understanding that it is from that location that feminist research should begin. For Harding, emotion provided a distinctive content to women's accounts (Harding, p. 122), particularly to women's stories of oppression. Collins (2000) wrote that the "ethic of caring", including emotion and empathy, was essential to the knowledge validation process. Feminist research enabled me to include emotion as part of knowledge validation process with Dr. Knight; how I felt and how she felt were key ingredients as we reviewed her life.

"...to know the phenomenon about which [researchers] write and to be fully honest about how they came to their interpretation, one can argue that it is dishonest *not* to draw on their own emotional experience ..." Gilbert (2001).

As Wincup (2001) noted in her article, *Feminist research with women awaiting trial: the effects on participants in the qualitative research process*, the influence of Feminist Standpoint Epistemology had implications for how I used emotion in my research, but it did not prevent my using mainstream theoretical concepts in my analysis (in Gilbert, 2001, p. 22). In her research work with women Wincup observed that feminist researchers did not simply use pre-existing research techniques; rather, they adapted them to mesh with their gender-conscious theoretical position (p.20) to topicsthat are relevant to women's lives" (p. 22). Wincup's writing helped me to incorporate an emotional dimension to Feminist standpoint epistemology as centered my interpretations and analysis of Dr. Knight's experiences.

Similarly, Kathleen Gilbert (2001) in her chapter, *Why are we interested in emotions*, enabled me to reach inside and specifically call out my own empathetic reactions to Dr. Knight's experiences. Gilbert described how she began having dreams of her own daughter's death as she interviewed grieving parents who had lost a child (p.5). When she described them to her mentor Strauss (1998), he suggested that they were a "sophisticated form of going native".

The idea of going native had always been presented to me as a negative, something that would remove me from the role of scientist and shift me into the role of someone who had become too close to the phenomenon under study---something to be avoided at all costs. At the same time, I felt conflicted because

I had experienced the dreams as a positive, albeit painful, side of my interviews. (p. 5)

Instead of dreams, as a researcher I had flashbacks as I ran back the scene in front of me with Dr. Knight in the frame to a time when I worked with a charter school and endured significant emotional and financial sacrifice. At one point, I felt myself developing tightness in my chest accompanied by a sick feeling in my stomach. I clearly empathized enormously with both Dr. Knight and the charter school operator who she discussed with me, and like both women, I felt passionate about what I could accomplish with urban children through the school. Perhaps I, too, was going native, but I also believed, like Gilbert (2001, p.5), that my emotions were a positive, albeit painful, side effect; these emotions enabled me to experience the “ethic of caring” that Collins (2000) observed in Black women, and in its own way, enabled me to validate this part of Dr. Knight’s knowledge. The idea that surfaced to full expression by Dr. Knight was the same one that surfaced internally with me---that is, the sense that there is a quiet, insidious battle over urban education policy and conflicted feelings among some educators over not only how urban children should be educated, but whether poor and minority children should be educated at all. The difficulty of reforming the way public education is delivered to urban children, especially if it is to be delivered by Black and other adults, who are outside of the social order, appears to draw conflict and divert attention from the ostensible goal of educating children. Like Dr. Knight, adults who choose to join in the battle may find

themselves burdened with heightened, unflattering public scrutiny and the silence of their friends.

Gilbert also observed the phenomenon of the *co-authored narrative*, where the researcher and the researched contribute to a final text that moves through several filters from the initial telling through the final interpretation and reporting: "...at a minimum, researchers as well as participants filter everything they experience in the research process through their own biases, views, and feelings. (p. 6). Yet Gilbert also saw her self as an "emotional conduit" through which her participants were telling their story.

....ultimate goal of research is to enter the world of others in such a way as to allow the researcher to see life through their eyes. In order to do this, one cannot see this as a purely intellectual exercise, but as a process of exploration and discovery that is felt deeply—that is, research is experienced both intellectually and emotionally. (p. 9)

Gilbert (2001) and Wincup (2001), linked with Collins' (2000) ethic of caring, encourage empathy, a kind of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995), in investigators. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to know and to manage one's own emotions, to recognize emotions in others, and to handle relationships (i.e., handle emotions in others) as having "clear implications for high quality research efforts" (Gilbert, p. 11). Gilbert's and Wincup's works related well to interviewing women generally and specifically to my interviews with Dr. Knight.

Social Capital Theory

“...as they go about the tasks of leadership, people enact forms of capital. In valuing forms of capital enacted by others, followers attribute leadership to them. In this process, leaders make use of the capitals they possess, and followers value the forms of capital enacted by leaders.”

(Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003, p.3)

“Organizational members come to expect leaders to look, act, and think in ways that are consistent with the socially constructed meanings of *organizational leader and leadership.*” (Parker, 2001, p.45)

In this second sphere of the review of literature, *social capital* as an overarching term provided the theoretical framework in which to examine the disparate experiences in social institutions that lead women to develop their standpoints ...social capital refers to connections among individuals---social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19), and it informs those connections that are individual and between individuals, and those that are collective, that is, between groups, or between the individual and the group. First, social capital theory enabled the conceptualization of how persons from a gender, ethnic, or social class structure that differed from that in the dominant community fared in the broader community; of particular interest was how socialization may have differed for them. Second, using as lenses the literatures of organizational leadership, gender, race, age, and power, social capital theory provided critical perspectives

and fresh ways of thinking about how Dr. Knight's experiences as a woman of color, an educator, and a civic leader led to the development of her standpoint.

The writings of two scholars, Bourdieu (1991), and Lin (2000), were particularly helpful in applying social capital theory as a framework to understand components of Dr. Knight's life and the experiences that resulted from them. Each scholar used the concept of capital to describe how persons from different social classes, genders and race/ethnicities fared in the broader community.

Bourdieu (1991) in *Language and symbolic power*, analogized capital to powers over a field, powers which defined the chance of profit in a given field. He identified the fields, *economic*, *cultural* and *social*, as comprising symbolic capital that resulted in *prestige*, *reputation*, *fame*, and the like when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (p. 230). Closely related to capital was Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which he theorized as a set of dispositions that inclined people to act or react in certain ways in the course of their daily lives (p.12). Bourdieu believed that individuals acquired these dispositions through training and learning, particularly through childhood inculcation, and as a result, they inevitably reflected a person's social class upbringing. Further, dispositions were durable, generative, and transposable: they were inculcated in the person's subconscious and affected everything they did or said in the course of their daily lives. Structured dispositions became the person's *cultural capital*. The value of that capital was determined by the perception and recognition of it as legitimate in that field (p.230).

Lin's (2000) specific analyses of the influences of gender and race/ethnicity drew upon Bourdieu's basic theory of cultural capital to explain how individuals and groups developed stocks of social capital that could be recognized as legitimate in the broader community. Lin's analyses had important implications for Dr. Knight's experiences as a woman and as a Black woman in the California Peninsula community.

Lin observed that social capital was differentially distributed across different social groups; men's networks, for example, consisted of fewer kin and more non-kin, and included fewer neighbors but more co-workers, advisors, and friends. Women's networks had more kinship ties, and as a result, women had information that was more narrowly circumscribed than that of comparable groups of men. "The gender differential in network diversity and size is due partly to the fact that males and females participated in organizations with different embedded resources" (p. 787). If women were to fare differently in the community at large, Lin's analysis suggested, then they must assertively seek out those organizations or relationships that helped them to gain the knowledge important to power (Foucault, 1977) or to create beneficial networks that empower them in their communities, outside the regular kinship ties (Putnam, 2000).

Lin (2000) also analyzed the structural constraints imposed by race and socio-economic status and concluded that "people in lower socio-economic status tended to use local ties, *strong* ties, and family and kin ties" (p.789). Lin argued that inequality of social capital occurred when a certain group clusters at

relatively disadvantaged socio-economic positions, associating with those of similar socio-economic characteristics or group characteristics, or *homophily* (p. 787). Social groups occupy different socio-economic standings in society, went her argument, and this was a structural process; depending upon historical constructions, society has provided unequal opportunities to those occupying different socio-economic positions based on social class, race, gender or other ascribed or constructed characteristic. If members of a low ranking group cluster together and associate only with each other, they derive no benefit from the bonding (strong, to *get by*) ties (Putnam, 2000) with others like themselves. By contrast, those of higher ranking groups derive benefit from access to diverse socioeconomic strata through bridging (weak, to *get ahead*) ties (Putnam, p. 23).

Bourdieu's and Lin's analyses were important to this investigation because they added another dimension to understanding how the intersection of race, gender, and class may have functioned to create experiences in the everyday, ordinary life of Dr. Knight. For example, in interviews with Dr. Knight and with informants to this writing, I learned that Dr. Knight was extremely successful in making network connections for her school district, Ravenswood, with the foundations, government grants, and others who could provide both public and private sources of support for the district. Dr. Knight also said, however, that attempts to discredit her included (ironically) the fact that she had brought in "too much outside money" into the district. Using Bourdieu's analysis, one could argue that Dr. Knight's critics had attempted to devalue the capital she brought to the district by failing to perceive or to recognize her contributions to it.

Lin's analysis articulated just how race, gender, and class could intersect to confound Dr. Knight's roles as a public school superintendent in an economically depressed district, and as a community leader in an affluent region. Coupled with Collins' (2000) feminist standpoint analysis of the "outsider / within" experiences of Black women like Dr. Knight, Lin's analysis also served to articulate the interdependence of the economic, political and ideological dimensions of oppression in the lives of Black women. The analyses of Bourdieu, Lin, and Collins added depth to the significance of women's lives as the starting point for scientific inquiry and the idea that feminist standpoint unearthed new ways of understanding the dualisms that affected women's lives (Harding, 1993).

Leadership

Of particular interest in this writing was how women of color and women generally fared in the broader community as leaders. While there is room for more studies that contribute to the theoretical understanding of how women of color and women generally enact forms of capital for leadership in organizations, In their study, *Forms of capital and the construction of leadership; Instructional leadership in urban elementary schools*, Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) apply social capital theory to individuals and the attributions of leadership. The study did not control for race or gender when they queried respondent (n= 84) teachers' attitudes towards construction of leadership and their attributions of leadership to other teachers or administrators. It is significant, however, that the participants were more likely (70.2 per cent, or 59 participants) to cite *cultural capital*, that is, "the possession of certain interactive styles, habitual ways of

being and doing that are acquired through the life course and used in social interaction" (Spillane, et al., p. 7) when they considered administrators who were the leaders in the organizational culture.

In their application of social capital theory to enactment of capital in a school organization Spillane, et al. recalled Bourdieu (1991) and described capital as resources that are acquired, accumulated, and of value or worth in certain situations (p. 3). They argued further that construction of leadership occurs through an interaction process in which followers "construct others as leaders on the basis of valued forms of human capital (skills, knowledge, and expertise), cultural capital (ways of being), social capital (networks and relations of trust), and economic capital (material resources)" (p.2). Ultimately human capital shaped teachers' construction of leadership in other teachers, and cultural capital shaped teachers' construction of leadership in administrators.

The Spillane, Hallett & Diamond (2003) study was an important iteration of Bourdieu's (1991) concept that in a social structure, certain people actuate forms of capital that result in perceptions of legitimacy, or perhaps even "belonging" to the social structure. Further, these forms of capital affect the dispositions of individual actions and interactions of people within the structure, or what Bourdieu called *habitus* (Bourdieu, p. 12). The focus of Bourdieu's analysis of capital was based on an *interactive* style, and in the Spillane et al., (2003) study, capital was perceived as a *supportive* style (p. 7).

The implications for women, including women of color, in the interpretations of capital by Bourdieu and Spillane et al., have been found in the

value, or legitimacy, that employees place on the cultural style women brought into the social structure of the organization and whether, as a result, employees would have perceived or recognized women, especially women of color, as *legitimate* leaders. The Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) study and its conceptual bridge to Bourdieu (1991) formed an important link which contributes to understanding how to regard the professional experiences of women. Further, the studies contributed to fresh perceptions of understanding how those experiences may have contributed to the development of a woman's standpoint. It may be clearer, too, that how women may be perceived in the organizational structure would be determined by how they were socialized into the culture.

Allen (2000) and Bullis and Stout (2000) each examined how women are socialized into particular cultural roles in organizations. These roles can determine the attributions of leadership (Spillane, et al., 2003) to women. In "Learning the ropes", Allen (2000) examined "the process by which an individual enters and becomes integrated into organizational settings" (p. 177) through the lens of feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint allows the researcher to individualize women's experiences and to see in detailed relief the "metamorphosis period" (p. 181) where the woman works to be accepted into the organizational culture, internalizing rules and norms. Women, however, must often deal with particularly stressful "newcomer" (p. 185) treatment; this is especially true of Black women in non-traditional roles in organizations, including leadership. The result may influence communication processes (p. 185) that create inner struggles for the Black woman experiencing them, and may have an

overall negative effect on socialization into the organization (p. 194), and ultimately, attributions of leadership and legitimacy in the field (Bourdieu, 1991). Allen cited stereotypes ("beneficiary of affirmative action", "token", "mammy / caretaker", "matriarch") (Allen, p. 190) as controlling negative images (Collins, 2000) that interfere with socialization processes for Black women.

Bullis and Stout (2000) affirmed the use of feminist standpoint theory to examine the socialization of women into organization culture, enriching the definition of standpoint as achieved through reflexive struggle of the oppressed to define themselves (p. 58). They also enriched the definition of socialization, adding that it is a

...site, or a culturally defined set of processes that occur in identifiable locations, where the conditions, relationships, identities, and processes of interest to standpoint feminism are produced and reproduced. Specifically, socialization is a set of communicative processes that produce and reproduce relationships through which domination, subordination, and marginalization occurs. (p. 59).

By examining those on the outside of the social structure, Bullis and Stout advantaged the use of standpoint by beginning a scientific study of socialization at the point where women and other marginalized people came into organizations; "the notion of an organization member inherently relies on a nonmember" (p. 61). The researchers argued that by only examining those who transitioned *into* an organization, socialization scholarship overlooked those

people and processes that sustained "outsiders" who, in turn, were the invisible but necessary resource that sustained the notion of "insiders" (p. 61).

Understanding this dynamic was important and necessary to understanding the forms of oppression experienced by women and people of color, and thereby freeing them and their oppressors through that understanding.

The intersection of race and gender affected attributions and legitimacy of cultural capital and leadership in Parker's (2001) study of 15 African-American women leaders in organizations, their subordinates, and their supervisors. Parker found that leadership was a "localized, negotiated process of mutual influence" (p. 44). Echoing Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) and Bourdieu (1991), Parker found that "organizational members come to expect leaders to look, act, and think in ways that are consistent with the socially constructed meanings of *organizational leader and leadership*" (p. 45). Parker noted that traditional expectations of leadership were often at odds with the commonly held stereotypes of African American women (Allen, 2000; Collins, 2000); these stereotypes instead often use as a basis of analysis, White males, an expectation that silenced and undervalued the roles of women, and of Black women in particular. Parker used feminist standpoint theory to place Black women at the center of analysis, posing the research question, "What are the salient elements of African American women executives' leadership communication as described by the executives and their coworkers within dominant culture organizations?" Parker's investigation revealed five themes that also resonated with the Bourdieu (1991) and Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) notions of *interactive* or

supportive style as contributing to perceptions of and attributions of leadership and legitimacy in the organization: 1) interactive communication; 2) empowerment through challenge to produce results; 3) openness in communication; 4) participative decision-making; and 5) leadership through boundary spanning (Parker, p. 69). One very important implication of Parker's findings that relates to this study was the importance of diversifying sources of knowledge about leadership theory (p. 74) particularly when it is applied to those leaders not in the dominant social order. The use of feminist standpoint theory enabled access to the knowledge derived from a Black women leader's experiences that led to the development of a Black women leader's standpoint. Twenty-first century concepts of the workplace were important implications of Parker's work, including leadership of a more diverse workforce in a more global market place.

Gender and age intersections also affect attribution of capital to women, but this is yet another area where substantially more research would contribute to the development of richer theoretical frameworks. In a lengthy treatise, Trethewey (2001) examined what she termed the *discourse of decline* as it communicated midlife professional women's experiences of aging in a youth obsessed cultural context that included the workplace. The 15 White women in the study experienced the material consequences of aging in the work place, including discrimination, downsizing, and corporate flight (p. 192). The central core of Trethewey's thesis, however, was that while the women often reproduced the narrative of aging and decline that they heard from the broader society, they

also resisted it, even as they also embodied Collins (2000) *both / and, insider / within* construct: "...these women have achieved wisdom, a sense of freedom and achievement, and inner strength. Yet, those experiences will not save these women when they are downsized, when they look in their mirrors, and are horrified by their reflections" (p. 216).

In individual interviews and in a group, the women revealed that they understood the value and advantages of their aging in their work places, but they also understood their vulnerability in the youth obsessed culture. While not always directed at their appearances of youth or age, the women seemed to understand that youth might advantage age in the work place in the context of compensation and benefits. Many younger and newer workers earned lower salaries, or enjoyed few or no benefits in comparison to the aging or longer tenured workers who may have accumulated more organizational resources, such as retirement plans.

Trethewey's analysis, which appeared to pit liberal feminism against the more radical standpoint feminism, singled out that what she termed an *entrepreneurial discourse* (p. 217) that had absolved social institutions from critical consciousness. In the treatment of aging women, as well as other marginalized groups, a consumer identity which focuses on self-interest has been substituted for a collective critical consciousness, numbing midlife women's political resistance strategies (p. 217). Instead of forming collective resistance against the general culture's obsession with youth and trivializing of the knowledge and other benefits born with aging, consumerism incites individual

women to obsess on preserving youth through rampant consumerism -- anti-aging creams, anti-wrinkle creams, moisturizers, and the other panaceas for aging -- to the detriment of the construction of supportive cultural discourse and interactions for aging. Arguing for a more activist stance by women who had the means to resist, Trethewey also argued that society's entrepreneurial discourse absolved privileged women from the recognition of and fighting against other kinds of oppression faced by women and marginalized people, including discrimination, poverty, domestic violence, and focused them instead on spending capital to retain youth. Based up her findings, Trethewey recommended for midlife women: 1) more work mentors to guide women through the process of aging in the same productive manner that comparably aged men are guided; 2) midlife social support at work to combat the isolation that women reported experiencing, and finally; 3) more advocacy for women at work, developing a collective cultural discourse about responsibility to and interest in an aging population.

Particularly relevant to this investigation into the life of Dr. Knight is the discussion of power in the relationships between public school superintendent and the community, including the school board and the citizens it represents (Watson & Grogan, 2005; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1966; Fowler, 2000), and the civic and corporate communities (Stone, 1998; Deetz, 1992). Education policy in the United States is about power and decision-making; those who have the power make the decisions about education policy. This is especially true for elementary and secondary education leaders, districts, and state legislators who

form a virtual circle and determine how power will be communicated, shared, and enacted within the circle. The institutionalization of power in school systems and in the often fractious tenures of women superintendents, coupled with the poverty and low academic achievement of children in urban schools, motivated me to explore how relations of power are enacted in communities like East Palo Alto's Ravenswood District.

The competition for resources and the uses of power was an important theme to explore as I developed the investigation of Dr. Knight's life and how she contributed to the social capital of her community. Attributions of leadership (Spillane, et al., 2003, Bourdieu, 1991) to Dr. Knight also suggest attributions of power to her. Although there is a paucity of literature on Black women superintendents and power, one article validated Dr. Knight's focus on her community and provided insight into how Black women superintendents used and developed stocks of social capital. Barbara Jackson (in Brunner, Ed., 1999) noted in her article profiling Black women superintendents, "Getting Inside History---Against All Odds" that today's "...black women leaders continue to 'make communities' wherever black people live. This same spirit is evident in the school systems that these black women now lead" (p. 147). Jackson noted how Black women superintendents involved themselves as leaders in every aspect of their community, as Dr. Knight had done, including not only educational, but religious, philanthropic, political, and social organizations. Interviews with informants in the community described how Dr. Knight was very knowledgeable about the family lives of the children in her community, and demonstrated that

she understood how poverty affected their families' ability to provide food and adequate shelter, and how that level of want affected children's ability to learn. The fund that Dr. Knight established to help district families and staff, which eventually led to the conflict of interest charges brought against her, was a direct outcome of her efforts to provide financial resources to a community that for many years lacked even a branch bank.

Jackson's article was a gateway to a more extensive discussion of women and the superintendency, and power in organizations, and it suggested that in examining Dr. Knight's experiences, I should consider multiple uses of power. In "Toward a More Complex Understanding of Power to Better Grasp the Challenges of the Contemporary Superintendency," Watson & Grogan (2005) used a feminist post-structuralist framework to examine women, power and the superintendency, but for my purposes, I focused on their practical applications of power in the superintendency and less on the theoretical articulations. The researchers conceded that "...the notion of power in educational research has been conceptually limited and laced with normative biases", but understanding how power worked was extremely important for women superintendents, especially:

To use power as a resource to effect reform, a superintendent must understand fully what is going on in his or her district. Moreover, superintendents who understand well the power dynamics in their communities have a better chance of remaining in the position long enough to accomplish their goals.

Because the superintendency is a prominent, executive level social position, it follows that there is great interest in the promise or threat of power (Watson & Grogan, p. 52).

The idea that the superintendent must be fully aware of her district to use power effectively was also related by Alston (in Brunner, Ed., 1999), who observed that "...since the male power wielders in a given community are a dominant force, and the position of superintendent is viewed as a powerful and masculine position, then a woman wishing to be superintendent must define and use power in the same ways as the community's male power wielders " (p. 63).

The case study of Dr. Knight perhaps provides another indicator of how demographics in the community shifted, bringing a change and shift in power as well. This literature helped to analyze how Dr. Knight might have defined and used power in the Ravenswood District and in the Peninsula, and even in the broader arena of the state. To have gained the power in her community and the Peninsula community at large that she did, including being named to San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame in 1991, she must have understood what was going on in her district. What did it mean, however, for her to have lost enough power to ultimately lose her job? Was it an indication that at some point, she stopped knowing what was going on in her district? Was she distracted by the two lawsuits, and perhaps more importantly, was that the venal purposes of the law suits---to distract her and use up her resources? Or in her focus on the

community's poverty and challenges that swirled around her, was Dr. Knight resistant to the changes and shifts going on her sphere?

Watson and Grogan (2005) articulated two concepts of power, *capacity* and *legitimacy*, which help me to understand Dr. Knight's uses of power in her community. *Capacity* power was something that one could acquire or possess corresponding to one's position in the organizational hierarchy, while legitimacy power included the *right* to act (p.52). Similar to Bourdieu (1991) and Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003), Watson and Grogan's articulation of power suggested the attributions of *capital as power* to superintendents; indeed, Watson and Grogan pointed out the personal power associated with the position of superintendent (p. 53). One of the power shifts that have occurred over the decade has been the development of lay leadership in the community which means that some of the power and control of education or spheres of influence once residing with the superintendent as well as the board has eroded, accentuated by state and federal mandates (p. 53). Certainly, as the population demographics shifted in Ravenswood from nearly 100 percent Black to nearly 100 percent Latino, along with increased demands for bilingual education and the demands for special education that grew out of the IDEA lawsuit, Watson and Grogan's assessment of one cause of power shifts experienced across the country may have provided insight into Dr. Knight's situation in East Palo Alto.

The move to more representative and diverse boards in urban areas and elsewhere weakens supt. traditional power.

Earlier trusteeship board had more direct political and

economic ties with the local elites---troubling notion because supt. had long been understood as playing a vital role in community power brokering, while drawing on extended influence through the board of education--- Facilitative power...power with rather than power over (p. 54).

Watson and Grogan's (2005) articulation of the causes of weakening superintendent power in urban areas was helpful in analyzing Dr. Knight's case study. For example, newspaper articles and participant interviews confirmed the slate of candidates, two White men and one Hispanic man, who ran on a platform of firing Dr. Knight; the reasons for their candidacy rested squarely on taking power from the superintendent. Up to that point, Dr. Knight had worked with an all Black board of education with which she wielded much power.

The researchers contributed additional insight into the special challenges faced by women, particularly women of color in the superintendency. They take particular aim at the "crisis in the superintendency" idea promoted that suggests that there is a severe shortage in the number of "qualified applicants"...

The way the discourse on "quality applicants" has been formulated, largely from a white, male, traditional perspective, keeps alive the tension between the non-white, female aspirant and the white, male superintendent norm. Each of these dimensions of the superintendency is enmeshed in a power struggle between competing interests and interpretations (p. 54).

This was a central idea to Dr. Knight's struggles in Ravenswood. In her instance, self-interested school board candidates and self-interested city council members with the help of the media framed issues as crises to serve their own economic and political needs. Clearly, the board slate here had their agendas, and interviews and research suggested that unseating Dr. Knight was the least of them.

Fowler (2000) observed that power is institutionalized in schools systems; the ability to exercise power depends on possessing appropriate resources such as money, social status, and information (p. 27). It is the institutionalization of power in school systems and in the organizational positions of school administrators (Fowler, p. 26), coupled with the persistently low academic achievement of children in urban schools that motivated researchers to explore relations of power in the communities where schools are located, such as East Palo Alto and the California Peninsula. The importance of the political context of choice and reframing to develop new ways of operating was significant in Bolman and Deal (1997) "Reframing Organizations," and in Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) "The Art of Framing". Bolman and Deal used the idea of frames to describe to managers and leaders how to recast organizational experiences "to enrich the ideas and approaches they bring to their work" (p. 5). Reframing makes people more effective and sets them free from old ideas that create what Bolman and Deal termed "psychic prisons" that prevent leaders from seeing old problems in a new light or finding more promising tools to work on perennial challenges (p. 5). Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) concurred, adding specifically for

leaders, framing is a way to manage meaning by selecting and highlighting information; however, they cautioned leaders that framing requires initiative, and they must frame consistently, developing well-thought out mental models that allow leaders behave consistently between behavior and framing (p.20). They noted, for example, that managers often have problems coordinating a vision and framing, enabling people to see the world as they see it. The authors advised leaders to take the time to understand and develop mental pictures of a well formulated vision, and then communicate it.

To reframe organizational change, Bolman and Deal (1997) identified four frames: *structural*, *human resource*, *political* and *symbolic*, and published a chart that outlined each, including the barriers to change, and essential strategies for using the frame (p. 321). Similarly, Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) identified five language tools for framing: *metaphor*, *jargon*, *contrast*, *spin* and *stories* (p.100). In the context of educational change, all four frames from Bolman and Deal have use and merit for specific issues of change, but it was the *political* frame that presented the best opportunity for, among other issues, developing the preventative actions that ameliorated power conflicts in the community over the issues like improvement of instruction and test scores. In this frame, Bolman and Deal identified *disempowerment*, *conflict between winners and losers* as barriers to change, and *creating arenas where issues can be renegotiated and new coalitions formed* among the essential strategies for change (p. 321).

Concurrent with Bolman and Deal, Fairhurst and Sarr's frames had use and merit for change in schools, but particularly if used in language by school

leaders, like superintendents or principals. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) described the three components of *communication* framing: language, thought, and forethought; the language component is the most tangible because it focuses, classifies, recalls and facilitates understanding in terms of another (p.21).

Conflict was expected in shifts in power, but conflict can be managed, and it can be managed to produce positive results (Bolman and Deal, 1997; Sarason, 1995; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) also observed that a chief function of leadership was the management of meaning, and leaders must become experts at managing meaning (p.21). Leaders, like superintendents and principals, manage meaning through vocabulary, words and symbols that construct a frame in the mind of the listener; clear frames convey the message, "blurry" frames do not. (p.100). Fairhurst and Sarr's analysis informs parts of my research of Dr. Knight; during the field research phase, I read several hundred newspaper articles about her or about the district, and during the last two years of her superintendency, most of the articles were negative. Dr. Knight and her district, but more importantly perhaps Dr. Knight herself had been unable to manage meaning in the district, primarily because the local newspaper had developed clear frames that conveyed negative images of Dr. Knight and of the district.

If Bolman and Deal's political frame (p.15) had been utilized, conflicts among community members over school improvement could have been managed by changing the arena. The authors advised managing conflict by negotiating and bargaining to hammer out decisions before they became "street

fights". They distinguished between "street fights" and "arenas": in street fights there are no rules, anything goes, people get hurt, and bad feelings last for years; in arenas, however, there are rules, referees, and spectators which encourage combatants to forge agreements (Bolman and Deal, p. 326).

Pfeffer (1994) offered that by pretending that power and influence do not exist, we have contributed to the major problem facing organizations in the United States today: the incapacity of anyone except the highest level managers to take action and get things accomplished (p.10). I would observe that Pfeffer's point is reflected in educational bureaucracies and contributes to the question of why schools will not change, even when a consensus exists that they should change. He observed through his analysis of *power* the ambivalence to use power which grows out of a misunderstanding of its meanings, and that the downsizing of organizations to smaller, simpler forms was actually an attempt to find a simpler, less interdependent and therefore less political organization at the core (p. 9). The unique aspect of Pfeffer's views on power was his emphasis on its participation in the interdependence of relationships in organizations; power is an important social process that was often required to accomplish tasks in interdependent systems (p. 16). School reform accomplished through the interdependence of community stakeholders and constituents would be one such example. Individual success in organizations was not achieved individually, he reminded us, but rather it was achieved by working with and through other people (Putnam, 2000). Organizational success was often determined by how well individuals in the organization coordinated their activities (p.17). Power and

politics traveled together for Pfeffer, situating him with Watson and Grogan (2005); the political principle for Pfeffer included determining a goal and assessing who was important to help accomplish the goal (p.29). As important, working towards consensus avoided conflict and the need to exercise power to influence others.

The literature on leadership, organizations, and power, although lacking in substantial, specific references to women of color and the attributions of capital and uses of power, informed this case study of Dr. Knight. Particularly challenging was trying to comprehend the various ways that she may have lost political and social power in her community, even as she worked to bring resources to it. Clearly, the two lawsuits played a major role in distracting her from the expanded responsibilities that she took on as superintendent who made communities (Jackson, 1999). Like those Jackson described, Dr. Knight included in her duties the uplift of the entire community from poverty, hunger, and unemployment. The literature helped to analyze how her fall from power began in the district and what role her legal troubles played in the effort to unseat her. During the numerous interviews I had with Dr. Knight and informants, her continuing resistance against forces of oppression and her passion for helping poor children in the face of overwhelming challenges may have been both the key to her longevity and the key to her ultimate dismissal as superintendent.

In Kets de Vries' book, *The Leadership Mystique*, he posits a clinically based suggestion that all of us have specific ways of dealing with our environments that are based upon our subjective experiences and they are

“deeply embedded” in our behaviors (p. 142). Kets de Vries also suggests that organizations where power was highly concentrated reflected a relationship between the personality, leadership style, and corporate culture, strategy and structure (p. 7). In what he termed *dominant constellations*, including *dramatic*, *suspicious*, *detached*, *depressive* and *compulsive*. Kets de Vries outlined characteristics of organizations, the executive, the culture, and the guiding theme of each of the five constellations (p. 146), but he also observed that leaders and companies were often a mixture of the five constellations.

What was noteworthy of Kets de Vries’ analysis, however, was his controversial idea that our behaviors as adults were strongly influenced by our childhoods---all relationships were colored by previous relationships (p. 85). As he described *transference*, as our tendency to act toward people in the present as if they were people from the past; “*we behave toward them as children do toward their parents, for example, forgetting that we’re now adults*”. Kets de Vries referred to this phenomenon as an “absolutely ubiquitous element of the human condition” (p. 85). This literature would contribute towards understanding the phenomenal strength of resistance that Dr. Knight showed in the face of crushing challenges in her personal and professional life. Her will to go on even as her friends appeared to have deserted her and even her husband passed away must have been rooted in her subjective childhood experiences, if Kets de Vries was accurate. Kets de Vries argued also that these subjective experiences worked for the benefit and to the disadvantage of the individual, but individual change, like organizational change was always possible.

Summary

The literature demonstrates the absence of comprehensive studies that cover the unique perspectives of women of color in positions of district leadership and authority. It is clear, however, that the intersection of gender and race affects attributions and legitimacy of cultural capital and leadership (Bourdieu, 1991; Lin, 2000; Spillane, Hallett & Diamond, 2003), and socialization studies placed women in distinct, genderized roles (Allen, 2000; Bullis & Stout, 2000) often with attributions of leadership based upon race (Alston, 1999; Collins, 2000; Parker, 2001; Jackson, 1999); and age (Trethewey, 2001). Further, although an investigation of women's leadership must include discussions of power relationships in organizations, these relationships are under researched in education (Watson & Grogan, 2005). The coverage of African American women leaders from the perspective of African American women participants and researchers is more limited still, with few exceptions (Jackson, 1999; Alston, 1999). All but invisible, however, is comprehensive research into follower's attributions of leadership to women who are over 40 years old and in positions of leadership.

This study adds another dimension to perspectives of women like Dr. Knight and their own interpretations of their parallel "both / and roles in society. Dr. Knight's interpretation of her parallel roles as superintendent and as civic leader, illustrates how these dimensions of her professional and private selves both supported and conflicted with each other in the community.

Chapter 3 Methodology

In this chapter, I will outline the methodology I used to investigate the two critical incidents in the professional life of Dr. Charlie Mae Knight, educator and former public school superintendent in the Ravenswood School District, East Palo Alto, California. Located in the Silicon Valley in the midst of the most valuable commercial and residential real estate property in North America, East Palo Alto is a small town in the throes of social and economic transition in the Peninsula area, and its Ravenswood School District has become one of the key flashpoints as disparate forces in the community try to negotiate the transitions.

In this study I explored three primary issues:

- How, if at all, did the intersection of race, gender, age, and leadership style enhance or diminish Dr. Knight's role as the connection between the shifting demographics in her district?
- How, if at all, was Dr. Knight's social capital a resource to the community generally and to the school district in particular? How was it a resource to her personally in the challenges she faced in the district and in the community as superintendent?
- What other dimensions influenced her experiences as superintendent?

I used the introspective case study method (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000; Robbins, 2000) to address these questions. The case study format enables the

researcher to engage in a detailed examination of a single person, group, institution, social movement or event (Thomas & Brubaker, p. 102). The case study method is particularly appropriate for Dr. Knight because it is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case (Stake, 1995). To examine Dr. Knight's professional career and the critical events that shaped her last years as superintendent, I used the *introspective* case study method. This method represents the individual's unique experiences and discloses how the individual interpreted her experience of those events (Thomas & Brubaker, p. 104). The introspective case study method gives voice to the subject because it enables the discovery and understanding of her in the context of her experiences, as opposed to merely verifying or validating her experiences against some external dynamic (Brunner, 1999).

In using the introspective case study method, I acknowledged that Dr. Knight's experiences were unique enough to represent a contribution to knowledge, particularly of knowledge of women superintendents of color, and of women superintendents in general, and they were of scholarly import (Mies, in Fonow & Cook, Eds., 1991). Dr. Knight's story as superintendent occurred in the complex social context of urban public education, and the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership. The case study approach gave her a voice and it facilitated the complete telling of her story, the descriptions of the circumstances in which it unfolded, and the important lessons that are inherent in her experiences.

In my approach to the case study, I was influenced by frameworks or schools of thought from Feminist Standpoint Epistemology (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1991), Bolman and Deal (1997), who anticipated a political frame for education, and to a lesser extent, a clinical paradigm of leadership (Kets de Vries, 2001; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002) because of my readings and my coursework. Reflecting on my style of conducting research, I found that these frameworks were especially influential in my collection and analysis of data.

I drew upon Feminist Standpoint Epistemology rather than imposing it; that is, it had implications for how I designed and conducted my research, but it did not rigidly constrain my research nor did it prevent my using mainstream theoretical concepts in my analysis (Wincup, in Gilbert, Ed., 2001). It was present first in the decision to focus this introspective case study on Dr. Knight's experiences as a superintendent who was both an African-American and a woman. Wincup in her research work with women awaiting criminal trials observed that feminist researchers do not simply use pre-existing research techniques; rather, they adapt them to mesh with their gender-conscious theoretical position (p.20). I believed that my investigation and analysis of Dr. Knight would cover not only her life and career, but they would result in a critique of the academic discipline of Education as well, and I hoped, contribute to the efforts that lead to "...reorienting research agendas to topics [in education] that are relevant to women's lives" (p. 22).

My approach to interviews with Dr. Knight was not distancing, clinical, and certainly not cross-examining. It was instead an emotional exchange, and an

emotional interaction which I believe established our mutual credibility: she as participant / respondent, and I as researcher / investigator into her experiences.

“In my opinion...experience means taking real life as the starting point, its subjective concreteness as well as its societal entanglements”

(Mies, in Fonow & Cook, Eds., 1991, p. 66). In using Feminist Standpoint Theory, taking real life as the starting point does not always yield pleasant findings, and I sometimes found information that was dismaying to me. Dr. Knight is a complex woman who worked in an equally complex, constantly evolving and changing environment that challenged her professionally and personally.. Her interpretations of events and her reactions to those that shaped her experiences as a superintendent prompted accolades as well as critical consideration, or at least perplexity. I was challenged to interpret them in such a way that they were authentic to her life, while at the same time they contributed to research agendas relevant to other women’s lives.

Interview Setting and Methods

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology was influential in my approach to interviewing Dr. Knight. Our meetings took place in her home, not an office, classroom, or other perhaps more clinical or sterile setting. Her home was a condominium in a gated community, a secluded location that created a dissonance with my image of her as “people’s activist”. I always associated gated communities with exclusivity, superiority, and class and racial segregation. From my interviews with Dr. Knight, however, I formed the opinion that her residence

behind the gated walls was perhaps about trying to provide respect and privacy for herself and her family in a highly charged political climate in which the media had demonstrated publicly that they had no respect for her privacy or that of her family. For example, her husband died in 2000, in the last full year of her superintendency which was a few months prior to her acquittal on conflict of interest charges , adding grief to the other emotional challenges she faced in public during that time. I also learned that Dr. Knight owned units in the gated complex in addition to her own, and frequently provided these properties at below market rates (or free) to women and their families who were in distressed circumstances, much to the chagrin of her fellow property owners.

Her home is physically located within the city boundaries of East Palo Alto, but it is at the western most boundary of the city, which actually places her home closer to the city of Palo Alto than to the city of East Palo Alto. The two cities could not be farther apart, however, by any measurement of income, class, ethnicity, education (Palo Alto is the home of Stanford University), commercial enterprises, or housing. What East Palo Alto and Palo Alto share is, oddly enough, a water and sewer system that acts both symbolically and in reality as an underground connection and a line of division between the two cities.

Interviews in her home enabled me to recognize and appreciate that Dr. Knight's home in this physical location of East Palo Alto may have contributed to her objectification as the "other" (Collins, 2000), eventually leading even to her legal prosecution. As a Black woman, her residence in this affluent area of a poor city became a metaphor for her binary, "both/and roles" (p. 70) as the

superintendent of an impoverished school district for whom she was an aggressive advocate, and as an astute and powerful business woman in the community at large. These images were at odds with each other in the traditional White, male-dominated, and affluent communities of the Peninsula. Living in this neighborhood and in this manner, Dr. Knight lived as subject with the right to define her own reality, establish her own identity, and name her history (hooks, 1989). As an object or the “other”, however, she was not privileged to those rights.

I audio taped our discussions, taking written notes with her prior approval and only as necessary to highlight areas of the tapes I wanted to remember for future reference. I was conscious of the tape-recorder, and I tried to make it as unobtrusive as possible without affecting the sound quality of the tape; but as it happened, she appeared to be much more comfortable with the micro cassette recorder than I might have imagined under the circumstances. She was clearly an experienced interview subject. We had talked on the telephone on numerous occasions prior to meeting in person, and we knew women in the same circle of Black women educators; in fact, I had requested a childhood family friend of my mother’s to act as “trusted messenger”, one who interceded for me in my initial efforts to contact Dr. Knight. We began our interview with small talk and gossip about issues or people we knew in common. My overall approach was one of “...conscious partiality based on a partial identification” (Mies, in Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 69) which grew out of our common identity as women of color and as educators from a common community.

The early childhood experiences of the participant are particularly relevant in the introspective case study of a leader like Dr. Knight; consistent with the idea of a clinical paradigm of leadership (Kets de Vries, 2001; Goleman, et al, 2002). Kets de Vries observed that our interpersonal and intrapersonal processes make us all products of our pasts (p. 20): “All of us are nothing more than a developmental outcome of our early environment modified by our genetic endowment. And because of heavy imprinting that takes place at earlier stages of life, we tend to repeat certain behavior patterns.” Our early lives as infants and children have a profound influence, both positive and negative on our behaviors in our adult spheres. Through our experiences as children, we experience the world in ways that influence our adult perceptions unless or until critical incidents intervene to change those perceptions. Dr. Knight’s narrative of her early years and life history demonstrated how they shaped and influenced her later behavior as a leader. In particular, her narrative of the circumstances of her development as a youngster in the pre-Civil Rights era Southern United States, and even her struggle as an adolescent to gain tuition money to attend a Historically Black College explained why she was so compassionate and so determined to see that the impoverished children and their families in her communities were well equipped emotionally and physically to be educated. The influence of experiencing her own family’s struggle for daily subsistence in the often vicious oppression visited upon Blacks in the middle part of the 20th century can be seen in her attempts to make food, money, and other resources available to the families of her students. For example, she told of watching her father nearly

beaten to death for trying to organize Black mill workers. Listening to and analyzing Dr. Knight's narratives of her early life enabled me to draw the connections between her assertiveness and abilities to raise money and friends for her district from people like entrepreneur David Packard (of the HP [Hewlett and Packard] Corporation), and her ability to identify and go to the right person to help her in her education and throughout her career.

Phase I: Feasibility Study

I first conducted a feasibility study under the University of Missouri Columbia Campus Institutional Research Board ("IRB") approval specifically for that study. This study was important to orienting the research and identifying initial themes. It also helped to determine interview dynamics; that is, how Dr. Knight would talk and I would listen, one of us interjecting a question or a comment occasionally, and building mutual trust. I gathered preliminary narrative data in approximately six hours of recorded data from Dr. Knight in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted at her home in East Palo Alto, California. Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers (Riessman, 1993). From those interviews, I was able to develop a broader perspective of the genesis of her leadership style and her personal spirit, including her childhood, adolescence, and the early professional career experiences that shaped her and helped her to arrive at her standpoint. I came to understand how those places where her personal and public personas met either supported or were sometimes in conflict with each other.

The following questions guided the interview with Dr. Knight in the feasibility study:

- Please share three of the most significant events that best characterized your superintendency.
- What made these events significant in terms of leadership?
- How do you define the concept of 'community'?
- What is your view of how schools make and sustain community, and what is the superintendent's role in community building?
- Who are your community stakeholders?
- In your opinion as a woman and as a woman of color, what effect did your status have on the leadership of your community from the perspective of the parents and from the perspective of the business community?
- What are the gender-related issues that impact women in positions of leadership?
- Would you include perceptions of your age by others (stakeholders, employees, the media, etc.) as a gender-related issue that affected your superintendency in some manner?

Her answers to these questions during the feasibility phase of the investigation highlighted the two legal actions that precipitated or at least strongly influenced the termination of her career as superintendent in the Ravenswood School District.

Interviewing and observing Dr. Knight in person and in her home projected a multidimensional, overlapping image of her as a private person and a public

figure. Her home and the artifacts displayed there enhanced the image that I gleaned from her narratives. One approached the front door to her condominium down a narrow walkway between her garage and her neighbor's garage, and through a courtyard filled with small flowering plants. The front door opened into a narrow, well furnished hallway hung with art, with a kitchen on one side, and the guest bathroom on the other side of the hallway. The hallway opens onto a great room arranged into a well-furnished dining area divided from the living room area with a leather sectional sofa. The living room also functions as her family room or great room. It looks out onto another enclosed courtyard that reminded me of a "secret garden"; but this courtyard, perhaps at one time well-attended (by Dr. Knight's late husband?) is now overgrown with ivy, shrubbery, and weeds; a long abandoned aluminum lawn chair is nearly completely covered with trailing ivy which has partially overgrown even its arms and back. Typically when I was in the room, the drapes were closed against that inner courtyard with a large screen television sitting in front of it, and Dr. Knight would be just ending a telephone call at her small writing desk in the corner. The telephone would ring many times as we talked, but she always ignored it, allowing the machine to pick up the call instead while we talked.

Her home was decorated tastefully, expensively yet comfortably in muted earth tones of tans, beiges and browns. While her house was decorated traditionally and was familiar to my Black middle class upbringing, I was surprised by the distinctively feminine touches that seemed at odds with Dr. Knight's hard-driving image; blown glass accessories, silk floral arrangements,

and scented candles. She would often have the large screen television airing a popular television show (sometimes one of the Soaps) with the sound muted when I came to interview her. Yet she was usually dressed in a business suit, except for one occasion when she had just returned from working out at Curves, a fitness center for women, and she was wearing sweats and athletic shoes. She always offered fresh fruit to me from her dining room table, and she always had colorfully wrapped toffee candies in a blown glass jar on her bookshelf (“I keep these for my grandson who loves them”). The last time I visited, she placed a box of Godiva chocolates that she had received for Mother’s Day on the coffee table between us (as a confessed “choc-oholic”, I was very pleased when she insisted that I take some of them). I visited her guest bathroom and immediately noticed the heady aromas of the scented French milled soaps and candles, and coordinated guest towels that my mother would have approved of as reserved “for company”.

Phase II, the Study

Next, under a new IRB approval specifically for this dissertation, I conducted the full-blown study.

A well-constructed case study combines multiple methods of data collection to develop a holistic understanding of the case. By observing people in their everyday lives, listening to them talk about what is on their minds, and looking at the documents they produce, the qualitative researcher obtains firsthand knowledge of social life unfiltered through operational

definitions or rating scales” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

I conducted additional face to face, audio-recorded interviews with Dr. Knight, again in her home, to gather more narrative information including names of additional people in the community who provided insight into specific experiences that shaped her superintendency, particularly the time frame leading up to her dismissal. Based upon the responses to the feasibility questions, I developed the following interview questions.

1. During the feasibility phase of this study, you shared two events as being significant events that influenced your professional and personal lives: the IDEA 97 Lawsuit that eventually was settled out of court, and the Conflict of Interest Charges alleged against you but of which you were subsequently acquitted. In retrospect, please describe your perceptions of how these two events shaped your experiences in the District, and in the community at large.
2. What made these events significant in terms of your leadership of the District? For example, what impact did they have on your leadership?
3. How would you describe your leadership style before the two law suits? What strengths sustained you through them?
4. What changes did you perceive in your leadership style as the events were unfolding, or as the end result of these events? What do you perceive to be the major influences of those changes?
5. Describe how you manage relationships or networks with the business community in your district. How was the management of those

relationships implicated in either or both of the legal actions you experienced? How did those relationships help you during either or both of the legal actions? Please describe why they did, or why they may not have helped you.

6. Which of the legal actions had more effect on your relationships in the business community?
7. Describe how you manage relationships or networks with the broader community in your district. How was the management of these relationships implicated in either or both of the legal actions you experienced? How did those relationships help you during either or both of the legal actions? Please describe why they did, or why they may not have helped you.
8. What are your perceptions of the effect that your gender and ethnic status have on the leadership of your community from the perspective of the parents? From the perspective of the business community?
9. What are the gender-related issues that impact women in positions of leadership? What role does age also play? How would the outcome have been different if you were 20 to 30 years younger?
10. If you could provide executive coaching today to a group of Black women leaders, what strategies would you advise them to follow? How would that advice differ for Black women superintendents? Would the advice be the same for all women of color? Would your advice be the same for White

women superintendents? How would that advice change for women in leadership roles outside of education?

Resources

I asked Dr. Knight to identify people who she believed were relevant to the unfolding study, but I also identified others myself through newspaper accounts, personal networks, and through interviews with state and local education officials who worked with her; sometimes there was overlap in sources of these contacts. I interviewed these Informants in their homes, or places of employment, and at the Senior Citizens Center in East Palo Alto; I interviewed at least two people by telephone. The Informants signed an IRB approved Consent form which outlined my study, the fact that I would tape record their responses, and the fact that I would maintain the confidentiality of their responses. For those Informants interviewed by telephone, I informed them that I would be taking notes by computer as we spoke, although telephone interviewees also agreed to be audio tape recorded. I reaffirmed my agreement to keep Informant responses confidential in subsequent conversations with them.

I perused the NewsBank[®] database for newspaper articles appearing in *The San Jose Mercury News*, the major daily newspaper in the California Peninsula area. Several informants (and Dr. Knight herself) shared with me their opinions: the newspaper had been highly influential in objectifying Dr. Knight, keeping her not only in the public eye, but also in the least flattering light. Indeed, if one would be satisfied with its one dimensional perspective, the *Mercury News* made it possible to follow the many ups and downs of Dr. Knight's

long tenure in the district by simply reading the newspaper articles; she appeared weekly, and sometimes daily in over five years of articles. Newspaper coverage of her career and her personal life became more strident, disdainful, and more frequent in the days and weeks immediately leading up to her dismissal, and to the time of this writing negative articles about her continued to appear although less frequently. I also found it helpful to explore Alternative Press sources, many of them national, for example, *Consortiumnews*, *Common Dreams News Center*, and *PBS' On Line News Hour*. Several of the local on-line newsletters (*EPA.net*; *Palo Alto Weekly*; *Metro Active*) provided extremely helpful background information which also served to triangulate information from interviews and from the mainstream press, like the *San Jose Mercury News*, and provide leads to other sources. In addition to interviewing others, and to perusing years of newspaper coverage of Dr. Knight, I also used public documents, including legal documents related to the lawsuits to provide more dimension to this case study, and which added to the meaningfulness of it.

Touring Ravenswood

I also asked Dr. Knight to accompany me in my car and provide running commentary and directions as I drove around East Palo Alto to get a feel for the social and political context of her experiences. This tour enabled me to see the shifting demographics in the community, and it enabled me to see how Dr. Knight's power base in the community had shifted, too, as reflected in the school board elections. I was stunned to see modest two and three bedroom California Ranch style homes that sold at prices from four hundred thousand dollars for a

run down “fixer upper” to nearly a million dollars for one that had been extensively remodeled. Dr. Knight observed that when she moved to East Palo Alto in the 1980’s, homes sold for fifteen to twenty thousand dollars.

The neighborhoods that had been the homes of the burgeoning Black middle class in the 1960’s and 1970’s were now occupied by Mexican and Hispanic families. I saw block after block of houses with wrought iron perimeter fencing, door screens, and window coverings, punctuated by brightly colored stucco walls and trim. The streets and driveways in front of the houses were filled with cars and minivans, and with pick up trucks and flatbed trucks, some with the logos of gardening and construction businesses painted on their sides. In California, these were the quickly recognizable cultural artifacts of the new inhabitants. Dr. Knight told me that it was not uncommon to learn that many of her Latino former students lived with two and three extended families who occupied a single home; sometimes the one story home had been remodeled to a two story building to accommodate all of the families, and sometimes families simply crowded into existing space. When I asked her what had happened to the Black families who lived there previously, she told me that they had moved away, mostly out of the area. Many had resettled on the other side of the bay in cities located in the valley areas of the central part of California.

Shifting demographics

Blacks now constituted less than five per cent of the population, but in the 1980’s when Dr. Knight first arrived in East Palo Alto, they were nearly one hundred percent of the population. The new, 21st century residents included not

only Latino families, but working class White and Asian (particularly those from Southeast Asia) families. In addition, as housing prices climbed on the Peninsula, Dr. Knight pointed out, more upper middle class White families, including those from the nearby Silicon Valley corporations and Stanford University staff and faculty, moved into new in-fill homes and “pocket” home developments springing up within the East Palo Alto city limits. These new developments sprang up in vacant lots within older, existing neighborhoods, and on blocks of land where former homeowners had been bought out and their older homes razed to make way for the new development. As we drove through these neighborhoods, Dr. Knight directed me past the new IKEA and Home Depot, both “big box” retailers that followed the money trail of the new area residents. These retailers also represented attempts by the East Palo Alto City Council to gain a tax base for the city by encouraging commercial development within the city limits. These efforts to develop property by the city council would be factors in the critical incidents experienced by Dr. Knight.

A few Blacks remained to take advantage of the commercial boom in the area. For example, Dr. Knight pointed out the local McDonald’s franchise that was owned by a Black man, but she said he felt it necessary to use Hispanic staff to keep his business viable. The local Black owned funeral home, a staple business in most Black urban areas, had found it more convenient to sell off substantial portions of its parking lot to IKEA, which in turned allowed its clients to use the IKEA parking lot during funeral services. The building, an attractive stone, wood, and glass structure of 1960’s or 1970’s vintage, was now dwarfed

by the IKEA multi-story parking lot which loomed over it, casting a large shadow over the smaller building.

Data Analysis

I decided to use the techniques embedded in narrative analysis because I anticipated that as a researcher, I would be confronted by diverse forms and voluminous amounts of information about Dr. Knight's experiences as superintendent and her experiences as a Black woman from those who know her, from those who wrote about her, and especially from the woman herself. Her personal stories about the life she had lived as superintendent and as an African-American woman were not merely a way of telling me and others about her life. "Respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society" (Riessman, 2003, p. 3). As a participant/respondent, Dr. Knight's narratives particularized experiences in her life, especially those that would bring her into conflict with others in the later years of her superintendency in Ravenswood. She was caught up in some situations that she could not control, although in others she had agency. For example, she talked about her efforts to provide financial stability for her marginalized community through special funds, but she was heavily battered by the allegations and trial for conflict of interest which resulted from her attempts to help her community. Dr. Knight would have faced heavy fines and up to twenty years in prison had she been convicted of the charges against her.

“Narrative analysis has to do with how protagonists interpret things... we can go about systematically interpreting their interpretations” (Riessman, p. 5). Feminist standpoint is well suited to use with narrative analysis because both enable the subjective exploration of identity and human agency. Through narrative analysis, the personal experiences of Dr. Knight, Informants, and those events and people interpreted by the *San Jose Mercury News* could be understood within the context of the dramatic social and political changes that were occurring in East Palo Alto and in the broader Peninsula community. Through narrative analysis, “[t] is possible to examine gender inequalities, racial oppression, and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by individual speakers” (Riessman, p. 5). Narrative analysis allows for the representation of experiences by those who actually lived them, which was an especially poignant factor in Dr. Knight’s case study because the media had socially constructed a reality that she had to endure in silence. Except on very subjective and personal level, Dr. Knight had no voice to interpret her experiences, to explain her actions, but instead she was held hostage by the public interpretations in the media of her experiences.

My narrative analysis method began with my conversations with Dr. Knight and Informants. “We cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret.” (Riessman, p. 8) I met face to face with all of the informants except one who had moved to another part of the United States, and we spoke several hours on three occasions by telephone. I recorded the interview conversations and transcribed them to written scripts, both verbatim and summarized concepts.

I followed up the interviews with member checks by telephone, except in the case of Dr. Knight; my member checks with her were both in person in her home and by telephone. I took copious notes on the telephone conversations, creating a transcript of questions and answers as I made notes. Mostly, in those instances, however, I minimized questioning and I encouraged the Informant or Dr. Knight to talk freely, often in a stream of consciousness that would wander through several subjects of their choosing in rapid succession. On at least two occasions, the Informant said that I had made them recall events that they had repressed or forgotten about, and that our conversation afforded them another opportunity to consider their perspectives of the event. My own interpretations often centered around not only their answers to my questions, but what they chose to discuss, and the tone they used to discuss it as revealed by their voices, and from those, I was able to interpret the “truth of their experiences” (Riessman, p. 22).

Trustworthiness of the Study

I used three means of strengthening the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985): member checks, triangulation, and reflection on my role as a researcher. Perhaps ironically, the role of the media was an important source of triangulation for this investigation because of the volume of information that was printed, repeatedly in some cases, about Dr. Knight, events in the school district, and events in the city. At one point, the volume of scandal laden information clearly alerted the national media because Dr. Knight, individuals and groups of antagonists were all mentioned by name in a news article. I often used

the articles in the *San Jose Mercury News* (less frequently the *Stanford Daily*, or the *Palo Alto Weekly*) as a springboard to questions for Dr. Knight and the Informants. For example, if the newspaper stated a fact, I would ask Dr. Knight and the Informants to respond to what the newspaper had written. In this way, I was able to gain multiple perspectives of issues and events to contrast and to synthesize for interpretation.

To identify the Informants and preserve their confidentiality, I labeled them as *Internal* or *External Informants*, *Former Board Members*, *Current Board Members* or *Family Member*, and I numbered them 1, 2, and so on as appropriate for identification. External Informants were those outside of school with no official connection to the Ravenswood School District; Internal Informants had official connections to the District. Dr. Knight is the only one of the participants to be identified by name, unless names appeared in the news articles. I believe that the agreement to maintain the confidentiality of their responses encouraged them to speak openly and freely with me, even by telephone.

As I developed my analysis from the interviews, I used member checks with Dr. Knight, the participant, and the Informants to freshen and ground what I had learned as I had listened to them. Some member checks were done by telephone; with Dr. Knight, I actually visited again in her home on two separate occasions, in addition to speaking to her by telephone. The member check in her home enabled me to verify my recollections as entered into my notes, and in many cases, her comments brought a fresh perspective to my analysis.

Role and Identity of the researcher

My personal connection to working with Dr. Knight was that we shared the experience of being Black women who are often objectified as the *other* (Collins, 2000). Treating Black women as *other* denies them the full status of human subjects. Black women have occupied the position where a series of binary constructs converge: for example, restricting access to opportunities for leadership mentoring or preparation, and then claiming that Black women do not have enough experience to lead. As a researcher, I played a role that allowed me to have an “angle of vision” (Collins, p.12) not seen by the participant, Dr. Knight. At the same time, as a researcher, I become a “complete member” who shares the participant’s feelings (Kleinman & Copp, 1995). I felt empathy for this woman who was beleaguered, to echo the words of one of the informants. Feelings here are data, clues, and a sense like hearing or sight (Hochschild 1983, as cited in Kleinman & Copp, 1995).

Our feelings about those we study are situational; they depend on what participants say or do (or do not say or do). We will like them some of the time and dislike them at other times. In addition, we might feel ambivalent about them, their words, or their actions (Kleinman and Copp, p. 31).

My dominant emotion was continual, utter amazement at Dr. Knight’s ability to persevere in the withering, often malicious scrutiny she endured from the

newspaper and the community. She had no private part of herself or friends where she could retreat and regroup emotionally. She indeed was beleaguered on all sides.

But my dominant feelings of emotion often masked my own anger, disappointment, and frustration with those people from the community where she had dedicated so much of her professional and personal life. Her colleagues, Black and Hispanic families, and Stanford University, had allowed Dr. Knight to “twist slowly in the wind” (and in the media) knowing how she had demonstrated her concern for the welfare of the district’s children. I was really enraged at them, and I thought of them as spineless, self-serving, and ungrateful.

Groves (2003) observed that when researchers are “...on one hand the researcher, and on the other hand the researched, the learning process usually begins with questions of boundary crossings. What identity do we perform at any given moment---that of the researcher or that of the researched?” (p.107). I did engage in critical reflexivity, examining from time to time how my involvement in this research on Dr. Knight’s life affected my data collection, my interpretations and analyses, and how my representation of the data would appear in this writing. My angle of vision also enabled me to attempt see power relationships from multiple perspectives (Groves, p. 107), and I applied my own intellectual and personal knowledge from my own experiences with marginalization and power to my research with her.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology overlay with Black Feminist Thought and coupled with Social Capital Theory created a framework to access those

social relations that create the structure of oppression faced by African American women aspiring to the superintendency and in the superintendency (Gorelick, 1991). For example, I understood that even though Black women may encounter issues based on gender, they experience those same issues and arrive at their standpoint differently because of their race (Collins 2000, Alston 2000). I explored the genesis of the conflict of interest charges against Dr. Knight: were they the product of bad judgment on her part in her actions to facilitate housing and other financial advantages for teachers and staff in one of the most expensive communities in the United States, or were they part of what Collins (2000) referred to as the dialectics of oppression and activism of Black women (p. 3)? That is, were the prosecutions attempts to silence her activism in the community on behalf of urban education and education of poor inner city children? Was she simply too old for the position of Superintendent? Or, had she become too aggressive and powerful in the community at large in the eyes of the moneyed, traditional, "old boys" network in the Peninsula? I used Dr. Knight's narratives to probe her theories on how society works for women in leadership in general and for Black women in leadership in particular.

Chapter 4 Findings

Introduction

Interviews with Dr. Knight, and with key informants, confirmed that the two most critical incidents in her long career in Ravenswood were the state criminal charges leveled against her for conflict of interest, and the civil lawsuit brought against her District under IDEA 97 (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997), the law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education. These two critical incidents played out within the harsh reflection from the glare of the persistent role of the media. In this chapter, I will build up to the two critical incidents by first peeling back layers of her life history, including the important social and political interactions which occurred at critical points in her life. This background is important to understanding the context of Dr. Knight's reactions to the economic and social changes she faced in the Ravenswood School District and in the East Palo Alto community. Patterns of professional and personal opposition emerged along with reactions to her leadership that aligned to drastically alter her career as a public school superintendent.

Section 1: Personal History

Dr. Knight's ability to withstand the harsh light of the media and the disparagement of the community which she had worked so hard help must be rooted in the resilience she developed as a young woman. The critical incidents in this study may have shaped the last five to seven years of her superintendency, but earlier forces may have shaped Knight's reactions to them.

As these earlier forces shaped her perspective of the world around her, they also shaped the form and substance of the knowledge she drew from her experiences. She began her life in the 1930's in poverty in a small town in Georgia that she said was aptly named, *Killmequick*, located near Valdosta. It was the "bottoms, a hellhole" as she described it, where poor Blacks lived in the lowest parts of the terrain; the soil was as poor as those who tried to eek a living from it. "We were Poor, we were REAL poor...I tell my sisters that we were so poor we could only afford to spell poor with one 'o'. That's how poor we were!" [She laughs].

Nurturing, leadership, and resilience were inculcated by the early critical incidents that unfolded in her life. As a young girl, she listened to her mother's screams and watched as she died in childbirth after several agonizing days in labor. A few years later, she would become the *other mother* (Collins, 2000), an important source of help to her step mother in raising four siblings, two girls and two boys, who came to rely upon her for their nurturing and resources, including college tuition when they were older. "The leadership thing came out of necessity for me, first with my mother dying, then with my father marrying somebody young (10 years his junior) and didn't know too much about being a housewife. " A family member confirms this role Charlie Mae had in the family: "She was always a nurturer...she always wanted to see Black people achieve. She fought hard to get her own education, then she came back to take care of her family." When Dr. Knight graduated from college, she bought her family its first gas stove; until that time, they'd been using a wood burning stove. "In the South," a family

member continued, "You always knew where you stood because you were Black...so you always knew what you had to fight for. Charlie Mae had more courage than anyone I knew."

Dr. Knight's courage would be tested many times as a superintendent, but one of the many tests she would first survive and learn from was at home as an adolescent. Barely into her teens, Charlie Mae recalled watching as her father was dragged out of their home and beaten nearly to death by White men who were anti-union goons after her father tried to bring in the AFL-CIO to unionize the other Black men who worked at the Valdosta Feed and Milling Company and at the Bruce Milling Company; the Black men wanted to earn the prevailing minimum wage paid to White men at that time which was 75 cents per hour, instead of the 35 cents per hour the mills paid to Black men. Despite his terrible injuries, she watched and helped as he directed her and her step mother to cleanse and cauterize his wounds with liniment and salt. He was determined to go to work the following day. "He would not be intimidated," Dr. Knight recalled.

She would always remember that the next morning at 6 am, her father got up, dressed, and walked the two miles to work and behaved as though nothing had happened; people were surprised to see him, she recollected from overhearing her parents' conversations. By his actions she thought "He was saying to us, that he was not a victim and he was still the head of the house," a man who could and would provide for his family, no matter what pain he endured. Later, her father's brothers and other family members moved to Detroit to work in the Ford Motor plant, but her father would not leave. "He said, 'they are not going

to run me out of Valdosta!’,” Dr. Knight recollected. Her father was Blackballed by the mills, and was disabled, and eventually died from a work –related accident at the age of 45.

Growing up in the rural South in the 1940’s, a teenaged Charlie Mae Kelly recalled that she wanted to go to college more than any thing; she saw education as way to the vision she had for life for herself. I asked her how she managed to get to college: “In 1949, I finished high school. Before that, I babysat for rich White people, and you could tell the difference [in how they lived]. You didn’t have any thing to compare with before. They had a coffee table, we had no such table; they had lawns, we had no grass in our lawn, we just had dirt. They had curtains, we had shades. You can tell the difference in the furniture and such...they had full sets of dishes....” A significant difference for the young Charlie Mae was in how the child lived in the White household, and how she and her siblings lived in their Black home. “One child had urinated in the bed the night before, and the bed wasn’t changed...still wet and we got to go to bed again that night...I would notice when the little White boy wet the bed, the mother would say in the morning, ‘Charlie, go in there and change the bed and wash the sheets.’ I would scrub the sheets on a scrub board...I had three tubs, one to wash, first rinse, and last rinse, and then put them on the line [to dry]. When that boy came home from school, you took those sheets and made up the bed. Over here at my house, that sheet stayed on the bed...my mother didn’t get up in a hurry to wash it and that kind of thing...I had this feeling of discontent for a long time.”

Although that discontent was fueled by her exposure to how White people lived compared to how she and her family lived, it had a positive influence on Charlie Mae, too. It motivated her to learn to develop what Putnam (2000) called “bridging ties,” or “getting ahead ties”. Her family member also recalled that Charlie’s family “...didn’t have much growing up...you had to know people. She [Charlie Mae] was a role model for making the right contacts,” and their grandmother was a role model for them. “Grandmother worked for affluent White people. She would come and teach the girls social graces like setting a table, what kinds of things to decorate a home.” Learning by example to make the right contacts and exposure to the homes of influential others, especially through domestic work, was not without its price, however. Like thousands of other poor women and girls, Charlie Mae quickly found domestic work was not only low-paying but there was the constant threat of sexual harassment, particularly for African-American women or girls who worked as domestics in the South (Collins, 2000, p. 54).

Charlie Mae was forced to quit her job babysitting when her grandmother, who cooked for the White family for whom Knight babysat, observed that the father of the house would often touch Charlie Mae inappropriately. “She didn’t like the way Mr. Rhodes would come by and hit me on the fanny, and she told my dad. He said, ‘you ain’t ever going to work in those houses [for White people] again, girl...you got to learn to do something else, girl’”. Charlie Mae next found a job working in a restaurant to earn college money. She was a basketball and track athlete, and she hoped for a scholarship to Florida A & M, one of the

historically Black colleges and universities (“HBCU”) in the South. When the scholarship did not materialize, she wrote to over 100 Black colleges, and was accepted to Albany State College, another HBCU, which accepted her; all she needed was fifty eight dollars and fifty cents to make up the difference. Here, teen-aged Charlie Mae learned how to make important “bridging ties,” or “getting ahead” ties (Putnam).

I had worked hard...worked in tobacco [pronounces it *tobakker*].

I hated to work in the sun, and stringers [people who strung the tobacco for processing] could work in the shed. As soon as I learned that information, I learned to string during lunch hours by sitting with Stringin’ Lizzie, ‘best stringer in Georgia’.

I learned to string so well that I was in demand when another stringer was absent.

By making the right contact with Stringin’ Lizzie, Charlie Mae assured herself of an acknowledged skill, a workplace out of the sun, and earning a slightly higher wage.

Young Charlie Mae was sure that she had the \$58.50 that she would need for college because she gave her earnings to her mother to keep. “In those days, we didn’t have checking or savings accounts, so you gave your money to your mother who would keep it in her bosom.” But when she went to her step mother, she did not have the money, she told Charlie Mae, because she had spent it on the family for food and such because Charlie Mae’s father had not been able to get steady work. Charlie Mae was devastated, but she remembered that she had

important “bonding ties,” or “getting by” ties (Putnam, 2000, p. 22), when she said “I had two interesting grandmothers: Claudia my maternal grandmother was very light-skinned woman (“an indicator of privilege among Blacks in the South,” Dr. Knight added), a bohemian, who didn’t wear shoes or panties, wore loose dresses”---and she did not like Charlie’s stepmother, whom she believed to have been ”involved” with Charlie’s father before her mother died in childbirth. The other grandmother, Henrietta, was married to an AME (“African Methodist Episcopal”) minister. Grandmother Claudia offered Charlie Mae her social security check of \$24.50, and when Charlie Mae told the other grandmother Henrietta about Grandmother Claudia’s gift, Grandmother Henrietta matched it. All she had to do was get on the bus.

Dad found enough money, seven dollars, to get a bus ticket. I bought cardboard suit case from Kress [like Woolworth’s, one of the original “five and dime” stores], which I over-packed and it broke on the way to the Greyhound Bus Station [she laughs]. My dad took off his belt and wrapped it around the suitcase so it would stay closed.

Charlie Mae arrived in Albany only to learn that the college was five miles outside of town, and without any money for transportation, she demonstrated the perseverance and single-mindedness that helped her to survive: she walked the five miles to the campus.

It was beautiful. It had big Ante Bellum buildings, and

a swing on the porch of the building where I was supposed to go that was occupied by well-dressed middle class girls, swinging and playing games. Of course, I've just walked five miles and I am dressed in a 'big apple' dress made from feed bag sacks, and patent leather shoes in October with the patent leather rolling off the shoes.

The women saw her and laughed and laughed. "I didn't really know what they were laughing about, but I was really so happy to be in college, that I didn't care. They gave me what they considered an undesirable room mate, which was the best thing that could have happened to me. The students told me, "you get to have Capearl," and laughed again.

An unlikely bridging tie

"Her name was Carrie Pearl, but she called herself 'Capearl'. She was 'dull normal' but her daddy had money," Dr. Knight recalled, "and the college would keep her there as long as he paid. " Once again, Charlie Mae made an important "bridging tie" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22), for although she may have been considered 'dull normal', 'Capearl' clearly understood the rituals and the culture of the school; it was she who told country-girl Charlie Mae why the other girls were laughing at her: it was because of her dress and shoes. She would tell Charlie Mae things that no one else would tell her that would help her to fit in, to get ahead. "You wearing a 'big apple' dress...next time you shop, get smaller print, that way they don't know how poor you are Dr. Knight recalled Carrie Pearl saying to her, and Carrie Pearl added, "You're not supposed to wear patent

leather in October, and you supposed to get a new pair of shoes when they start to roll up like that.” Carrie Pearl helped Charlie Mae to assimilate, but more important perhaps, Dr. Knight recalled, “Carrie Pearl could identify people who were phony, because I really wasn’t looking at the depth. She really would look at it. When [people] said she was dull normal, I just felt she would never talk.”

Carrie Pearl might not have talked, but she was certainly observant. It was she who also knew where the jobs on campus were located. She told Charlie how to get a job cleaning up the auditorium at 7 a. m. before and after Vespers; Charlie could get the job done before going to her own classes. Carrie Pearl was also Dr. Knight’s inspiration for entering the teaching profession. It was “because of Capearl—because she never passed any courses, but they just kept her there...I moved to another dorm after freshman year, but she stayed in the freshman dorm because she never completed anything,” Dr. Knight reminisced [smiling, and shaking her head slightly]. “I always wondered what happened to her.” Carrie Pearl was clever and she had adapted to her surroundings, but she was the kind of ‘lost child’ that Dr. Charlie Mae Knight, the educator would champion throughout her long career.

Her career in education started as a teacher in the South. “My first teaching job was as a PE [physical education] teacher and basketball coach in Blakely, Georgia.” But before long she was married to her husband who, after a stint overseas, was later stationed in Fort Ord in Monterey Bay, California [the former military base that is now the site of California State University at Monterey Bay]. Along the way, she gave birth to their first of four children. The Fort Ord

assignment, far from the roots of their homes for either Dr. Knight or her husband, was nevertheless fortuitous for Charlie Mae. As the wife of an enlisted man, her ability to find a teaching job was very slim, and it was slimmer still as an African-American because at that time, Blacks were rarely hired as teachers in the Monterey Unified School District. She taught as a substitute for two years before a regular position became available, and that position gave her opportunity for movement into positions of influence and visibility in the District, and ultimately, in the state.

She was described by a family member as “always the nurturer,” and the nurturing she displayed to her family, she also displayed in the Monterey-Seaside community. “I was in charge of after school operations and I became very involved in the community...abandoned children and other children at-risk...on welfare, abused....” Charlie Mae Knight found the poverty in Monterey and Seaside incredible, like what she might have expected to see in the rural South, but certainly not in California: “We had the largest concentration of Black youngsters between San Francisco and Los Angeles right there in Seaside, California, because of Fort Ord. Our bilingual group was Filipino because of the Philippines [Islands] being a territory of the U.S.” She turned the crisis into a benefit for the community and for her own career.

I began to be noticed because of my work with children and their families in our District” she recalled, “and I began doing special projects, presentations, and the like for the superintendent. I was the leading

lobbyist for the school District long before they had lobbyists. I also was the District's representative back in Washington. We were a military area, and Monterey received the second largest grant from the military for federal impact aid.

Her lobbying paid off for the District and for her career, and she soon became the first Black administrator in the Monterey Unified School District. In 1965, the impact of poverty in the Monterey area earned that school District one of the first ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now No Child Left Behind Act, which extends it] Title I grants in the state. The superintendent asked Charlie Mae to be a counselor in the program, a chance she said that she immediately seized because it allowed her to work directly with social service agencies to identify the children and families most in need of services. She moved from counselor to the administrator for ESEA, however, when the man originally appointed the position declined to accept it because of the large budget--over \$800,000.

For Charlie Mae, her position as the new administrator over this highly visible and politically charged ESEA Title I grant gave her nearly unfettered access to power and the authority to use it. "My job was one where the superintendent allowed my flexibility, and it was unusual for a Black woman to have that kind of flexibility...jump on the plane, go to Washington [DC], stay a few days, come back...". While she was there, she had the opportunity to meet leading congressmen like Carl Perkins [Louisville, Kentucky] and Adam Clayton

Powell [Harlem, New York City], "...the real heroes, those were the authors [of ESEA], those were the ones who put the content in that bill," Dr. Knight recalled, describing the two powerful politicians from the 1960's. Her respect for the political prowess of the two men was evident when she spoke of them, and it was possible to see each of them reflected in her own experiences: personal roots in rural poverty, and working with constituents in poor urban communities. "Even though you go back to Congress and look through the Annals, they might give Carl Perkins some credit, but Adam Clayton Powell would probably get nothing," she said of Powell. The first Black elected congressman from New York, and the first from the North, other than Illinois, Powell challenged the segregated Congressional facilities, and headed the powerful Education and Labor committee that passed important social legislation; and he had been the subject of constant media coverage during the early 1960's to 1970 when he was defeated (much like Dr. Knight was in the early 21st Century in 2000 to 2003). At one point, Powell was stripped of his committee chairmanship and excluded by other congressmen for 'misconduct', only to be re-elected by his constituents, although he did not take his seat (Retrieved October 20, 2005, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Clayton_Powell,_Jr).

When she began her job, Charlie Mae Knight and the custodian were the only Blacks in her building. She used her new authority to begin recruiting Black teachers to California; and she became the most successful recruiter of Black teachers in the state ("Where ever I had played basketball, that's where I recruited in the

South”). She recalled that prior District recruiters had claimed they were “unable to find any qualified Blacks”. Her visibility and the awards she received for her projects brought her to the attention of Wilson Riles, the first elected Black state superintendent of public instruction in the United States.

Wilson noticed how Monterey was bringing in the money. I mean we got *federal* [her emphasis] grants, and I had good staff and we wrote grants. We held a multicultural conference every year. We did teacher training---we didn’t qualify for a Teacher Corps [a federal program], so I made up my own teacher corps. Teacher Corps was so impressed with us they invited me to all their meetings.

Wilson Riles was very impressed with Charlie Mae Knight’s relationship with the people in Monterey which she demonstrated by her ability to organize, to access ideas, power, influence, and money.

He never missed a Multi-Cultural Conference [which she organized and convened in Monterey], but I think what impressed him more was my ability to deliver...he called me one day and told me that he wanted to play in the AT& T Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Pebble Beach. When I told him that it was a national golf tournament, the Pro-Am, that

you have to be a celebrity, he said, 'I'm a celebrity!
He said, 'I know you can do it!' and he laughed and
hung up. I went off to Pebble Beach not knowing what I
could do...

but again, Knight's ability to forge and sustain bridging ties, those "getting ahead ties," made her successful. The father of one of her staff members frequently played the Pebble Beach golf course, and the staff member told Charlie which people she had to see to get Riles onto the course and into the tournament.

We made a presentation to the AT&T officials
[in charge of the golf tournament], selling the
idea of Wilson who was the first Black elected
superintendent, and so on....a few days later,
I got the call that Wilson could play. Everybody
in the state knew that I had pulled that off!" she
laughed. "After that, Wilson thought I could walk
on water. He was dying to get me to come to Sacramento
[State Superintendent's office], so I came.

By this time, Charlie Mae Knight and her husband were the parents of four children, three boys and one girl. The youngest boy was ten years younger than his siblings. I asked her how she combined being a mother and wife with being an educator and an administrator. Her answer highlighted again her use of network ties.

My husband was a career military man, 30 years; he served in Korea, and he served in Vietnam. So I was used to being mother and father to the kids; however, I was always the refuge of one or two of my sisters or my brother who lived with me, and who helped with the family. I had a built-in baby sitter so I could take night classes or go to meetings. When my husband was re-assigned from Fort Ord [Monterey] to Germany that made it easy and logical for me to move the family to Sacramento. My daughter had graduated from college and was working there, and my older son was in community college. My youngest was 10 years old, but we had lots of dear friends who became extended family to us when we lived there.

In Sacramento in 1978, Riles was a true mentor to Charlie Mae, encouraging her to get a doctorate and supervision credentials that would enable her someday to become a superintendent. But as Associate Superintendent for Elementary Education, Dr. Knight also found herself in the thick of the politics of education. "...Sacramento was just intolerable. It was a cow town, which it still is, but they were as racist in Sacramento as they were in Georgia," she said. As Dr. Riles' point person for early childhood education,

at that time, I was selling early childhood education...

that was the mantra for Wilson Riles. And I noticed that in the middle class areas, those mamas bought that early childhood education...give the child an early start... particularly in high wealth areas, we had no problem. You know, we were down in Santa Barbara; we were up in Monterey and Monte Vista, all of these places where there is money. But then, when you got to the inner city, ahh, early childhood education was not embraced by the inner city leadership, meaning the board of education, the superintendent, and so, I decided that there ought to be a summit. And unfortunately, being a little militant, I called this the California Black Summit. I'm the one who had the *Black* [her emphasis] Summit in Sacramento, California in 1979 [she laughs]. It was the first time in 100 years that Blacks had met in Sacramento to discuss educational concerns about Black children.

Dr. Knight recalled the political danger of holding a summit headed with the racial term "Black" [on education or anything else] particularly without the blessing of the Black political leaders of the time, including those men like Willie Brown of San Francisco [powerful Democratic party leader, former Speaker of the California Assembly, and recently as of this writing, former mayor of San

Francisco] and Mervyn Dymally (former state assemblyman) of Los Angeles. Equally formidable were women like (now Congresswoman) Maxine Waters of Los Angeles, although Charlie Mae had invited powerful Black women who did not come.

We had over 2000 Black people from all over the state of California come to the Summit. Jerry Brown was the Governor and he called Wilson Riles to see if he could talk to me. He wanted to know if he could be invited to speak at this Summit. Jesse Jackson was there, Lerone Bennett [historian] was there, Maynard Jackson [first Black mayor of Atlanta] was there... Tom Bradley [first Black mayor of Los Angeles] also came, along with the Black mayor of St. Louis. We had cooks, we had people from all walks of life there.

Dr. Knight said that what they talked about was as politically controversial perhaps as the conference itself:

We talked about what we [were] experiencing, and it's interesting that I had that kind of vision... before the issue of test scores, we noticed that the ESEA Title I money was being siphoned off for bilingual education which meant that the money that we were spending on Black youngsters was greatly reduced. But you couldn't come out there

and say it if your boss was Wilson Riles, because he had to think about all of the children. But if we had a summit we could say it to our leaders. We had the president of the Urban League from the State of California; I mean it was a real Summit. Jerry [Brown, the Governor] did come, and Jerry and Jesse [Jackson] got to developing a relationship...they started a dialogue...the press came out and gave us great reviews from the [*Sacramento*] *Bee*".

But perhaps as a harbinger of press coverage and public controversies to come, Dr. Knight remembered,

...there's another local paper...it came out and said that I and Rex Fortune [associate superintendent for secondary education and the colleague who helped her put on the Summit] and my staff had planned this summit on state [taxpayers'] time. Well, we went to the conference, but none of us actually filled out a conference slip getting permission and all that stuff... a real technicality. It was not enough of a problem to cast a shadow over the summit.

Dr. Knight recollected,

but you could tell that it was unsettling... because just let me tell you what happened. One of the things we said was that we are talking

about action, and where do you go for action?

You go to the capital. So at Noon, on the last day, we marched to the capital, and was singing outside of the Governor's office. Singing 'We Shall Overcome,' all kinds of songs...Maxine Waters [who had not been invited to the conference] saw the group out there and she came out and said, 'You ought to be back there teaching your children rather than being here...'

And Willie Brown [at that time, Assemblyman representing San Francisco, and as Speaker, a powerful figure in the California Assembly with his own political ambitions], right away decided that I was Public Enemy Number 1---'who does she think she is?'---well, he was the Kingpin then...Maxine Waters said, 'oh, this is outrageous!'

And so what happened as a direct result of this kind of aggression, they started something called BAPAC: the Black Political Action Committee...and that was really to derail us. It had all the 'high muckety mucks' [slang adaptation of Amerind Chinook (western North America) words for "hiu muckamuck," a synonym for "those in charge," or "those very high on the totem pole". (Retrieved October 20, 2005 from <http://www.yaelf.com/questions.shtml>)] But it never did get off the ground like ours.

Dr. Knight found that her conference would not get off the ground for a second year either, however, after auditors in the state department of education sent a letter to Wilson Riles saying that all of the school Districts that paid the way for participants to go to the Summit would have to give that money back.

When I got ready to put on the second Summit, the day before we were supposed to have the Summit, Wilson Riles made us send a letter to all school Districts saying that the Summit was illegal and that school Districts could not defray the costs of persons who attended. It cut it [conference attendance] down from 2000 to about 200. I lost about \$30,000; had to take my retirement to pay it because by that time we had all the hotel contracts...I had to pay for rooms, I had to pay for the convention center, and it cost me \$30,000, personally....I signed everything. And the rest of them could not afford it...so I drew my retirement [funds] out from Monterey [Unified School District where it was accessible to her because she had transferred to another retirement system when she became associate superintendent]. I paid off all the bills, and after that, the Summit had a cloud over it. Black people were afraid.

By convening the Summit, Knight most certainly demonstrated courage enough to put her professional reputation and her personal finances at risk, but

she also demonstrated her ability to grasp the importance of the linkages between critical social forces like education and politics, particularly urban politics. What made her invaluable first to the Monterey Unified School District, and later to Wilson Riles' State Superintendent's office was her talent for "delivering," for making something happen that was empowered and informed by her bridging and bonding ties. These ties to people, institutions, and ideas connected her to a more global perspective of the delivery of public education, especially its delivery to children in poor communities. By linking education and politics, Knight could understand how social issues like poverty, classism, and racism in communities were inextricably bound to each other and to the ability of the communities' children to learn and to succeed in school. While serving as ESEA administrator Monterey prior to working in Sacramento and convening the Summit, Knight organized and convened the Monterey Multi-Cultural Conference ("...that's how I knew to do the Black Summit," she recollected) which brought people from all over the world. Dr. Knight reminisced about that moment in her career: "People still remember that it was a time when we did sit down and we did exchange ideas, and it wasn't just about education...it was about culture and education...and it had the feeling that we were really talking about getting all cultures together." But what made her invaluable first to the Monterey Unified School District and next to the California State Superintendent's office appears also to have made her a political threat to others. While working for Riles as Associate Superintenant, Knight again set about developing stocks of social capital through bridging ties by holding fundraisers and dinner parties at her

home in Carmichael, a suburb of Sacramento [and now the location of California's new Governor's Mansion].

What I was creating without knowing it...I was trying to make something happen, but what I didn't realize was that those people who were in earnest running for public office began to see me as some kind of threat. And then I began to get resistance from the 'powers that be'. ..in fact that's why I registered Republican [she had been a registered Democrat]. I thought I might want to be something else because I was not getting anywhere with these people [Democrats and others who were in control in the California legislature]. I was about things that I thought children needed, like good schools...about learning how to get access to those dollars in Sacramento [the legislature] that inner city schools just didn't get.

If her experience as a Washington lobbyist for the Monterey Unified School District taught her about the politics of education at the federal level, Knight's experiences in Sacramento baptized her in politics at the state and local levels of education. The experiences at this level also prepared her for becoming an urban superintendent, first in Lynwood, California, followed by her critical experience in East Palo Alto, California at Ravenswood Unified School District. The urban politicians in the California legislature were good Assembly people, Knight

discovered, but they had a different idea of what the priorities should be for their constituents.

Education was really not something they embraced.

Education is the step child even at the colleges [higher education]. We [education] get the least money even at the college level. We just don't have champions out there advocating for education. I blamed them [politicians] at the time... 'they're not about anything', I would say... but they were about crime, etcetera, because their constituents had people going to jail.

I asked her if no one saw the connection between going to jail and getting an education. She shook her head as she recalled, "No, not at that time. Another thing they were after... Willie [Brown] had another agenda: he wanted to be in control, and he was... Willie was like the Godfather... he was in control."

According to Dr. Knight, it was Willie Brown who decreed that Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco [at this writing the Democratic Whip in the U.S. House of Representatives] should run for Congress and not another woman, an African American who actually had more political experience. "Leadership was not involved in education, but owed a lot to education associations---they were 'chummy' with associations, like unions, who donated to [political] campaigns. They [education associations] got their share of bills through [the legislature]" Knight said, however, "I often had to go through White legislators to get bills sponsored." She had developed important bridging ties among White legislators

in Sacramento, and it was her political acumen that took her to her first superintendency in Lynnwood, California: “it was natural for me to go to Lynnwood, even though that is Maxine Waters’s territory, Merv Dymally, Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, Diane Watson [all prominent California Black politicians who were Democrats]. But none of those people had brought a new building to be built anywhere other than in the ritzy areas of LA.”

In 1981, Charlie Mae Knight became the superintendent of Lynnwood School District, a small District outside of Los Angeles, California. Situated in Los Angeles County as a part of the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area, Lynnwood shares a boundary with Compton, a city which had begun experiencing the effects of poverty, crime, and low expectations in the schools as these social issues spread out from the urban center of Los Angeles into the surrounding exurban areas. Lynnwood was incorporated as a city in 1921, and was a small middle class city in transition when Dr. Knight arrived as superintendent of its school District. As of the US Census of 2000, it still had less than 75,000 people, and Lynnwood has been the home of such notables as actor Kevin Costner, who is White, and several years later, tennis star Venus Williams, who is Black. In fact, Lynnwood was experiencing demographic shifts in its population from original White settlers to Black and Hispanic residents during the time that Dr. Knight was superintendent, 1981 to 1985. Its school District is part of the Los Angeles County School system, and is now over 65 percent Hispanic. But at the time Dr. Knight was Superintendent, the school board was predominantly White shifting to

Black, and male dominated, Knight recalled, and she immediately stepped into a quagmire of stereotypes when she went to Lynwood:

I am female and Black, and Lynwood was male-oriented. And I was political. I ran for the board of trustees of Compton College. This was unusual for a superintendent, but [Dr.] Abel Sykes [the African American chancellor- superintendent of Compton Community College at the time, which was also in demographic transition from White middle class to Black] needed an ally. [Being a politician] that meant people could take liberties with what they said about me. I created problems for myself by running for office and being an elected official. There was even talk of my running for Assembly [the legislature] but I knew that I could never run against someone like Maxine Waters. Anyone who ran against Maxine would be perceived as a threat. We never did click." She did not click with two of the new board members, both Black who opposed her operating style, as did some White board members.

The challenge of urban education

Teachers, principals, and superintendents working in low-income schools and Districts face different challenges than those of their peers working in middle-class and affluent areas. Although parents

in low-income communities want the same opportunities for their children as middle-and upper-income parents do, they live in places that threaten their safety and lack the resources to support their aspirations. Moreover, schools in these areas seldom provide the minimum services that middle-class families and Districts take for granted (Cuban, 2004, ¶ 5).

What Dr. Knight the new superintendent found in Lynwood was a growing number of students at risk, particularly minority students.

There the children were being allowed to fail, not come to school, and so on. I put in rules to instill attendance, reduce tardiness. The White people knew that I was about discipline and I was a visionary, but they just didn't like my vision [she laughs]. If there was going to be a Black in that seat, it was going to be *their* Black.

Lynwood had been a middle-class, suburban enclave for Whites who had settled there in the 1920's and again in the post-World War II era. As more and more minorities (first a wave of Blacks, followed by a wave of Hispanics) immigrated to the Los Angeles metropolitan area, Whites had fled into close-in suburbs, like Lynwood, and by Dr. Knight's arrival, Whites were moving again leaving a school District in transition with shrinking property values to fund it.

Part of her vision was an improved curriculum, Knight recalled, one that would prepare students for life after high school, including college, but she also

pushed for a new high school that would accommodate the Black and Hispanic students from poorer homes that were beginning to arrive in the District in large numbers. Knight recalled that the original high school had been appropriate for the smaller number of students who came from the comfortable, middle-class and working class neighborhoods of Lynwood, but as Whites fled to the San Fernando Valley and other areas, the buildings left behind were inadequate and outdated; this was particularly true of the high school. Much of the board, however, which was still dominated by the White power-elite of the area who were resistant to the cultural change they could see in the neighborhoods and in the schools, thought the students deserved no better, according to Knight. She recalled realizing their pervasive low expectations of the new students after being asked by one board member, "Why are you putting in all these new fangled things? They [the students] don't need academics---Blacks will be janitors and Mexicans will be gardeners." She also experienced power struggles with a Black woman on the board over issues of governance and policy; members of the newly arriving Black community wanted to flex their power but Charlie Mae was apparently resistant. Her conflict with the board and subsequently with the teachers' union which had gone out on strike led to a rancorous departure from Lynwood Unified School District and a settlement with the board for the remainder of her contract, but Knight had used her connections in Sacramento to finally get funding for the new high school. After long struggles, including derailing of the funding of the new building on several occasions, the new high school was completed at last, but after Charlie Mae Knight left Lynwood for East

Palo Alto and the Ravenswood School District. Dr. Knight recalled that she returned for the dedication of the new building, along with Maxine Waters who spoke at the dedication. “But it was George Deukmajian [the Republican Governor] who used his political leverage to put the funding through the legislature,” she said.

This time in Lynwood was especially challenging for her youngest son who was now in junior high in Lynwood. Charlie Mae remembered the teacher’s strike, and how it affected her son’s view of some of his teachers whom he had trusted and admired. “He was really involved in music, in the band, and that all came to an end, I think, because of his disillusionment with what happened during the teacher’s strike.” The younger son was an avid reader and read the newspaper’s accounts of the acrimony between his mother and the board, and his mother and the teachers’ unions. An especially trying time came when someone accused Charlie of taking a computer modem from the school and giving it to her son so he could communicate with the friends he left in Sacramento, which was not true. He was one of the few children in the neighborhood to have a computer, however. He was puzzled how something as personal as what he had in his room could become front page news. Dr. Knight told him that probably some of his friends who visited him mentioned the computer, and the rumor just grew from that point. She recalled:

It really disrupted his life. It was
so traumatic that I sent him to live with his sister
who was working in neighboring Pasadena so

he could attend high school there, and
he graduated from high school in Pasadena.
I've always believed in living in the District
neighborhoods. How else will you know
what your families are experiencing?
But the downside is that people get jealous.
They see you with things, furniture, how you live...
if you buy more than one house, they get jealous
that you have more than one and they can only
afford one...that's the downside. But
I still believe that it is helpful to understand
the plight of the families whose children
attend your schools.

Charlie Mae Knight knew about being a child from poverty when she became an educator, and that *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1991) provided a trajectory from her early life that shaped her responses and reactions to those professional as well as personal environments where she saw others, especially children, struggling with the effects of poverty and injustice. Further, working in the Monterey Unified School District as the administrator of the ESEA Title I funds no doubt taught her how to make a bureaucratic system work for poor children and their families; and in Sacramento as the Associate Superintendent for Elementary Education, building upon that ability to get things done that had encouraged State Superintendent Wilson Riles to hire her in Sacramento, she

quickly learned how to exploit the connections between education and politics. Perhaps the most important knowledge that Charlie Mae derived from her personal and professional experiences was her innate use of an asset building approach with the poor communities with whom she came in contact in her work. This approach avoided the traditional *deficits* or *deficiencies of the poor* approach, one that saw them as impassive subjects of external forces, incapable of affecting their own lives. It also recognized the role of injustice as a determinant of poverty, as much as personal or community histories. Instead, it built on the innate ability of all human beings to develop their skills and on the near universal desire to create a better life for oneself and one's progeny (Oliver 2001, p. xii).

Dr. Knight's survival and her successes in her early life and in the earlier part of her career invoked her ability to make and sustain not only bonding ties, the ties that helped her to get by, but the more important bridging ties, the ones that helped her to get ahead. Like her superintendent in the Monterey Unified School District and then later Wilson Riles, one is impressed by her ability to identify the right people, and then work through them to get things done for others and for herself. At a particularly low point in her challenges in the Ravenswood School District, a critic said that she "acted too much like an old fashioned politician---cementing her power base by dispensing favors or assistance". The *San Jose Mercury News* quoted a former board member as saying, "That's why there are so many people loyal to her. When they were in a jam, she got them out" ("Loan Fund" 1998). It is instructive to note how people

from different parts of the same country may interpret behaviors; in the eyes of her critic in California, Dr. Knight's philanthropic behavior was seen as completely self-serving and not at all humanitarian. But Charlie Mae Knight grew up in Georgia, in the South which is dominated by a *traditionalistic* political culture (Fowler, 2000). In the traditionalist culture, Fowler observed, kinship, social connections, and personal relationships are extremely important (p.95). In this culture, politicians are expected to have and steadily maintain a wide ranging network of personal relationships. A notable major characteristic is ambivalence towards the market and unrestrained commercial enterprise, and yet another is the belief that an *established elite* should provide political leadership. Fowler also noted that the traditionalistic political system often produced courageous, even brilliant leaders who might not succeed in a moralistic or individualistic political culture.

Yet, observers might reasonably argue that while Charlie Mae Knight certainly fulfilled many of the expectations of the traditionalistic political culture with its commercial enterprise, social connections and important personal relationships, she also embodied elements from the *individualistic* and *moralistic* political cultures (Fowler, p. 96). When she argued convincingly that the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution should guarantee that every child should receive the best education available, her philosophy most resembled the *moralistic* political culture dominant in New England and in Midwest states like Wisconsin and Minnesota. The moralistic political culture perceives government as activist, initiating new programs when

necessary and important to improve life for everyone (Fowler, p. 95). Ironically, perhaps, Dr. Knight also firmly believed that IDEA 97 (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997) the special education law that guaranteed that all children would receive a free and appropriate education without regard to their disabilities was selectively enforced in large urban school Districts and needed to change. She contended that the federally enforced IDEA 97 was severely disadvantaging urban school Districts and their communities, and hampering efforts to educate children who most needed focused educational efforts. In pushing for an Equal Protection application to IDEA 97, she argued,

In middle class communities, you don't see White children with mental retardation or similar disabilities sitting in algebra or calculus or advanced composition classes; they are placed in classes that can accommodate their special needs. But that's not the case in poor urban communities, where classes are forced to accommodate these children even though they get nothing out of it, and at the same time put the other children in the class at a disadvantage.

In numerous interviews with Dr. Knight, she revealed a perspective that sees the educational system as an integral part of the political framework that shapes the community, and reforming the educational system does not happen without reforming the community; this is particularly true in urban communities. Like Fowler's (2000, p. 96) description of the *individualistic* political culture, Knight

sees government as necessary to provide the framework that keeps the economy working efficiently to enable reform. Perhaps it was no surprise, then, that Dr. Knight believed strongly in charter schools. In fact, she was instrumental in developing several in and around her District, and now that she was no longer superintendent, as of this writing, she was considering moving to Fresno, California where she had taken over the operation of two troubled charter schools.

“Politics is seen as a business like any other; individuals enter it in order to advance themselves socially and financially” (Fowler, p. 96). Poverty, unemployment, injustice, and crime all negatively impact how public education is delivered and how children learn, Dr. Knight believes, and in order to enact the dynamics of reform, one enacts a process that is based on the exchange of favors that exist within a system of mutual obligation (p. 96) found within concepts of social capital. A strong connection exists between social capital and social justice (Putnam, 2001). The bridging and bonding ties that Dr. Knight used so adroitly throughout her career were not completely or universally applicable; also, they no doubt had their dark side especially when they led to her conflicts with her school boards or with political forces in the community. But by her actions, one might argue that Dr. Knight also understood the distinction between the important uses of nonpolitical forms of social capital and political forms of social capital. She seemed to understand implicitly that political forms of social capital were required for the policy reforms that would help her communities and cement her influence, but that powerful constraints on social capital existed

within poor communities that derived from both broader structural conditions and misguided public policies (Putnam, p. xv). Early on in her professional career, Knight also recognized the importance of *extracommunity* linkages that benefited the community as a whole. She understood that schools were linked to neighborhoods or housing developments, banks, and police (Keyes, 2001). Perhaps when she saw the need to change political party affiliations in order to get the educational reforms that she felt were necessary through the state legislature, it was an innate recognition and exploitation of the political forms of social capital.

Section 2: Ravenswood and East Palo Alto

Dr. Charlie Mae Knight arrived in East Palo Alto as Superintendent of the Ravenswood School District as one uniquely prepared to deal with the entrenched effects of poverty and injustice. Perhaps it was her own background of poverty and wants that made her more aware of the conditions in Ravenswood than the nine previous superintendents, but Dr. Knight appeared very sensitive to the effects of long term poverty and disenfranchisement in the East Palo Alto Community when she arrived there in 1985. One Internal Informant observed, “Dr. Knight demonstrated that she felt what the community felt”. That included helping to bury children slain in vicious drug wars in addition to delivering food baskets. Her supporters in the District observed Dr. Knight’s generosity however, including her intense concern for the families in the District, even to the willingness to loan her own money to help those in need. The Internal Informant reminisced about first meeting Dr. Knight:

We were not prepared for the change that Dr. Knight brought: She moved into the area [none of the other superintendents had lived in the area]. She'd show up at church on Sundays; she was visible in the community. She was able to jog in the streets—that was strange to us...that made a few of us realize that she was here to stay. She was always working at her desk, she answered her phone; she seemed to be available, or her secretary would tell us when she could see us. All of these things were strange carrying on for a Black educator. She paid attention to the students' families, including Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas boxes: 'every kid should have a Christmas gift', she said. She got right into the mix and made sure that kids had Thanksgiving dinners; she would personally distribute boxes to those who needed them (Internal Informant # 1).

Dr. Knight stated several times in her interviews with me that rental housing deposits and myriad other financial emergencies were at the top of her list when she approached the former director of the Peninsula Community Foundation, Bill Somerville, for a grant. "In hindsight, I would do anything for my employees that would improve their lives," she said to me, repeating what she also had shared with others ("Chief's charges contested indictment," 2000). Dr. Knight voiced her belief that the concerns over the loan fund and the subsequent charges against her confirmed the impression that many people on the Peninsula

did not understand what it meant to be poor. Bill Somerville, however, was more astute and understanding of the issues and problems confronting the poor. An editorial in one of the online newspapers, *The Palo Alto Weekly*, noted that after leaving the Peninsula Community Foundation, Somerville had established a smaller foundation, Philanthropic Ventures, which had a “strong interest in education and in East Palo Alto and other minority communities,” the editorial continued. The article also added that Somerville was “known for his disdain of the paperwork and administrative burdens found at many foundations”. Dr. Knight recalled that Somerville had been given a golden parachute from Peninsula Community Foundation which he used to establish the Philanthropic Ventures Foundation. The results of the collaboration between Knight and Somerville was the District loan fund run by a small committee, who would “decide on loans to District employees to help them through tough times” (Retrieved October 9, 2005, from http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/spectrum/2000_Jun_14.EDIT14.html).

Apparently, Knight was not like the other nine superintendents who had passed through Ravenswood in ten years: one superintendent had severe personal problems and did not even unpack his bag, and the others were only acquainted with the District as the way to pick up their pay checks, according to long time District residents. One board member who grew up in the area noted: “I can’t tell you who the superintendent was because all I recall is every year we had a new superintendent” (Board member # 2).

Dr. Knight also set about buying property when she moved to East Palo Alto, and as a result owned significant numbers of properties in both Northern and Southern California. A family member recalled that Dr. Knight's grandfather was an "honest entrepreneur who amassed a substantial amount of property," and a younger Charlie Mae had been very influenced by him. Real property ownership remained very important to her, and in interviews, she mentioned the importance of affordable housing and home ownership to stabilizing a community and building capital among its residents. In the same article in which the *Mercury News* criticized the District's loan fund and the District credit cards, it also quoted one of the citizens who had benefited from her assistance: "People know, in this community, [you can] call Dr. Knight if you need something." The woman, a mother of six who lived in the Ravenswood District was facing eviction when Dr. Knight helped her move into a home owned by an out of town landlord that the District had refurbished with donations from another fund ("Loan Fund Raises Questions," 1998).

The *Mercury* articles made much of the fact that some District staff members who borrowed money from the District's loan fund also owed rent or money to Dr. Knight, and from these facts the conflict of interest charges emerged. But in addition to failing to draw connections between the need for the District loan fund and the lack of accessible financial resources in the community, what the *Mercury* also did not mention was the fact that Dr. Knight owned several properties that she rented at various levels of the market, including Section Eight [Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, further

amending the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 to create the Section 8 Program. In the Section 8 Program, tenants pay about 30 percent of their income for rent, while the rest of the rent is paid with federal money] (Retrieved October 23, 2005, from <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/index.cfm>). Even in her own gated community, she owned additional units that she leased at below market rates to women who were “trying to get back on their feet,” as she described them. She also established real estate trusts for family members, she told me, which would endure long after her death. A family member said that Dr. Knight is “a very unselfish person—she would deny herself something if someone else needs it.”

It was her business acumen and her ability to generate money which may have been one of the factors that made her a highly visible target for investigation by prosecutors, government officials, and the press. Dr. Knight’s husband, who died of cancer on December 2, 2000, during her trial for alleged conflict of interest, told a family member that “I’m just afraid that if I should die, that people will take advantage of Kel” (his name for Charlie Mae, whose maiden name is Kelly). According to the family member, after being assured that Dr. Knight’s family would look after her, her husband “let go and passed away about seven months prior to the verdict in the trial” (Family Member).

From his deathbed concerns, it was apparent that Dr. Knight’s husband saw her as a vulnerable person who loaned money to people, brought food boxes to families, buried the dead, and rented homes to people at below market rates, actions that most certainly built confidence among the taxpayers and citizens of East Palo Alto. That confidence was very evident in passage of two

bond issues which allowed the District to construct a playing field, refurbish seriously outdated school buildings, and to build a state of the art gymnasium, among other things, at the same time Dr. Knight was under fire in the *Mercury News*, and under indictment by the San Mateo Grand Jury (“Third time proves to be a Charm,” 2000). A few days after she was indicted by the San Mateo District attorney’s office on 19 conflict of interest charges, she appeared at the ribbon cutting for the new Boys and Girls Club of East Palo Alto. The paper quoted Dr. Knight as stating:

“I am still committed, in spite of the challenges of last week, on improving the education and services for children in East Palo Alto,” Knight said. “I’ve seen pain and suffering in this community and all my efforts have been to help the people who have been forgotten.” The newspaper reported that she received the loudest applause of the day (“A Place for the Kids,” 2000).

Dr. Knight’s good intentions appeared to have ignited resentment among some who said, interestingly, that “she acted too much like an old-fashioned politician---cementing her power base by dispensing favors or assistance”. The *Mercury* quotes a former board member as saying “That’s why there are so many people loyal to her. When they were in a jam, she got them out”. (“School Official’s Use of Loan Fund,” 1998). A family member observed however, that “the news media gave her more power than she had” and that people were jealous of her; apparently the jealousy was fueled by people’s own selfishness and narrow mindedness: “They are not used to people helping others for no reason---there must be an alternative motive” (Family Member).

Certainly, Dr. Knight was known for her willingness to speak up and put the weight and image of her office behind issues that affected the entire East Palo Alto community, especially when those issues affected Ravenswood District students and families. In fact, in December 1997 in the *San Jose Mercury News* ("Independent Study Urged" 1997) article, Dr. Knight publicly commented on the published results of an internal CIA probe into the distribution of crack cocaine in Black communities. She was one of several African American leaders from the Peninsula area communities who were asked for their opinions of the results of the CIA investigation which had been prompted by a highly controversial series of articles written by Gary Webb, a Pulitzer Prize winning *Mercury* reporter at the time he wrote the articles; Webb was pushed out of the newspaper shortly before the article appeared. "Gary Webb's 1996 series in the *San Jose Mercury News* titled *Dark Alliance* alleged that for the better part of a decade, a Bay Area drug ring sold tons of cocaine to Los Angeles street gangs and funneled millions in drug profits to the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contras" (Retrieved October 10, 2005, from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/forum/october96/crack_contra_11-1.html)

The 1997 *Mercury* article in which Dr. Knight and other Peninsula area Black leaders appeared stated that Webb's story had "sparked outrage among Blacks around the country because of persistent rumors that the government had brought crack into Black neighborhoods" ("Independent Study Urged," 1997). In same article, Dr. Knight was quoted as saying, "it would be hard for such an insidious drug to spread to 'every nook and cranny' of America without government influence". In the article she also related how she found that crack

had infiltrated poor rural neighborhoods when she returned to her home town of Valdosta, Georgia. The 1997 article quoted her further as saying, “Most Blacks probably feel that the investigation that was conducted would not erase the notion that somehow somebody has to be responsible for bringing this into the country. We don’t want to indict the CIA, but we want to find out who’s responsible.”

The Superintendent knew only too well about all the “nooks and crannies” inhabited by drugs in East Palo Alto. She had first hand experience with the problem when she arrived there-- drugs were rampant in the community. The urban-savvy Charlie Mae quickly learned that drug dealers hid their “stash” in the hedges and trees that grew in front of her District office window, so she had the greenery sharply pruned back or taken out completely. She recalled one particular series of events that began when she had to fire a principal because he took a minor female student across the Bay without a chaperone. That principal was always well-dressed, drove expensive automobiles, owned a boat, and generally seemed to have lots of money. She also had heard a rumor, she remembered, that he could be seen on Friday night’s at a local bar cutting cocaine with some of the local drug dealers. Working alone in her District office as usual one Saturday morning, a well-dressed junior high school student, who she had heard was a runner for one of the dealers, came into her office. He said to her quietly, chillingly, *‘you don’t need to be here’*. “Any other time, I would have argued with him about why I didn’t need to be there,” she laughed. “But for some reason, this time I just stood up, gathered my papers and stuff, put them

back in my briefcase, got in my car and drove straight home.” Later that afternoon, the police reported to the Superintendent that her office had been peppered with gun shots; if she had remained in her office, she would have been killed. When she saw the young student who had warned her, Dr. Knight asked him why someone would shoot up her office. But before he answered her, he asked her why she had fired the principal. “I fired him because he took an under aged female student to Oakland without a chaperone.” “Is that why?” he responded. “You shoulda fired him for that! We thought you fired him because he’s a drug dealer.” Drugs were such an integral, entrenched part of the culture in East Palo Alto that dealers were a respected, even protected part of the community.

Section 3: The Mercury News

In the early phases of the study, and as the previous section shows, I relied heavily on the *San Jose Mercury News* as another “factual” source on Dr. Charlie Mae Knight’s trials and tribulations in Ravenswood District and the East Palo Alto community. However, the *Mercury News* was not a disinterested source of objective information; the newspaper constructed Dr. Knight’s story in particular ways and for particular purposes, about which I can only make educated guesses.

For the Superintendent, Gary Webb’s August, 1996 series of articles had the ring of truth. Webb’s series on the Contra-cocaine connection, however, may have had an unexpected and unintended consequence in the life of Dr. Charlie Mae Knight. The series created a firestorm among the establishment media who

denounced Webb's articles, and Webb's own executive editors at the *San Jose Mercury News* quickly distanced themselves from him. On May 11, 1997, Jerry Ceppos, Mercury executive editor, published a front-page column saying that Webb's series "fell short of my standards." After first running the series nine months earlier, he now criticized the stories because they "strongly implied CIA knowledge" of Contra connections to U.S. drug dealers who were manufacturing crack-cocaine. "We did not have proof that top CIA officials knew of the relationship" (Retrieved October 10, 2005, from <http://www.consortiumnews.com/2004/121304.html>). After being publicly disowned and denigrated by his employers, Webb was demoted within the *Mercury News* to a field office in Cupertino, California, the moral equivalent of being sent to a Gulag in Siberia, so serious was his transgression. Webb resigned from the *Mercury News* shortly before the 1997 *Mercury* article which interviewed Dr. Knight and others, although he did push his investigation further in a well-documented book *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion*, published in May, 1999. In fact, Webb had revived an Associated Press story written by Brian Barger and Robert Parry in December 1985 that connected the Contras with the drug trade. While that story also had met with ridicule, Webb's story had more impact for at least one major reason: the Internet. Even though the *Mercury* was a regional paper, it had taken advantage of its location in Silicon Valley to develop very sophisticated Internet capabilities. As alternative press sources described it, Webb's article was a firestorm, the shot heard around the world, literally, and the big national

newspapers, like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* found themselves upstaged by a less well-known regional paper (Retrieved from <http://www.consortiumnews.com/2004/121304.html>). But in Gary Webb's own words,

...and that's when this strange thing happened.

The national news media, instead of using its brute strength to force the truth from our government, decided that its time would be better spent investigating me and my reporting.

They kicked me around pretty good, I have to admit.

(At one point, I was even accused of making movie deals with a crack dealer I'd written about. The DEA raided my film agent's office looking for any scrap of paper to back up this lie and appeared disappointed when they came up empty handed.)

[Webb was found dead in December, 2004, an apparent suicide.] (Retrieved October 15, 2005, from <http://www.counterpunch.org/narconews.html>)

Despite their efforts to distance the paper from him, it appears that in 1997 the *Mercury* was feeling the heat from Webb's article, which also created lots of heat for the CIA and for the US Justice Department; the article must have been a huge *leftist*-tinged embarrassment for the *Mercury News* in the affluent, influential, and politically conservative climate of the Peninsula [Condoleezza Rice,

the U.S. Secretary of State for Republican President George W. Bush, was the Provost at Stanford prior to going to Washington D.C., and the Hoover Institute, a conservative public policy “think tank,” resides on the campus]. The paper probably felt that it needed to redeem itself in the eyes of its colleagues and rivals, and that it also needed to beat back the competition from its neighbor to the north, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, which may have smelled blood in the water. By distancing his paper from Webb and the mainstream media’s harsh criticism of the article, Executive Editor Ceppos probably believed that he needed to regain a foothold among the power elite and reinstate the paper in the hierarchy of the mainstream, more *conservative* media, and the paper needed a new investigative focus to distract the focus away from itself.

The paper also needed to make a bigger profit, and in fact in March, 2001, Jay T. Harris, *the Mercury News* Publisher; resigned his position saying in a final letter to his staff that he was stepping down “in the hope that doing so will cause [the Knight Ridder executive management] to closely examine the wisdom of the profit targets we’ve been struggling to meet”. Harris went on to say that he was concerned that “we have been unable to find a way to meet the new targets without risking significant and lasting harm to the *Mercury News*—as a journalistic enterprise and as the special place to work that it is” (Retrieved October 8, 2005, from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/03.15.01/public-eye-0111.html>). Dr. Knight said that at one point, she and two others from the Black community visited Harris to ask him and the *Mercury* editorial board to broaden the newspaper’s coverage to include more diverse dimensions of the

brewing controversy in East Palo Alto, and “it worked for a while,” she said, “but it didn’t last”. Charlie Mae found herself and her District pummeled from multiple angles: “I just stopped talking to any of them [reporters], because no matter what I said, they’d find a way to twist it,” she recalled.

By the time Harris, an African American, wrote the letter to his staff, the *Mercury* appeared to have been working extremely hard to boost its readership (and perhaps to undo the damage perceived to have been done by the Webb articles). Harris’ letter suggested that the *Mercury* was pushing its staff to make a profit at all costs, but to do that, it needed to sell papers so that it could garner advertising revenue. It needed a good, titillating scandal to cover, and it may have found it in right down the road in East Palo Alto. During the 1996 to 1997 academic school year, a few short weeks after the storm over Gary Webb’s article began in earnest, the *Mercury* began a series of investigations into the Ravenswood District and Dr. Knight under the color of the Public Records Act (California Codes, Government Code Section 6250-6270)

. Their investigation covered myriad District administrative matters, including travel and conference expenditures, and credit card policies and use. “The District located and provided to the *Mercury News* thousands of documents spanning a three year period” (Declaration of Theresa A. Gibbons, Esq., August 9, 2001, Ravenswood City Schools...Show Cause, p. 5). At the same time, the *Mercury* also appeared to be working to dominate the entire news industry by overwhelming smaller regional newspapers, like the independent, Hispanic-

focused publications *La Oferta Review*, *El Observador*, and *Alianza Metropolitan News* which the Knight Ridder-owned *Mercury* overtook on the Peninsula with its own Spanish Language paper, *Nuevo Mondo* (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/05.29.97/Spanish-Press-9722.html>).

Perhaps the *Mercury's* most notable role, however, was as one Informant observed, "churning the events" surrounding Dr. Knight and Ravenswood School. In its June 28, 2001 issue published a few months after Harris resigned (and during Knight's conflict of interest trial), the *Mercury* published the results of its six month long and most recent investigation of Dr. Knight and the District in an article with the titillating title, *Schools Chief Benefits While Students Lag* (2001). While the results of its investigation may have been intended to help convict Dr. Knight, she was acquitted a few days later on all 19 felony charges.

In the review of four to five years of newspaper articles, it would be difficult not to draw the conclusion, as Dr. Knight and many others in the community had done, that newspapers, especially the *Mercury*, were interested only in promoting the more sensational, negative information about the community and Dr. Knight, and ultimately to drive her out of office. By the newspapers constantly "churning the details of the cases against her," observed one External Informant, "Dr. Knight had to fight public opinion as well as legal charges". Certainly, it was possible to follow in the newspaper the tortuous paths of Dr. Knight's skirmishes with various government officials and organizations. The investigation of the conflict of interest charges leveled against her by San Mateo County prosecutors and then her indictment on those charges appeared to follow investigations by

the *Mercury*, and at the same time were fodder for the press. While a few minor daily and weekly papers (including the *Stanford Daily* and some on-line newspapers) covered the events in the Ravenswood District or those in East Palo Alto, it was the dozens of articles from the 1996 to 1997 academic year, when the newspaper launched one of the earlier of its major “investigations” into Dr. Knight’s activities and the District’s, up to the time of her dismissal in 2003 that appeared in *The San Jose Mercury News* that kept the problems in the city of East Palo Alto and in the Ravenswood School District, and the allegations against her fresh in the minds of its readers. Already defensive of their negative public image, including being dubbed in 1992 as “the murder capital of the world,” some groups within East Palo Alto cringed at the additional harsh light shined on them because of the allegations against Dr. Knight that appeared in the *San Jose Mercury News* on an almost daily basis; and rightly, they felt that all of the negative attention brought on the District, the city and Dr. Knight took away critical attention from the children. Dr. Knight’s problems were often cited as the reason the District was having problems (EPA.net Message Board, retrieved from <http://www.epa.net>). The *Mercury* articles served to focus public attention on East Palo Alto and Ravenswood School District, and to discredit Dr. Knight and her considerable accomplishments in the District, and in the city. At the same time, the *Mercury* had joined with other media to discredit and silence Gary Webb, its former news reporter.

Background of East Palo Alto

The San Jose Mercury News accurately depicted the East Palo Alto community as economically depressed, but there seemed to be a disconnect in their news stories between the impoverishment of the area and the roots or consequences of poverty for its citizens. Located between the affluent communities of Menlo Park and Palo Alto (including Stanford University), East Palo Alto had no tax base, high levels of unemployment, and a school system that was in tatters when Dr. Knight arrived in 1985. The city now known as East Palo Alto evolved from post World War II population shifts in California and on the Peninsula in particular. Tract housing flourished in the area after WWII, and White Veterans and their families rushed to the area to purchase the new homes that costs less than ten thousand dollars, the limits of loans to Veterans. By 1950, the population of East Palo Alto had grown to seven thousand, and by 1960, it had doubled (Romic Environmental Technologies Corp, Special Report for 10th anniversary of East Palo Alto, 1993). At the same time, Blacks were limited in their housing choices because of racial segregation. In the 1950's, however, the 'block busting' strategy used by realtors and developers contributed to the further evolution of the city. Block busting involved realtors going to the homes of White homeowners and telling them that their property values were about to plummet because Black people (or sometimes other racial or cultural minorities) were moving into the neighborhood. The realtor would then offer to sell the property at a quick sale, reduced price, and then turn around and sell the same property at an inflated price to Blacks or other minorities. Agents

responsible for relocating African Americans displaced by redevelopment in San Francisco offered free bus rides to East Palo Alto. The maneuver had the dual purpose of attracting new buyers and alarming potential sellers (Romic Technologies History of East Palo Alto, 1993). In addition to block busters, however, several groups worked to end housing segregation and to integrate neighborhoods by having Whites act as 'fronts' for Blacks to purchase properties East Palo Alto was a focus area because prices were lower and residents were more tolerant.

Shortly before Dr. Knight arrived, the City of East Palo Alto was incorporated in 1983. Despite its location in the [at that time] technology-rich Silicon Valley, the city property lines were drawn and parts of East Palo Alto were annexed in such a way as to leave the city without a strong tax base; all of the high tech industries were located in Menlo Park on the East or in the West in parts of Palo Alto, and the land left to East Palo Alto was predominantly residential or church-related. Although East Palo Alto had a municipal council established in 1966 by the County Board of Supervisors, at the time of annexation because it was unincorporated, San Mateo County government made critical decisions (or allowed critical decisions) that impacted the unincorporated city. The widening of the Bayshore Highway (U.S. 101) and annexation decimated "Whiskey Gulch," so named because taverns and bars lined the old highway after Prohibition; but with the widening of the highway, East Palo Alto lost a central part of its business base in the 1950's. The lost businesses included a Safeway store that operated from 1959 to 1974. All four of the city's

banks left in the 1980's. Several other large businesses, including an aircraft manufacturing plant were annexed to neighboring Menlo Park, and fifty more businesses were lost when the University Avenue cloverleaf was constructed. A former board member noted that

East Palo Alto was in the county and had no representation on the County Board of Commissioners. In fact, the first Black woman was appointed first and then elected in 2000. The East Palo Alto community was disenfranchised and really had little or no say about the annexation (Former Board Member #2).

In 1968, a group of younger citizens in the 18 to 21 age group wanted to rename the city, Nairobi, to reflect the fact that the city was predominantly Black, but the name change lost 2 to 1 (Romic Technologies History of East Palo Alto, 1993). The East Palo Alto Municipal Council, however, continued as a viable force for the five Districts in the city: "To our knowledge, this is the first program [the East Palo Alto Municipal Council] of this nature in the United States. East Palo Alto is an ideal community for this experiment in incorporation and self-government of a minority area," San Mateo Legal Aid official was quoted as saying at the time (Romic Technologies History of East Palo Alto, 1993).

The annexation of East Palo Alto's land to its significantly more affluent neighbors set in motion complex power and financial dynamics that clearly advantaged some groups, but at best did not help, and at worst severely disadvantaged the citizens of East Palo Alto and the children of the Ravenswood

School District for nearly half of the 20th Century. It was a gradual shift downward into social isolation and racial segregation. The impact of the complex dynamics were felt for years, but *The Mercury News* rarely if ever mentioned the lack of a tax base or the lack of any political power or financial framework within the City as the possible contributor to the impoverishment and disempowerment of some groups in the area. Ravenswood school District was the major employer in East Palo Alto, and under Dr. Knight's leadership, it became a major power to be reckoned with, especially by the East Palo Alto City Council and the powers in the surrounding communities. Despite their proximity to East Palo Alto, the surrounding high tech industries did not provide an employment base for the city's high number of unemployed. Dr. Knight set up a loan fund to meet the needs of the families and school personnel, who lacked the empowerment or the financial stability to develop their own forms of capital, A current board member, who lived in the area continuously for a number of years, recalled that when Dr. Knight arrived,

...there were no banks, and we were a poor community.

A lot of the teachers and workers were saving money under mattresses. A lot of older parents would come home to find their money gone because they'd been robbed; drugs were a major problem in the city.

Because we are in a poor economic area, [at that time] there was no way of refinancing---we were 'redlined' [policy where banks and insurance companies

draw redlines on maps around certain zip codes or other boundaries that identify the areas as 'credit risks' or 'economically depressed', or 'minority'] by banks and savings and loan companies. When loans were available, it was at a high rate [of interest]. With the loan fund [started by Dr. Knight] people could borrow money at a low interest rate, and the money from the interest was reinvested. She just had the business sense, and I think people were threatened. And they just didn't understand how she could have done this, but they had to realize that this lady had been in here for 17 years; she had developed a lot of networking. In fact, she was recognized by the Governor [Wilson] (Board Member 2).

Missing from news stories reviewed for this writing was the comparison between how Dr. Knight found the community, and what she had been able to bring to it using the networks referred to by the Board Member # 2. Dr. Knight had extensive social capital, those networks of trust and reciprocity, including weak ties and strong ties, bridging and bonding ties (Lin, 2001, p.248) that she used to help remedy the conditions she found in the community.

The *Mercury*, however, used numerous opportunities to report the "bad news" about Ravenswood and Dr. Knight, and indeed, as both former and current board members believed, the newspaper appeared willing to spend a great deal of time, money and energy looking for bad news, perhaps to generate

more readership, and perhaps, too, to divert attention away from the embarrassing firestorm caused by Gary Webb's *Contra-Cocaine* series. Public opinion was highly influenced by the *Mercury's* unrelenting articles on Charlie Mae Knight and the Ravenswood School District. At one point, the *Mercury News* called for Dr. Knight to take an administrative leave ("For Now, Take an Administrative Leave," 2000) in an editorial:

Knight, a venerable leader and champion to many in the struggling Peninsula city, will have her day in court. Until then, she must take an administrative leave. While the accusations have not been proven, the cloud of indictment will diminish the office, darkening the struggling District's already blemished reputation.

Some residents wrote letters to the editor of the *Mercury*, taking issue with the call for Knight to step aside. Around the same period of time, Charles Quackenbush, the state insurance commissioner, was under fire for defrauding earth quake victims. One letter to the editor noted:

What a sad contrast between the two Charlies on your June 10 front page: Charlie Mae Knight's honest face and Charles Quackenbush's arrogance. Quackenbush's malfeasance as state insurance commissioner has defrauded earthquake victims of untold millions, yet we have a hard time deciding whether

to even fire the guy, let alone prosecute him (“Knight Charges are out of Line,” 2000).

On June 10, 2000, Dr. Knight was indicted on conflict of interest charges stemming from the District loan fund that she established in 1992, and she was acquitted of all charges in July, 2001. Beginning in the academic year 1996 to 1997, and the interim period between her indictment and her acquittal, the *Mercury* ran a series of investigative articles covering East Palo Alto and Ravenswood School District that raised questions about the loan fund, and may have contributed to the political climate that encouraged the San Mateo District Attorney’s office to indict her. In an article entitled, *School Officials’ Use of Loan Fund Raises Questions*, (1998) the reporters focused their front page story on forty thousand dollars that was loaned to top District officials and workers who either rented homes from Dr. Knight or who owed her money; others who borrowed were not emphasized. While District officials who made up the loan committee contended that \$180,000 dollars worth of loans had been repaid, the paper reported that from the records released by the District to the newspaper, the paper could not confirm repayment of the loans. The reporters listed in the newspaper the names of all of the District officials and the amounts they had borrowed from the District (“Loan Fund Raises Questions,” 1998).

In our interview and in newspaper articles, Dr. Knight confirmed the observations of Board Member # 2; she agreed that she started the fund when a District worker needed help to pay for a family member’s funeral. She raised the funds with grants from a non-profit Philanthropic Ventures Foundation to help

with emergency situations that arose with students, parents, or staff. In an interview with *The Mercury*, the Foundation's executive, Bill Somerville, said that while he didn't envision the money would be lent to high ranking officials, he nevertheless trusted Dr. Knight's judgment ("Loan Fund Raises Questions," 1998). Dr. Knight was also reported by the *Mercury* to have been criticized by the District Attorney's office for the lack of oversight of District credit cards which had been misused by three staff people.

Section 3: Crisis #1 -- *Conflict of Interest Case*

In the conflict of interest case, the San Mateo County District attorney filed criminal charges in San Mateo County Superior Court against Dr. Knight on June 9, 2000, alleging that she broke the law by helping to arrange emergency public loans to District employees who owed her money or who rented housing from her; the alleged conflict of interest arose because she could have appeared to have personally benefited from the loans (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from http://www.almanacnews.com/morgue/2000/2000_06_14.knight.html). Dr. Knight and the District had been the targets of two San Mateo County Grand Jury investigations, one in 1998, and the other in 1999. It was the later which led to her indictment on conflict of interest charges. Charlie Mae Knight, who had been superintendent of public schools in Ravenswood for over 15 years, and who had established the loan fund in 1993 to assist the District faculty and staff, faced 19 felony charges and the possibility of 15 years in prison for what the prosecutors alleged was her control and oversight of the loan fund between 1995 and 1997. Prosecutor's allegations were based on secret grand jury testimony "that

suggested Knight signed the loan checks and may have had a central role in the loan fund in its earlier years” (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from http://www.almanacnews.com/morgue/2000/2000_06_14.knight.html).

In my interviews with her, Dr. Knight said that someone in her District (she could only speculate about identity or about motivation) had complained to the District attorney’s office, and that launched the investigation. The major daily newspaper in several articles including one dated August 31, 1997, perhaps ironically corroborated her speculations: “The District attorney’s investigation began after a series of complaints from unidentified East Palo Alto residents into alleged abuses by Knight, trustees on the Ravenswood School Board and other District officials” (“Loan Fund,” 1997).

The District attorney alleged that records would show that Dr. Knight had engaged in a pattern of behavior that led to misappropriation of public money and a conflict of interest when she approved loan funds totaling twenty-nine thousand dollars to people who were connected to her financially in some way; six of the over 100 employees who used the loan fund also paid rent to Dr. Knight or owed money to her. The prosecutors contended that the state’s conflict of interest laws prevented public officials from channeling money to anyone with whom they had a personal relationship. By approving loans to those who rented from her, prosecutors claimed, Dr. Knight violated those laws: “What the law says is you cannot participate in any contract,” the prosecutor argued. The District Attorney’s office chose to interpret her signature as a contract which guaranteed her “a

steady cash flow” from those who owed her money

(http://www.almanacnews.com/morgue/2000/2000_06_14.knight.html).

The Superintendent’s lawyers argued that the DA’s charges were an overreaching and technical interpretation of the state’s conflict of interest statutes, however, pointing out that a District loan committee, not Dr. Knight, actually approved the loans. The lawyers contended that the committee, not Dr. Knight, made the decision to make the loans; and as superintendent she signed the loan checks as a formality in the District’s process. Further, her attorneys argued, while a 1999 civil grand jury report criticized Ravenswood’s administrative practices, including the loan fund, it found no “willful misapplication” of District funds (“Official Faces Charges,” 2000). “Nobody has said she made a dime,” said her criminal attorney in an interview with the newspaper. In fact, Dr. Knight was quoted as saying, “I rent 80 percent of my properties to the disadvantaged that nobody will rent to; to the handicapped that nobody will rent to; to minorities that nobody will rent to---I was not interested in profit,” she said (“Chief’s Charges Contested Indictment,” 2000). In an article in the *Mercury News*, the District Attorney’s office countered that there was no need to prove that Dr. Knight profited from the loans made from the District loan fund; they had only to prove that she was aware of the loans, had some control over the process and could have profited (“Conflict Allegation Detailed,” 2000).

Disquieting issues emerge

The San Mateo District Attorney’s use of the conflict of interest criminal statute to prosecute Dr. Knight troubled not only her attorney and her supporters,

including one who called it a “lynching without a rope,” (“Chief’s Charges Contested Indictment,” 2000), but another newspaper, as well-- the *Palo Alto Weekly*, a local on-line newspaper which had followed the progress Dr. Knight had made in the Ravenswood School District and in the East Palo Alto community. A few days after her indictment, in a June 14, 2000, article entitled, *Disquieting issues in Knight Prosecution*, an editorial summarized the events and the program that lead to the charges against her, and criticized the seemingly heavy handedness of the conflict of interest criminal statute, noting that “the law all but ignores *intent* when it comes to financial conflicts of public employees”. As a result, the article allowed, the altruistic motivations of Dr. Knight were impugned if not ignored all together: “What will make the case against Charlie Mae Knight so controversial is that the apparent motivation of all her actions was compelling, if not inspiring: She tried to help underpaid school District employees with their housing and other needs through a loan program using private funds (Retrieved October 9, 2005, from http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/spectrum/2000_Jun_14.EDIT14.html). Providing background information that painted a different picture of the circumstances around the indictment, the *Palo Alto Weekly* editorial recounted for the public the struggles and challenges the Ravenswood Superintendent encountered in the District, including recruiting and retaining teachers and other employees in a more supportive tone that the *San Jose Mercury News* had not been able to achieve up to that point (Retrieved October 9, 2005, from

http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/spectrum/2000_Jun_14.EDIT14.html).

In interviews first with the newspaper and later with me, Dr. Knight herself asserted that she had nothing to do with the loans, other than legally asking for a charitable donation to create the fund and keep it funded (“Ravenswood Superintendent Call Charges a Technicality,” retrieved October 8, 2005 from http://almanacnews.com/morgue/2000/2000_14.knight.html). Dr. Knight recalled that during the trial that, unlike many others with whom she had good relations, who she had helped, or with whom she had worked with productively,

...Bill Somerville was there. I have to give him credit. He was there until the press got on me, then he had to worry about whether the people who were contributing to his [foundation] saw me as I had been portrayed by [some] as not wanting to serve “Special Ed” kids, etc. It was disappointing that even he was sort of, “...well, I have no comment” when the papers interviewed him. He hung in there with me during the trial because it was true... he was the one who gave me the money [for the loan fund] and told me to do with it as I wanted, and that was the end of that.”

The collaboration with Somerville for the District loan fund, unfortunately, was the good intention that paved the road to the hell of prosecution for Dr. Knight.

The case against Dr. Knight began in 1997 as a grand jury investigation by the office of the San Mateo County District Attorney. It is unclear if the

investigations by the *San Jose Mercury News* and those by the San Mateo County District Attorney's office worked in conjunction with each other, but certainly the *Mercury* mentioned the District attorney's investigation into 'possible conflict of interest charges' ("School Official's Use of Loan Fund," 1998) before they were officially filed; and perhaps, too, there is little doubt that the *Mercury's* series of articles probably persuaded or at least influenced the San Mateo District Attorney's office to pursue a grand jury investigation and the Grand Jury to return a 'true bill' of indictment against Dr. Knight.

The *grand jury* is a type of common law jury; responsible for investigating alleged crimes, examining evidence, and issuing indictments if they believe that there is enough evidence for a trial to proceed. A grand jury is distinguished from a trial jury or *petit jury*. (Retrieved October 8, 2005, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_jury). The grand jury usually is composed of 25 members, while the petit jury usually has 12 members. Grand juries are supposed to be a part of a system of checks and balances that prevent a case from going to trial on a prosecutor's bare word; an impartial panel of citizens must first decide whether there exists reasonable cause or probable cause to believe that a crime has been committed. Defense lawyers often believe, however, that grand juries are a prosecutor's tool. For example, grand juries can subpoena their own witnesses and compel them to testify before them, but a prosecutor who is conducting an investigation cannot; that allows a prosecutor who wants to mount an investigation and compel witnesses to testify may convene a grand jury to do so. Further, unlike the trial itself, the grand jury's

proceedings are secret, and the target or the defendant can not confront her accusers. The origins of the secrecy goes back to the Middle Ages when the secrecy of the proceedings was used to protect citizens from the over reaching of the Crown (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from <http://www.nvo.com/cgja/grandjurybackgroundinformation/>).

In a grand jury proceeding, the defendant and her counsel are generally not present for other witnesses' testimonies, and they are unable to confront (that is, cross-examine) witnesses against the defendant's interests. On the occasion when the defendant may be present in the courtroom (for example, if the defendant is called as a witness), usually her attorney is not allowed in the courtroom; if the defendant needs to confer with her attorneys, she must step into the hallway to meet with them. The grand jury's decision is either "true bill" (i.e. there is a case that may go to trial) or "no true bill." Britain abandoned grand juries in the 1930s, and today fewer than half of the states in the U.S. employ them. Most jurisdictions have abolished grand juries, replacing them with the *preliminary hearing* at which a Judge hears evidence concerning the alleged offenses and makes a decision on whether the prosecution can proceed. (Retrieved October 8, 2005, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_jury).

Grand juries are still used in a number of U.S. jurisdictions, however. In 1978, the California Supreme Court ruled that defendants indicted by a grand jury were also entitled to a preliminary hearing which is held in open court. In 1990, however, prosecutors placed a state-wide initiative before the voters that would allowed prosecutors to indict a defendant by a grand jury without having to go

through a preliminary hearing as well; voters approved the initiative as Proposition 115 (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from <http://www.nvo.com/cgja/grandjurybackgroundinformation/>).

Prosecutors in California have discretion to use the preliminary hearing or the grand jury to indict defendants. Some prosecutors prefer to have witnesses cross-examined in a preliminary hearing followed by a judge's decision whether or not to bind over a defendant for trial. These prosecutors point out that the testimony from a preliminary hearing may be used in the trial that follows, even if the witness is "unavailable" because he is dead or disappears; this is not true in the case of a grand jury witness. But the secrecy of the grand jury is attractive to other prosecutors because it offers security to witnesses, like undercover police officers who can testify without revealing their cover, or the secrecy of grand jury can protect the target of an investigation who is ultimately exonerated).

Alameda County in the East Bay, and San Mateo County on the Peninsula are two of the counties which use the grand jury procedure sparingly (unlike San Francisco, Santa Clara, Contra Costa and San Diego for which empanneling a grand jury is more routine (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/03/05/MN64486.DTL>). In using the grand jury to indict Dr. Knight, San Mateo made an exception to its usual practice of using the preliminary hearing. Harriet Chiang, the *San Francisco Chronicle Newspaper's* legal affairs writer at the time wrote in her on-line column about the grand jury process which was being used at the time to indict a San Francisco police official. She noted San Mateo District Attorney Jim

Fox's rationale for using the grand jury instead of the preliminary hearing in Knight's case: "we didn't want to subject Dr. Knight to any kind of public ridicule....we wanted to find out whether 12 ordinary citizens would believe there was a crime." (Retrieved October 8, 2005 from <http://www.sfgate.com/cgiin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/03/05/MN64486.DTL>).

Prior to her indictment, however, the prosecutors in the San Mateo County's District Attorney's office apparently were not as concerned about subjecting Dr. Knight "to any kind of public ridicule," or waiting to find out "whether 12 ordinary citizens would believe there was a crime" before they spoke publicly to the newspapers. In an August 31, 1997, article appearing on page 1B, the *San Jose Mercury News* headlined an article, *School official not cooperating in Case, DA Says; Ravenswood Superintendent Denies Accusation*. The article quoted the deputy District attorney who was handling the case in the District attorney's office as saying that Dr. Knight and other District officials had refused to turn over documents that related to District expenses as well as her own expenses that the DA's office requested in a letter dated July 1. The *Mercury* apparently had a copy of the letter from the District Attorney's office which detailed the requests including "a variety of the school District's financial records, as well as documents relating to Knight's own personal finances, including loans on her extensive real-estate holdings in East Palo Alto and Southern California, and 10 years of tax returns for Knight and her husband" ("School Official Not Cooperating," 1997). The materials purported to relate to the twenty nine thousand dollars in the District loan fund that became the subject of an official

investigation because she had personal connections with some of the borrowers. The article went on to reveal more details of Dr. Knight's personal business affairs such as the fact that she owned six properties in East Palo Alto, including three condominiums and three houses. According to the article, four of the properties were rented out to tenants who also worked for the school District, and earlier that year, she had sold one of her condominiums to the business manager of the school District and his wife who were named in the article.

Dr. Knight was interviewed briefly for the article and she denied the DA's accusations of non cooperation, a point which she reiterated to me in interviews. "They have not been refused anything...We are being picked up and reviewed like we are some kind of criminals," she was quoted as saying at the time. The article also mentioned that she had referred all requests from the District attorney to her criminal attorney. There is no mention in the article whether the District Attorney's office had filed a Motion for Discovery with the court, which would have prompted Dr. Knight's attorney to respond either with the requested materials, or to file another motion on her behalf to overturn the DA's motion. Neither was it mentioned whether Dr. Knight's attorney actually had received a copy of the Motion for Discovery , if it had been filed by the DA's office, although at one point, her attorney did argue that the charges against her had been filed too late, saying that the statute of limitations on all but two of the charges had expired. What was mentioned in the article, however, was the DA's comment that a "blaze at the District offices that fire inspectors labeled suspicious destroyed

some documents that the District attorney had requested” (“School Official not Cooperating,” 1997).

Vindication, but at a cost

“I’m relieved. I’m ecstatic. I feel vindicated. I just feel good to be alive,” Dr. Charlie Knight said to a *Palo Alto Weekly* reporter after she was acquitted. After a three year long investigation and the subsequent trial, Dr. Knight was acquitted in July 2001, on all 19 counts of the original indictment, but the prosecution extracted an onerous toll from her personal reputation and by the tarnish to her professional credibility. She was acquitted by the jury perhaps because they were not persuaded that she had any criminal intent in establishing or administering the District loan fund. Perhaps jurors also were put off by the fact that the charges were pursued by the District Attorney’s office “despite the fact that Knight had earlier consulted with the San Mateo County Counsel’s office about the proper procedures to follow, and had apparently corrected some of the problems” (Retrieved from http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/2001/2001/07_25.qedit25.html).

Perhaps the jury also may have been put off by the politicized tone of the charges against Dr. Knight. In fact, in a June 2000 editorial published a few days after Dr. Knight was indicted, the *Palo Alto Weekly*, one of several small regional papers that appear on-line as well, opined that the prosecutor was “on shaky ground” unless “it had more substantive charges than those made public at the time”. The *Weekly* had warned, for example, that if the allegations went beyond the technical charges of conflict of interest (which they did), “then the DA should

tread carefully to avoid the appearance of politically influenced prosecution”.

After her acquittal, the paper observed and concluded that “not much substance ever emerged,” and suggested that prosecutor’s office itself should come under scrutiny for its decision to “bring criminal charges on what turned out to be a shallow, seemingly petty case based almost entirely on technical provisions of conflict-of-interest statutes---with no solid allegation ever made that Knight personally profited or had an intent to defraud anyone”. The editorial compared the San Mateo District Attorney’s office and its dogged prosecution of Dr. Knight to the obsessive Inspector Javert in Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables* (Retrieved from

http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/2001/2001/07_25.qedit25.html).

Indeed, the prosecution’s pursuit of Dr. Knight also echoed Gary Webb’s description of the zealous investigations into his life after he wrote the *Contra-Cocaine* articles. At one point, Knight told me in an interview, the District Attorney’s office froze all of her personal assets (although they denied it to her), including her personal and joint checking accounts for about a month; and much to the annoyance of the Hewlett Packard Foundation, the District attorney’s office also filed a discovery motion which allowed them to examine all of the checks written by Hewlett Packard Foundation to the Ravenswood School District to determine if Knight had signed any of them. Dr. Knight had developed relationships with the Hewlett Packard Foundation which funded math and science projects in the District.

While the *Palo Alto Weekly* newspaper vindicated Dr. Knight (“A Vindication for Charlie Mae Knight”), it also warned her and District officials of the need to provide “better financial oversight and a commitment not to cut procedural corners, even if the goal may be a worthy one” (Retrieved from http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/2001/2001/07_25.qedit25.html).

Tiombe Jama who ran a homework help center and Boy Scout troop summed up her take on Knight’s situation and that of R.B. Jones, former school board member and later, East Palo Alto city councilman who was indicted for soliciting two bribes totaling twelve thousand dollars one month before Dr. Knight was indicted for conflict of interest: “I was very annoyed that the FBI spent 14 months for twelve thousand dollars and in the meantime, we’ve got drug-selling and gun-selling everywhere here. I thought that was absolutely ridiculous. The impact of guns and drugs in this community has been totally devastating, way more than any amount R.B. [Jones] or Dr. Knight are alleged to have taken. People do things to destabilize us every day. The people with power don’t want us to have any. And if they [our people, our city] remembered that, then everything would be okay,” she said (“Something for the Kids”2000).

Even though it apparently took into account the unorthodox nature of the loan fund, the *Palo Alto Weekly* still appeared to give Dr. Knight the benefit of the doubt, reminding its readers that the superintendent had often been the subject of discussion in East Palo Alto as it noted, “Charlie Me Knight has always been a controversial figure in East Palo Alto, and opinions vary widely on her effectiveness as a school superintendent”; and it also raised the specter of a

politically motivated prosecution: "She has no lack of political opponents, and undoubtedly it was some of her opponents who brought the conflict of interest issue to the District Attorney back in 1997" (Retrieved October 9, 2005, from http://www.paloaltoonline.com/weekly/morgue/spectrum/2000_Jun_14.EDIT14.html). One nagging point here, however, is why the connection between the absences of banks (or any type of financial institution) in East Palo Alto and this emergency loan fund was absent noticeably in the *Mercury* article of February 17, 1998. At the very least, the *idea* of a District loan fund and its high utilization (over 100 people had used the fund at that time, according to the article) might have triggered more questions in the minds of the *Mercury's* editors and reporters as to *why* the fund was necessary in the community.

In an article the following year, *The Mercury* reported: *Frustrating Bank Delay East Palo Alto: California Bank & Trust seems ready to fill a 15 year old gap in the city.* (1999). It should be noted that unlike the article on the loan fund which appeared on page 1A of the Front section, the article about the lack of a bank appeared in the Local section, page 1B. Even more noticeable, however, was the newspaper's failure once again to draw any connections between its own story the prior year on the loan fund and credit cards scandal with this story on the delay in getting a bank for the city. The article even referred to East Palo Alto as a "cash strapped Peninsula town of 23,000" (p 1B).

Section 4: Background of Ravenswood

Dr. Knight's acquittal in the conflict of interest case did not silence *Mercury News* criticisms of her administration. It appeared that the editors and reporters

at the *Mercury* mounted a renewed effort to discredit Dr. Knight and to cast the city of East Palo Alto and the Ravenswood School District in the worst possible public light, despite the challenges of poverty and unemployment experienced by the city and the District.

The *Mercury's* six month "investigation" into Dr. Knight and her activities as superintendent generated bad news on several fronts. In an article entitled, *Schools Chief Benefits While Students Lag* (2001) Mercury reporters led off a multi-columned article:

The Ravenswood City School District has been widely praised for its education of disadvantaged children in the East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park.

But a six-month Mercury News investigation shows a very different picture: a District in which the superintendent and her friends and relatives benefit while many basic educational needs of their students are not met. The superintendent is Charlie Mae Knight, one of California's best-known Black educators, who has helped bring a national spotlight to Ravenswood, a poor and racially segregated island in one of the country's wealthiest regions ("School Chief Benefits While Students Lag," 2001).

The newspaper listed findings that purported to show that Dr. Knight led a venal and inefficient District. For example, it appeared from reading the article that

anyone who spoke well of Dr. Knight or who agreed with her was described as 'loyal' to her or a 'friend', and immediately discredited; the inference being that they were not 'objective' in their assessment or opinions of her or of the District. *Mercury* reporters alleged in the same article that "[s]ome employees who cooperated with the *Mercury News* or their relatives in recent months were subsequently demoted or dismissed. District officials in each case said there was no connection", leaving an inference with readers that staff and others who had cooperated with the *Mercury* investigation indeed had been retaliated against by the District, but the District was now lying about it. The intimations of retaliation unearthed by the *Mercury* involved personnel issues, and because personnel issues were to be held in confidence under both federal and state law, the District could not comment upon them; but the inference remained that the District was underhanded and engaged in wrong doing.

Relying upon information gained primarily in interviews with teachers, teacher aides, even special education students, reporters cited examples that included: 1) excessive spending on travel by the board and Dr. Knight; 2) audits showing improper documentation of federal monies spent for special education and school lunches; 3) "fraudulent claims" filed by the District after a school fire in 1997; teachers told reporters the District never had the furniture; 4) District failure to promptly address dangerous conditions in schools resulting in the 1997 electrical fire in the school; 5) suspiciously higher [than usual for Ravenswood] test scores that were inferred to be the result of wide spread cheating after two teacher aides in the District claimed they were told to fill in the answers for

special education students. Reporters contended that the claim was substantiated by a special education student who was interviewed in the classroom; 6) an extraordinary number of teachers lacked proper credentials; 7) District practices diverted hundreds of thousands of dollars from education into costly legal battles. In each case, reporters apparently gave more weight to the opinions of those who fit their investigative stance. Perhaps if the *Mercury* reporters had done more historical research into the genesis of the current issues in the Ravenswood District, they would have gained a different perspective of the District and of Dr. Knight.

As disenfranchised and disempowered as Dr. Knight found the city of East Palo Alto when she arrived in 1985, Informants outlined an even more dismal picture of the Ravenswood School District in the late 1960's and 1970's prior to her arrival. Nearly 650 students had attended Ravenswood High School when it opened in 1958. Originally its enrollment was predominantly White, but by 1969, 87 percent of the enrollment was Black. The high school closed in 1975, and Ravenswood students rode school buses to Sequoia High School, a 45 minute bus ride away in Redwood City. The most important issue historically when Charlie Mae Knight stepped into the Ravenswood School District headquarters was "the lack of support for minority schools," said a long time resident who had raised several children and grand children in the District. "Lack of facilities, repairs, keeping up the surroundings of the school, certified teachers...not enough financial support from the state provided support for the Ravenswood schools" (Internal Informant #1). Before Dr. Knight arrived, District

parents had put together the “Sneak Out” program where about 75 children from East Palo Alto schools sneaked out to Palo Alto schools in 1966. “I had to recruit White families for the kids to live with during the week, and [they would] come home on the weekend” (Internal Informant #1). This arrangement became more complicated however, after the death of Martin Luther King in 1968; fights broke out between Black and White students, the numerous conflicts became untenable, and neither White nor Black parents could manage the conflict, according to the same Informant. Alternative schools, such as Nairobi High School and Nairobi Elementary School became part of the Black parents’ drive to educate their children in spite of the indifference of the school board (EPA Net. Acceptable Use: History of East Palo Alto).

The Sneak Out program was started by a mother whose son had graduated from high school, but could not read well enough to fill out an application.

I came from the South where teachers looked out for Black children. I was very disappointed....
one of my sons had always looked forward to going to college. My oldest son said that the high school (Sequoia Union High School, the high school for Ravenswood and several other Districts) was not preparing Black kids to go to college. Kids were bailing out as fast as they could to go to other schools. I organized a group of mothers

who went to the board and begged and pleaded for
our kids...please educate our children.

Apparently the pleas fell on deaf ears before Dr. Knight came into the District. Well before Dr. Knight's arrival, the board was majority White, and a high percentage of the unincorporated areas around the city were predominantly White, particularly the east side of the freeway (US 101); this area gradually became Black and Pacific Islander as the Whites moved to Menlo Park, Mountain View, Los Altos, and other surrounding Peninsula communities. Housing was still racially segregated, so Blacks were narrowly confined in the area within the then-unincorporated area of East Palo Alto.

The Black parents believed that the educational needs of the Ravenswood children were being neglected, and they organized to remedy the situation (Internal Informant # 1). In addition to the Sneak Out program, parents organized homework help sessions and weekend tutoring. "We were able to get a grant to pay students to tutor in our summer program, which recruited high school teachers and college students to tutor elementary school children. At one point, the reading tutorial program worked with the local Black clergy to improve their literacy skills. We had a real revival for learning!" (Internal Informant #1)

A former board member recalled how Dr. Knight arrived and took charge in the District. For example, she restructured the schools which had been kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5) with one middle school housing sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Fights and conflict were common as the eighth graders picked on the younger (and usually physically smaller) sixth and seventh

graders; additionally, the sixth and seventh graders did not get along with each other. Dr. Knight changed the structure of the school so that sixth graders remained with the elementary schools, making them K-6 schools, and the middle school was seventh and eighth graders only. A key reason that parents in the Sneak Out program returned to the District was the sense of order Dr. Knight brought to the school buildings: "Instead of the kids fighting all the way to school and back from school, they quieted down...they now had book sacks with books instead of sticks and guns" (Internal Informant #1). Another school was created for those children who met specific achievement levels; while not a talented and gifted school, students had to test to demonstrate that they met specific achievement levels. It was geared specifically for those who were more academically capable. These measures brought substantial improvement in student behavior and school climate (Former Board Member #2).

Additionally, Dr. Knight promoted the 1987 Tinsley Bill and lobbied to get it passed in the California legislature to allow East Palo Alto children to transfer to Palo Alto Schools. When Dr. Knight arrived in Ravenswood, the Tinsley family had been engaged in a lawsuit with the District for over 10 years; they alleged that the quality of education in East Palo Alto was poorer than that which was available in Palo Alto. Dr. Knight was able to settle the lawsuit out of court with an agreement that children in East Palo Alto who wanted to attend Palo Alto schools could leave at the rate of 1500 students per year. Under the Tinsley law, children could enter the Palo Alto schools only at Kindergarten age, with one exception being if the child had siblings in grade one. By entering at such a

young age, the children in fact became Palo Alto's children, a fact which Dr. Knight said she reminded people of from time to time: "they are *not* Ravenswood children in Palo Alto---they are now Palo Alto's children," she declared.

People thought I was crazy because we only had 3000 students in the District. They told me we'd be out of business in two years, but I said, 'no'...poor people are just like rich people; they want to look down the street and see a neighborhood school---they don't want to put their children on busses. Some of them will--- the upper middle class, the wannabes, will get out there. But the bulk of the people will remain, and they did.

The details of the Tinsley Bill outlined an agreement that gave Ravenswood two million dollars per year for five years as compensation for the loss of students to Palo Alto, but it also revealed the depth of the inequality in funding between the two Districts.

When Ravenswood children attended Palo Alto schools, they carried with them per pupil allocations of only two thousand dollars per year, but Palo Alto schools had a per pupil allocation of five thousand dollars. The state court ruled, however, that Palo Alto schools had to educate the Ravenswood children with the same allocation as the Palo Alto children. Later, special legislation compensated Palo Alto for the gap in funding. The children who would have

attended Ravenswood were sprinkled throughout the Palo Alto schools; at this writing, Dr. Knight stated that none of the Palo Alto schools had more than ten percent minority students enrolled in each building. Under NCLB (the No Child Left Behind Act), she noted, if schools have less than ten percent minority student enrollment it is not necessary to report it in school demographics. As a result, however, no one knows how well the children are doing (Dr. Charlie Mae Knight; Former Board Member #2).

When she arrived in Ravenswood, Dr. Knight instituted a number of other programmatic improvements in the District. She implemented parent-teacher conferences, school open houses, site-based councils and parent meetings at school sites, and graduation ceremonies; she focused on getting the parents more involved in the school. "Parents started coming out and feeling comfortable at the schools. Dr. Knight was very instrumental in getting parents more involved, and she also created the expectation of teacher involvement by including it in their contracts" (Former Board Member #2). Indeed, the Sneak Out parents decided to return to the District:

It really had to do with getting the parents together,

showing up in councils, that gave parents confidence.

The next year, we began deciding to bring our children back to the District. Dr. Knight had a good way of working with teachers; she had a good mix of White, Black, and Hispanic---she had some good dedicated folks (Internal Informant # 1).

Parents and community members were buoyed also by the attention to facilities that Dr. Knight brought to the District. Campus buildings had not been refurbished or rebuilt in years; many were thirty to fifty years old, outdated and ill-kempt. A series of successful bond measures created more funds for capital improvements to the campuses. Through outreach to foundations and to organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs, and the City of Menlo Park, Dr. Knight was able to bring after school activities to the East Palo Alto neighborhood. Under her leadership, the District provided the land for the construction of a Boys and Girls Club, and it provided a parcel of the Belhaven school campus in East Menlo Park (a part of the Ravenswood District) which became the home of the East Palo Alto Public Library.

“Test scores came up with improvement in facilities, play grounds, the Boys and Girls Club, and the public library” according to a former board member (Former Board Member #2) who believed that Dr. Knight’s actions improved the learning and operating climates of the school buildings. District high school students had to travel to Redwood City, Woodside, or Belmont because Ravenswood did not have a high school. For some students, this meant leaving home and boarding the school bus by 6:30 am or 7:00 am, and boarding the bus in the afternoon immediately after their last classes. This left no time for after school activities and sports unless they had private transportation. The addition of the Boys and Girls club, for example, meant safe, accessible after school activities where the bus let students off to stay until their parents signed them out at 6:00 pm. These projects contributed to Dr. Knight’s strong relationship with the

community and the community at large---this was her major strength (Former Board Member #1; Former Board Member #2; Dr. Charlie Mae Knight).

Further, poverty and crime in the East Palo Alto area had earned it the reputation of the “murder capital of the world” in 1991 to 1992, because it had the highest per capita murder rate in the nation (Former Board Member #2; Dr. Charlie Knight.). Organizations like the Boys and Girls Club helped to stabilize the community and helped it to begin building stocks of social capital by creating safe, nurturing spaces for children and families. Additionally, tutoring centers in churches, the library, and similar locations helped to improve the literacy skills of Ravenswood students and instill in parents the importance of prioritizing education (Former Board Member #2). The reputation of East Palo Alto, however, often had a direct, negative effect on teacher recruitment and retention.

The search for administrators and teachers was very difficult, however, because of the reputation of the District, which was poor and minority. It got around if a teacher was not hired in two or three neighboring Districts; she or he could always go to Ravenswood and get hired (Former Board Member #2).

For many years, the District started the school year with substitute teachers; then later in the year, teachers would come for interviews, often when they'd not been able to get better jobs in another, neighboring District. Dr. Knight also observed that when new teachers started with Ravenswood, they often would stay just long enough to meet the criteria for forgiveness of their federally insured student loans

by working in an inner city school (Former Board Member #2). Dr. Knight recalled

...the story isn't completely told because nobody looked at it, that is, when they [media] say, 'oh, there's a great exodus from the inner city schools. Well, part of the reason is that about thirty to forty percent of those people come because they want their loans forgiven.

So they are going to automatically leave in two years.

Who the District hired as teachers, and *how* [under what circumstances] they were hired remained a critical factor in teacher retention. Further, for even the most dedicated teachers, the cost of living in the Peninsula area within commuting distance of Ravenswood was nearly prohibitive unless they had another source of income like a spouse, a partner, or family wealth.

A key element in the *San Jose Mercury Newspaper's* criticism of Dr. Knight and the District was high teacher turnover (see for example, "School chief benefits" June 28, 2001), yet that criticism seemed to ignore the grim realities of working for a teacher's salary in an already impoverished District located in the most affluent area in the United States. Given *who* the teachers were, and *how* they were hired into the Ravenswood District, it would appear that there may have been at least a few teachers who were disgruntled and disappointed with finding themselves with no other option than to work in Ravenswood. With no innate sense of loyalty to the Ravenswood District or to Dr. Knight, they would be

good sources of negative feedback about Ravenswood for the newspapers, and the *Mercury News* had proved itself to be a ready and willing vehicle for teacher and staff grievances.

Dr. Knight also found a board of trustees used to micromanaging and "political posturing" when she arrived in 1985. "The board was very formal, insisting that they be referred to as 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' ; instead of focusing on policy and working to see that Dr. Knight carried out the policy, they had no unified direction, no idea of fiduciary responsibilities, and simply lacked any other indications of board development" (Former Board Member #1). Another former board member observed that the board was not "professionalized" when Dr. Knight arrived---"they had no idea how the board and the superintendent should interact" (Former Board Member #2). Under Dr. Knight's leadership, the board brought in consultants for a series of workshops who helped them to develop a business plan, create a statement of priorities, and vision and mission statements---"the kind of efforts that are not completed in an afternoon meeting" (Former Board Member # 1). The board also developed a good working relationship with the leader of the teachers union during that time, who worked with the board to accomplish goals on behalf of the students. For example, Dr. Knight, the board president and the board worked with the union leader to develop a Ravenswood achievement test that aligned with the Ravenswood curriculum. The curriculum was designed to be a core curriculum that would be consistent across the District and still meet state mandated guidelines under the API (Average Progress Index). One of the realities faced by the Board and Dr.

Knight was the highly dynamic and transient population of urban students in the District. “They moved around a lot from one relative’s house to another, within the District. They needed a consistent curriculum within the District so that they would not lose instructional time [when they moved to a new school]” (Former Board Member #1).

Dr. Knight was also in the thick of the emerging racial and ethnic political controversy as superintendent in Ravenswood. Hispanic parents, who increasingly were becoming a larger part of the District, were protesting the lack of bi-lingual education, even as she struggled to get and keep teachers for the District as a whole. No doubt influenced by the *Mercury News* coverage during that time, some Hispanic parents also were quoted as protesting “the school’s overall performance,” and criticizing her for allegations of cronyism and graft, as well as accusing her of stirring up racial resentment with Blacks to protect her position (CNN All politics, Dec 1, 1997). It is clear from news reports that the politics of race and ethnicity were emerging in East Palo Alto, yet, at the same time the Hispanic parents were bringing forth their concerns, many long-time Black residents still saw East Palo Alto as having a Black ethos (<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>). Black politicians pointed out that while Latinos made up the majority of the population, they did not make up a majority of voters; in fact, many of them could not vote because they were undocumented, that is, they were not citizens of the United States (SF Gate.com October 26, 2004). At the same time, Latinos were not a monolithic group. While one group threatened a lawsuit under the Voting Rights

Act of 2001 to secure their right to elect a candidate, others like Reuben Abrica, a former school board member who worked with Dr. Knight, and the only Latino city council member said,

What we're faced with now in California and in many cities is the reality of having a multi-ethnic population, where for one period of time some group may not be represented. Then for a brief time, another group may not be represented. If every time that happens we're going to court, we are always going to be in court (SFGate.com, Oct. 26, 2004).

Issues of ethnic or ecological succession were resonant in Abrica's analysis of the emerging conflict between African Americans and Latinos over political and educational resources in East Palo as more Latinos moved into the city, and more Blacks relocated out of the city. In his research on residential succession, Massey (1983) relied upon the ecological model to understand residential succession involving Hispanics, Whites, and Blacks in seven major metropolitan areas across the nation, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego in California:

...residential succession begins with the entry of a minority group into some area occupied by majority members. Following invasion, there is a period of consolidation during which the population of the original inhabitants declines while that of the incoming minority grows. Eventually the invading

minority displaces former residents entirely to form an established ethnic neighborhood (p. 825).

Similarly, East Palo had begun as part of an area dominated by Whites, then invaded by Blacks, and now it was moving towards a Latino majority. Massey also found however, that

unlike Black tracts, those containing Hispanics are quite likely to experience an Anglo population increase....

In other words, the entry of Hispanics into an area apparently does not automatically reduce its desirability to Anglos. In at least half such cases, invasion is followed by an increase in the number of Anglos (p. 830).

If the residential succession pattern observed by Massey was applied in East Palo Alto, residents could expect that while Latinos increased in numbers, the numbers of Whites would increase as well. In fact, subsumed in the shifting demographics and ethnic succession that brought in more Hispanic people to the East Palo Alto community were the forces driven by economic development and gentrification into East Palo Alto. One Internal Informant also economic forces as forming a context for the emerging Black and Hispanic conflict over resources:

...jealousy over jobs---Latinos are thought to work more cheaply than Blacks--- and there are problems with young Blacks who don't know how to work. But I think the friction is caused by Developers who want to buy [Ravenswood] District property and[residential] property in all of East Palo

Alto. Developers won't have as much trouble with them [Hispanics] as they do with Blacks who feel that we have rights. Many of the Hispanics are undocumented...if the County can move me out [perhaps through imminent domain], then others will move giving them [developers] access to the Bay....[developers] want to develop the waterfront (Internal Informant #1).

Dr. Knight's business acumen and strength of personality and character was frequently considered to be an obstacle to the City Council and the developers who were thought by Dr. Knight and many others, including Informants, to work behind the scenes in East Palo Alto. First, despite its earlier missteps in the 1980's that allowed Sun Microsystems to locate in Menlo Park instead of East Palo Alto, the East Palo Alto city council was working hard to develop a tax base that would bring the city into the financial abundance enjoyed by its more affluent neighbors. East Palo Alto is an attractive location because of its centrality on the Peninsula, and because of its Bay front property. Two "big box" retailers, Home Depot and IKEA, located within the city, along with a Four Seasons Hotel, and a new retail center was built to attract more business. Developers discovered East Palo Alto land values which were at two dollars a square foot cheaper than anywhere else on the Peninsula. One particular piece of choice property is the land now occupied by the Ravenswood School District Headquarters, and next door to it is the new Four Seasons Hotel. Dr. Knight recalled developers approaching the school board with an offer to purchase the District property, which included buildings, a gas station

installed by Dr. Knight to fuel District school buses, and the bus barn. The District property was an eyesore to hotel guests, but the price offered by the developers was too low, Dr. Knight said. “We were looking at relocating over 300 people, plus equipment and vehicles. We would have needed more money than they offered.” The District property had another value: it provided direct access from its frontage road location to the major transportation corridor, US 101 Freeway, making it extremely valuable to commerce. Dr. Knight had been astute enough to understand the property’s value as well as its costs. This drew the ire of the City Council, however, although it was perceived as giving away any potential tax advantages as it tried to attract businesses like the big retailers (Former Board Member #1).

Her negotiations with the Boys and Girls Clubs and the City of East Menlo Park to construct a recreation center in East Palo Alto and a library branch in East Menlo Park also drew the ire of the City Council even though both facilities served the children and the families of the area well. The Council actually went to the trouble of filing an injunction against the District to stop the negotiations (Former Board Member # 1) because they believed Dr. Knight was leading the District to give away its property. “At the same time, the City was practically giving away its tax base to Home Depot, although the Council argued that it was ‘encouraging development and jobs’ by letting a big box retailer like Home Depot come in on the promise of a low tax assessment” (Former Board Member #1).

“Capital has discovered this land,” a long time resident of East Palo Alto said (retrieved October 8, 2005,

<http://www.Metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>). He was reflecting on commercial development of East Palo Alto, and the increasing gentrification evident in the new in-fill housing units and the new housing tracts built within the city. The only Black county commissioner observed that “East Palo Alto had no choice but to tear up some of its older civic and economic landmarks because it was squeezed in by larger surrounding cities, with no room for expansion in any direction” (retrieved October 8, 2005,

<http://www.Metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>).

Residents saw it as a wholesale disruption of the culture built up in the area, despite the negative depiction by the newspapers, like the *Mercury*. “There is so much positive about this community. Pound for pound, this area has one of the highest levels of civic engagement in the state,” the resident observed. Because of the relatively low cost of the land, however, gentrification has reached East Palo Alto. Residents are selling out and making a killing, and they are relocating in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valley towns many hours away. Families who want to stay and or move back find the price of housing prohibitive. More important, perhaps, is the effect of the new housing on the community. “This new housing, you can see the way it’s being built, it’s unfriendly to the community. All the lawns are set in the back, away from the street. Everything is facing inward, as if they don’t want to associate with the rest of us,” observe another resident retrieved October 8, 2005,

<http://www.Metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>). “Their [developers’] idea is to clean out this whole area and build million dollar homes,

apartments and condominiums that none of us will be able to buy ” (Internal Informant # 1). That idea has credibility when one considers that East Palo Alto sits on the bay at the foot of the Dumbarton Bridge, and that originally Ravenswood was the name of a port and marina on the bay. Dr. Knight observed to me that one purpose of all the legal actions against her and the District was to “clean it out” for the White families moving into the area. She pointed to another group of new homes and said to me, “you see those houses? None of the children who live there go to Ravenswood schools now...they go to Palo Alto, Catholic or private schools. They just hang out here. What they are doing is fixing this place up. It won’t be long until they have a school.”

Section 5: *IDEA 97 Lawsuit*

“I always said it was a conspiracy,” Dr. Knight said with passion mixed with anguish as she talks about the IDEA 97 law suit filed against the District.

It got started with the Stanford Law Project [which as of this writing is called the East Palo Alto Law Project, a law clinic run by the Stanford Law School to help local citizens with various legal issues]. What made this case so phenomenal is how the system lined up against Ravenswood, and how the system lined up against me. Because I was always supportive of programs for children, *all children* [she emphasizes]. One of the Hispanics assigned to the County [schools] said that when they were planning

this, 'she has a number of followers and the first thing we have to do is destroy her credibility.' I asked her to tell me who "they" are? She replied: ...talking about whoever this was who started all of this [the lawsuit]. It had to have been some people who knew what they were doing. "

In the second critical incident, fifteen children who had special needs alleged that under the guidelines set by IDEA 97, they had been unable to receive a "free and appropriate public education" in the Ravenswood District. It is important to note that this lawsuit was filed in November, 1996, and continued at the same time as the investigations by the *San Jose Mercury News* and then the San Mateo County District Attorney's office into the conflict of interest allegations against Dr. Knight, who was subsequently indicted on those charges in June, 2000. She was acquitted of all charges in July, 2001, but the IDEA 97 lawsuit and its demands for compliance with various orders for documents, implementation of policies and staff had continued the entire time since its filing in November, 1996, and escalated in intensity after her acquittal. "When I was acquitted of the 19 felony charges, the very next day the Judge (Henderson) found me in contempt of court...the *very next day* [her emphasis] after that acquittal!...I was found in contempt by the judge...he said I had not attempted to carry out what he said."

In fact, Dr. Knight was not alone in her belief that a conspiracy of some type had led to the lawsuit; community informants, school officials, and even her attorneys implied that the IDEA 97 lawsuit had deeper, more political roots than those that could be seen at the first impression. At the time of this writing, the

case still was not closed, but a recent, dramatic turn of events gave credence to the belief in a conspiracy held by some. In the meantime, the District remained under a Federal Court Monitor who was expected to be in place for at least another two years.

To tie in this IDEA 97 lawsuit and the underlying dynamics with Dr. Knight and Ravenswood, it is important here to give a brief overview of the law and its provisions which became the source of trouble for the Superintendent and her District. It is important to note also, however, that the troubles that plagued the Ravenswood School District and Dr. Knight certainly were not exceptional---legal casebooks continue to be full of court judicial decisions of litigation between school Districts and parents of disabled children. Special education lawsuits are universally dreaded and notoriously onerous for everyone involved because for many, the provisions of the law are very subjective and open to broad interpretation by the judge, and in poor urban Districts like Ravenswood, they may be particularly expensive propositions to carry out because of the specially trained teachers and other educational and medical specialists required by the law. "The disabled children cases are devoted almost entirely to judicial responses to conflicts between school Districts and parents of disabled children seeking definition of provisions of the federal disabled children legislation" (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 447).

Details of IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA was enacted by Congress in 1990, as a successor to the 1975 law entitled All Handicapped

Children Act (AHCA) of 1975, which provided funding standards and “an elaborate set of procedures for the identification and education of disabled children” (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). In 1975, Congress enacted Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) which insured the right of all disabled children to a “free and appropriate public school education.” Specific tenets included 1) free and appropriate public education (FAPE); 2) an individualized education program; 4) related services; 5) due process procedures; and 6) the least restrictive environment (LRE) in which to learn. By September 1, 1980, all disabled children from age three to age twenty one were to receive appropriate educational services (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 20 U.S.C.A. §1400b, §1401).

By 1983, the law clarified the meaning of ‘special education’ as “services designated to meet the unique ‘educational’ needs of the handicapped child’. Additionally, the law specifically expanded services to deaf-blind children (Alexander & Alexander, p. 446). The 1986 amendments to EAHCA were even more comprehensive, “extending universal access to services all handicapped children beginning at birth” (p. 495). The law mandated that public education be extended to disabled three to five year olds, and further, it established a new federal education program for disabled babies from birth through age two. The 1986 amendment to EAHCA focused specifically on children with multiple disabilities, including children who were deaf and blind; the amendment contained specific provisions for “specialized intensive professional and allied services, methods and aids that are found to be most effective” (20 U.S.C.A.

§1422). Another related act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, section 504, is concerned with discrimination against the disabled in work situations, but it also addresses the problems encountered by disabled children in seeking equal protection for education. Specifically covered are a) location and notification, b) free appropriate public education, c) educational setting, d) evaluation and placement, and e) procedural safeguards (Alexander & Alexander, p. 445). These acts and their provisions were the basis of the litigation against Dr. Knight and the Ravenswood School District.

Attorneys for the Ravenswood District wrote the introduction to the *Show Cause* response to the court:

On November 18, 1996, class action plaintiffs filed a complaint alleging that Ravenswood City Elementary School District...failed to comply with federal and state laws that protect children with disabilities, including the Individuals with Disabilities Act ("IDEA") and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1983 ("Section 504"). Evidencing a profound willingness to improve, the School District voluntarily entered into a Consent Decree on September 2, 1999, which included the Ravenswood Corrective Action Plan ("RCAP"), prepared by co-defendant California Department of Education ("CDE"). The RCAP mandates the completion of roughly 260 corrective actions within twenty two months.

Extensive research has revealed the existence of no more comprehensive court order related to implementation of special education laws. (CR No.C-96-4179-THE, Ravenswood City Elementary School District's Response to the Court's order to Show Cause Why the District Should not be held in Contempt, August 22, 2001, p. 1).

The District's response

Superintendent Charlie Knight was no stranger to working with disabled children, including disabled infants.

I was the first superintendent in the nation,
first public school superintendent in the nation
 [her emphasis] that started a center for babies who were prenatally exposed to drugs. *I did this* [her emphasis]
 ...I got a federal grant for five million dollars because East Palo Alto had so many children born affected by drugs. Two of the poster children that they used to say that I had failed to provide FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) were kids who had been in my prenatal drug treatment program. That's what IDEA is all about. In no place in all of the documents that they [the plaintiffs] presented, no where did they mention that not only did I get them straight from the hospital when they were only six days on this earth. Yet they claimed that I had not done a

good enough job. They [the babies] had got everything...if they had been born in Stockton or anyplace else, they would not after 6 days been in a school someplace, and I had established a school just for them.

Appearing on a local news show that covered the special education lawsuit, Dr. Knight said she recognized one of the plaintiff children as one who had been in her center as an infant.

One [family] I had pictures of the child from when [she was in the Center]. ...but we were on the air and the station had set me up, and brought these parents in... and when the parents realized that I recognized them...because I was a hands on superintendent... I said, '...and your child was introduced to the Ravenswood School District in 1992 when she came...' and I just simply said, '...to the PIC center', so it wouldn't look like I was revealing anything [confidential], and all of a sudden when the interviewer who was using these parents, turned to them---they [the parents] got very quiet because they thought that I was going to say that these children were 'drug exposed' and that would have changed the whole equation, because people would have said, 'wait a minute that they were responsible for their child's condition'. The parents

didn't say another word. The other child was an invalid from birth, exposed to multiple drugs like PCP and cocaine; the third child was an undocumented Hispanic immigrant child who had arrived in the United States with problems.

Dr. Knight also recollected...after I left [the District], these poster children disappeared. When they first presented the case, the Hispanic child was the first. It took them three years to find any child to come in and claim that they didn't receive service. They couldn't find enough children to say that they had not received service---said there were 15, but only three showed up, and the others were currently in the system.

In a separate interview for this writing, an External Informant who had worked with the Ravenswood District to resolve the IDEA 97 lawsuit also noted that despite the highly publicized nature of the lawsuit, relatively very few people came forward to say that their children had not received free and appropriate special education services from the Ravenswood District (External Informant # 1)

The influence of residential succession

As discussed in a previous section, residential or ethnic succession from Black to Latino provided an underlying social force in the Ravenswood District in East Palo Alto. In 1990, African Americans outnumbered Hispanics 9,727 to 8,527. By 2000, however, the Hispanic Population swelled to 17,346, while the

Black population dropped to 6,641 (Retrieved October 22, 2004 from SFGate.com, April 24, 2002, Tyche Hendricks, Chronicle Staff Writer). In 2000, Blacks were 36 percent of East Palo Alto and Latinos were 53 percent while eight percent were Asian and Pacific Islander and Whites made up only 12 percent (retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>). In the meantime, some Latino leaders argued that the level of their power in the city had not kept up with their demographic impact which was now referred to as the “Bay Area’s biggest Latino majority community” (Retrieved from SFGate.com, October 26, 2004); and they were particularly concerned with the dearth of representation on the East Palo Alto City Council, and at that time, the Ravenswood Public School District. Change brought by shifting demographics or ethnic succession was clearly evident in the Bay Area; in the 2000 Census, Hispanics had larger households than any other racial or ethnic group in the Bay Area, nearly twice as large as the next racial or ethnic group, Non-Hispanic Asians (US Census). Residential succession (Massey, 1983) in East Palo Alto meant Latino families and individuals entered into the residential areas formerly occupied by African Americans. Early in 1997, a group made up of Latino and Hispanic parents, *Padres Unidos*, filed a complaint with the State of California demanding that the Ravenswood School District provide English-deficient children with general instruction in Spanish along with daily English lessons. In an on-line article entitled, *The Next Big Divide?* (Retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1997/11/24/time/divide.html>), one East

Palo Alto Latino parent was quoted as saying, " [The administration] always says yes, yes: they promise to do things, but they never change. We need a new face in there." The same article reported on a confrontation between Black and Latino parents at a Ravenswood school board meeting over the issue of bilingual education. Many Blacks viewed Latino demands for bi-lingual education with suspicion and resentment, a fact emphasized in the article [and in my interviews with some informants]. One grandparent was quoted as saying, "If they want to learn Spanish, they should go to Mexico," and another offered, "The District is spending an awful lot of money on bilingual education when it could be used to educate all children". One External Informant, a long time resident, recalled a time when a young relative was one of two Black children in a class where the balance of the children were Latino, and so was the teacher. The teacher spoke to the children in Spanish, but the Black children were completely left out of the discussion, and clearly disadvantaged. "Whenever there is 'brown' [referring to Mexican and Hispanic people], she said, "It goes brown all the way." Her experience was that when Hispanics were in charge, Blacks would be marginalized. A former board member expressed a slightly different perspective, however: "I always thought it [bi-lingual education] was a great opportunity for Black kids to learn a second language, Spanish. The Hispanic kids wanted to learn English, and that would have given the Black kids an opportunity to learn to speak Spanish....they [Latinos and Blacks] can fight over one pie, or they can work together to make more pies," [referring to the emerging Black and Latino conflict over resources] (Former Board Member # 1).

Further complicating the looming conflict over resources was the June 1998 passage of Proposition 227 in California which capitalized on the growing fear and concerns among many parents and educators of all ethnic groups, including many Hispanics, that bi-lingual education took resources away from all children. This proposition significantly changed the way that LEP (“limited English Proficient”) students were to be taught in California. Specifically, it 1) required California public schools to teach LEP students in special classes that were taught nearly all in English. This would eliminate "bilingual" classes in most cases; 2) Shortens the time most LEP students would stay in special classes. The initiative states that: (a) LEP students should move from special classes to regular classes when they have acquired a good working knowledge of English and (b) these special classes should not normally last longer than one year. This would eliminate most programs that provide special classes to LEP students over several years (Retrieved October 24, 2005, from <http://primary98.ss.ca.gov/VoterGuide/Propositions/227analysis.htm>).

It was from within that evolving political climate that the IDEA 97 lawsuit emerged to challenge Ravenswood District and Dr. Knight, and became the second critical incident that brought a change to her career as an educator. Each of the Internal and External informants expressed the belief that someone from “inside the District” fed detailed information to the plaintiffs, the newspapers, and perhaps even the prosecutors that helped to frame the charges under the IDEA 97 law; further, there were strong suspicions that the IDEA 97 lawsuit was merely a vehicle used by the Latino citizens to force the removal of Dr. Knight. The

results were seen not only in the law suit, but in the board candidates for the 2002 election. Three of the board candidates ran as a slate with the avowed intention of removing Dr. Knight, and the election reflected the racial and ethnic overtones emerging in the city (retrieved October 8, 2005 from http://www.stanforddaily.com/tempo?page=content&id=9605&repository=0001_article). One External Informant told of being visited in her home by three young Black teachers who told her that "...it's their [Latinos'] turn now. Our [Black] children are only 25 percent of the school District.' But I asked them 'and where will you be when this change takes place?'" (Internal Informant #1)

The Latino parent group, Padres Unidos, which had filed a complaint earlier over the lack of bilingual education, continued to press their issues through administrative complaints with the State and with the District. When I questioned Dr. Knight about the group, she expressed the belief that Padres Unidos was a "front organization" organized by Whites to disrupt the District and exploit the tensions between Blacks and Hispanics. She also was quoted as saying that when Whites lead Hispanics, Whites do not "get the same kind of push that a Black superintendent does" (retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1997/11/24/time/divide.html>).

Indeed, the Padres Unidos group had harsh words for Dr. Knight, accusing her of using her position as a "political tool to influence elections in the District. It is common knowledge," they wrote "that Dr. Knight's political friends are overwhelmingly elected by the community because Dr. Knight uses school personnel to work for their campaign. Because the election polls are at the

schools, she controls them also. Those people that get elected to the school board pay back the debt by giving the superintendent another four year contract, it never fails every four years.” (Retrieved October 8,, 2005, from http://www.epa.net/launch/epaboard/message?_id=369490&forum_id=68208)

For her part, Dr. Knight believed that jealousy and resentment from both Blacks and Latinos fueled the IDEA lawsuit. Her defense was not that the special education and bi-lingual deficiencies were not real, but that Ravenswood was doing the best it could with its resources, but it had no money to meet the various needs. District and community people were aware of those facts, she argued; yet they pressed the lawsuit as one more means to get rid of her. In fact, the idea of “getting rid of her” seemed to permeate the atmosphere of the election, closely intertwined with the complex and subtle racial and ethnic politics of the situation. . Internal Informant # 1 recalled several visits from a Latino man who worked as a local housing official. On one occasion, she said he told her “We had to come down pretty hard on her [Dr. Knight]. I’m sorry we had to discredit her, [but] we could never have gotten rid of her”. The Informant knew that the visitor was part of the group who was attempting to unseat Dr. Knight; to accomplish this, they constantly looked for an inside person who would be willing to betray Knight.

Everyone who had a personal issue with the District and Dr. Knight made it known during the election. Perhaps the most strident expression came before the 2002 election from Martha Hanks, the president of CTA, the California Teacher’s Association (the teachers’ union) who supported the challenger slate of board candidates. She led a parade of teachers from the Catholic Church

through the street to Dr. Knight's office; Hanks and the teachers carried a real coffin with a sign saying that it was time to "bury Dr. Knight". It was a harsh, particularly offensive gesture considering Dr. Knight's husband recently had died; clearly, emotions and the stakes were running high. During Dr. Knight's conflict of interest trial, Hanks had been supportive, according to Internal Informant #1, but her influence as a long time member of the community and as CTA president was used to discredit Knight again, according to the Informant.

An External Informant who worked with the Ravenswood District and the State of California to resolve the special education lawsuit said that

...historically, the State Department of Education had been negligent over the period time that preceded the new state superintendent at the time of the instigation of the lawsuit in 1996. Ravenswood's response to the suit had been that it did not have sufficient resources to provide the free and appropriate education demanded by the plaintiffs. Ravenswood may have actually asked the state for assistance but the state probably had been unresponsive (External Informant #1).

Unresponsive, too, was the San Mateo County School District which over saw the special education local planning area (SELPA) which was made up of lots of little Districts. Funds from the state are apportioned to the SELPA, which gives its plan to the County Office of Education for review. The County had separate, enumerated powers to review a SELPA plan and then forward it to the State. If Ravenswood had no money, it stood to reason, they argued, the County SELPA

should have been available for support and assistance. This unresponsiveness was called to task by some Ravenswood parents when Floyd Ganella, the County superintendent who had been over the County came in as Interim Superintendent after Knight was pushed out. Parents apparently asked him if things were so bad when Dr. Knight was at Ravenswood, why he had not taken action to help the District (Former Board Member #1; External Informant #1; Internal Informant #1).

At one point, Dr. Knight and the board went to the County Counsel for legal representation in the suit, but they were told that it would be a “conflict of interest” if the County Counsel represented them. Dr. Knight then hired an attorney from Georgia who was an expert in the myriad laws which govern the delivery of special education. He was extremely expensive but very talented; but his expense heaped more criticism on the board and Dr. Knight from the *Mercury* and the public.

Yes, we hired a lawyer because our county counsel could not represent us---conflict of interest. We couldn't talk about lots of issues because we were under a gag order, and the news papers were printing stories about the expensive counsel we hired for special education...who else could we hire? We are the only District with this special mandate in California...this small poor District (Former Board Member #2).

As it happened, since San Mateo County was not a party to the lawsuit, the County Counsel could have defended Ravenswood. Dr. Knight's relationships with the county had been strained, and added to the projected costs of IDEA litigation, those may have been the reasons county counsel was unavailable to Ravenswood.

The External Informant who had worked with both the Ravenswood District and the state pushed all of the parties to settle the matter, but Dr. Knight often expressed that she felt "railroaded" through the process, the Informant recalled, and she took a "stand-offish" position; the Informant quoted Knight as saying that "people were picking on a poor urban District, run by a Black woman". Indeed, Dr. Knight told me more than once that she believed that IDEA was a detriment to poor, inner city schools. She also noted that

big urban Districts have money but no power. The White people don't have to do this [get specialists, teachers] in Palo Alto. One of my contacts in that District told me, 'we don't have one positive behavioral specialist in the whole [Palo Alto] District.' But / [her emphasis] had to have one; I had to send some kids to Oregon when the mother said our summer school was inadequate.

The External Informant recalled that he thought it was poor strategy for Dr. Knight to have "played the race card" in front of the judge, who was Black and a well-known public interest lawyer from the 1960's and 1970's. The Informant agreed with Dr. Knight's assessments that the judge was not sympathetic to her or to Ravenswood, however; but her pressing the issue of an "urban District run

by a Black woman” did not improve the judge’s predisposition towards them as defendants.

Yet, from Dr. Knight’s point of view, politics of race and gender were clearly playing out in the courtroom. Dr. Knight remained very passionate in our discussions about the way Ravenswood had been singled out for what she and some members of the board felt were discriminatory actions on the part of the judge. “...all the other cases in California were in Superior court, but ours was in Federal court, and we could never get anyone to answer why [that was]...why was Ravenswood sought out and went to federal court?” [Actually, the case was probably in federal court because the State was named as a co-defendant.] Even the External Informant said that “the plaintiffs had the sympathy of the judge, however. At one point, the judge extended the time for the plaintiffs to re-file some of their motions which had been defeated by the defendant District, but extensions of time were costly to the District since they would bear the costs of attorney’s fees.” In addition, everyone was aware of Dr. Knight’s problems with the conflict of interest charges, which reduced sympathy for her, and added to that, new charges surfaced in the *Mercury News* that children in special education classes had been encouraged to cheat on state mandated achievement tests in order to raise scores. The District was threatened also with being taken over by the state. This information was gathered in another of the ‘investigations’ by the *San Jose Mercury News* and emerged as headlines as the parties tried to settle the IDEA case (“School Chief Benefits,” June 28, 2001).

The External Informant also noted that Dr. Knight was not served well by her staff. "In her defense," the Informant noted, "there was a real question of her District's ability to attract and retain competent people. For example, the person brought in to oversee the delivery of special education was passive aggressive, and generally uncooperative, and simply added to the bad relationships with the Monitor and the judge. Dr. Knight also may not have received the full story [on special education] from her staff. Her staff relations were not good, and one of her lawyers, who was flamboyant and eccentric, would often make the comment, "I can't control my client." (External Informant #1) Added to the mix, the External Informant continued, were the attorneys appointed to represent the plaintiffs in the case. The disability rights group that initially represented the plaintiffs brought in a litigator who knew nothing about special education, yet charged 450 dollars per hours while they "went to school" on the case. The IDEA law calls for school Districts to pay plaintiff's attorneys' fees.

Another Former Board Member confirmed the External Informant's observation that the staff did not serve Dr. Knight (or the District) well as she recalled the very real challenges the District experienced with special education. The Monitoring between site administrator, and the teacher

and the special staff at the District office ---they didn't touch bases and Monitor that all the IEP meetings were done on time, that parents received their notices, that child's records were updated appropriately, that they were

getting help through specialists when they needed it and it was in their IEP and all that---that's what started the dissatisfaction in the community—the special education. And when they saw that special ed was costing us so much money---and I think like a lot of them that the County was really using Ravenswood as a model as what you should never do in a District to children who had special needs. Parents and community [members] who were otherwise satisfied with Dr. Knight's leadership started to question it" (Former Board Member # 2).

Yet, as the External Informant had observed,

....when the court called for those in the Ravenswood District who felt they had not been adequately served for special education, few people came forward, which meant that either everyone who needed special education services was being served already, or there was little demand for the services. It could have been, too, that families simply were not made aware of the services, or of the class action lawsuit and how it might apply to them. She [Knight] was a 'hands on' superintendent. She delegated but she was handicapped because the staff didn't carry out in the most effective way. But she had good rapport with the board and external partners. Ravenswood simply lacked capacity, the Informant continued. People

[teachers, specialists, etc.] don't go there to build up a career—you must be committed to be there. The superintendent has to wear many hats, and absent a large competent staff to help, the superintendent ends up wearing too many hats. With the rapidly changing demographics in the area, there was also concern about her [Knight's] administration's capacity to communicate with the new families" (External Informant # 1).

In the matter of IDEA 97 as critical incident, outside of the regulations that governed the delivery of special education services to children in the District, the underlying issues were murky, although there appeared to be commonly held perceptions among all of the Informants that a disproportionate burden of the remedies to the lawsuit was born by Ravenswood. Dr. Knight saw the suit and the remedies recommended for settling it as a personal attack on her and her leadership of the Ravenswood District by disparate forces; again, certainly, given her experiences with the conflict of interest charges enough room exists for that opinion, although from an outsider's perspective, probably a combination of factors were in play. One former board member remembered the actual technical problems in working in administering the special education program in the District and in working with the Monitor since 1996. "

And if we had something that was wrong, *we had to do double the work to get it corrected to be acceptable*

to the court Monitor who was assigned by the judge to be in our District, and to have his office and secretary all paid by the District. [emphasizes each word]...

if the court Monitor was dissatisfied, he interviewed the principals and find all the things that were short comings, and then they'd interview the teachers, parents, the staff" (Former Board Member #2).

Another former board member saw the suit as singling out the District and holding it accountable for special education arrangements over which it had no power; as a county school which Ravenswood is, the county school board had the power and the resources to make any adjustments to the special education program in the Ravenswood District which might have pre-empted the problems Ravenswood encountered. Yet the judge and the Monitor in the case worked in tandem to unload all of the expenses onto the District" (Former Board member #1).

The External Informant involved in the settlement said that the Monitor could have worked well to help settle the case, but again, Ravenswood's special education person did not serve the District or Knight well, and it was possible that Dr. Knight was not always fully informed. Dr. Knight believed, however, that "...there was no measurement of what needed to be done. We'd take something

to the Monitor, and the Monitor would just reject it. And there was no appeal: “I’m [court appointed Monitor] not going to tell you what to do...you just go do it!” she recalled. Dr. Knight and several of the school officials who served with her told me that they believed that the Monitor and the judge actually lacked sufficient knowledge about the special education field or education in general to provide them as respondents with specific feedback that would help them settle the case. On the other hand, the relationship between the District’s special education person and the Monitor may have deteriorated to the point that full communication was stymied, recalled one Informant (External Informant #1).

The general consensus from Informants, both External and Internal, was that the court meant to make an example of Ravenswood as a strong public interest lawsuit that in the end, would serve to put Ravenswood as well as the rest of the state on notice to do a better job of serving the needs of special education students. It was a smaller District that the court could “get to the bottom” of much quicker, not as much discovery, and a much more manageable case,” observed the External Informant (#1). Dr. Knight was correct that small Districts typically have diminished capacity, and not enough of a critical mass to do what is needed or desired; for that, they would have had to depend on the SELPA (External Informant #1).

The IDEA 97 lawsuit as a critical incident was an essential part of the alignment of forces that benefited from the removal of Dr. Knight as superintendent of the Ravenswood School District. As with the conflict of interest allegations, once again she was beleaguered by political forces that overlooked

her ability to create her own extracommunity linkages that benefited the entire community. As she was acquitted of the criminal charges, she was perhaps exonerated of the IDEA 97 charges when Martha Hanks, the CTA president who had led a march of teachers carrying the coffin symbolizing Dr. Knight's death, stood up at an August 2005 meeting of the Ravenswood School District's board of trustee's meeting and read a letter apologizing to the people of East Palo Alto for having supported the three new board members in their efforts to remove Dr. Knight. She accused them of having accomplished only Dr. Knight's removal—nothing else (Internal Informant #1). I was unable to reach Martha Hanks for her comments, but after questioning several people, it was still unclear to me why a woman who had grown up in East Palo Alto, who had worked with the Sneak Out program, who still had family in the area, and who reportedly had supported Dr. Knight through her first criminal trial would suddenly (apparently) turn against her and take such drastic, mean-spirited steps as the “coffin parade” to oust Dr. Knight. Several Informants surmised that Hanks may have been used perhaps as the “inside person” who provided the key details to the plaintiffs and others who meant to remove Dr. Knight; her public expression of contrition certainly would seem to suggest that possibility. Her motive, however, remained a mystery at this writing.

Forces align against her

A slate of three school board candidates ran with the expressed purpose of removing Dr. Knight from her long tenure in the superintendency of Ravenswood School District (“EPA Board Members vow to oust superintendent,”

November 20, 2002). It is worth noting that two of the three had been District employees of Dr. Knight's: one, who also spoke Spanish, had been a principal and another was a teacher active in the teachers' union. The third, a last minute addition to the slate, was a Latino man who had children in the District. By the time of the election, the District had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal costs for both Knight's conflict of interest defense as well as the defense of the IDEA 97. Knight told me that her defense costs were paid by the Ravenswood District because she had been acting in her capacity as Superintendent when she accused of mishandling the loan fund. In a *Stanford Daily* article, the slate cited their concerns for the distraction and the expense to the Ravenswood School District caused by the on-going legal struggles. As a result of the IDEA 97 issues, the District was facing a state takeover [which is not likely to occur, however, because as of this writing, the State of California lacks the funds to take over any school District]. One of the candidates was quoted in the article as saying, "Money is going to be spent on our kids, not on lawyers and trips" ("EPA Board members vow," November 20, 2002). Emotions and sentiments appeared to be intensely angry and personally directed towards Dr. Knight by the members of the slate. For example, during Dr. Knight's trial for conflict of interest, at least one member of the slate had informed the *San Jose Mercury* newspaper and the San Mateo District attorney's office that Dr. Knight had been observed using District personnel and District property to fix up a home that she owned ("Ravenswood School Chief facing new investigation," September 29, 2000), a charge that could not be substantiated, according to Dr.

Knight and other Informants, when the slate member was called to testify under oath.

Someone or some group benefited from each of the actions that confronted Dr. Knight. While a conspiracy may not have existed, there was a fortuitous alignment of people who one factor in common: Dr. Knight was an inconvenience and an obstacle to them. Those who aligned themselves with her, those whom she had aided in some way, however, typically lacked the power (or perhaps the will) to assist her in all but the most basic ways. Perhaps the *San Jose Mercury News* needed a good scandal to divert attention from the embarrassing Gary Webb stories; Latinos wanted a bigger piece of the power in East Palo Alto, and IDEA 97 and bilingual education was an appropriate vehicle for gaining recognition and political power from the community; and the Palo Alto City Council needed to develop a stronger economic base without having to endure interference from the outspoken, “champion of the people” Charlie Mae Knight. Perhaps none of these factors alone amounted to much, but taken in concert, they formed a nearly immovable force that Dr. Knight could not easily overcome.

What is clear is that ethnic succession, or ecological or residential succession (Massey, 2001) along with other social and economic forces shifted the ground beneath Dr. Knight and a good number of those who lived in East Palo Alto; as a result, a shift occurred in the major institutions in that region, and in that state. The woman selected to succeed Dr. Knight as superintendent was said to have been released from contract within the year after attempting to

downsize the very bilingual programs that Dr. Knight put in place (Internal Informant; Current Board Member). A new acting superintendent, a Latina woman who was hired and promoted by Dr. Knight, is now in place as of this writing. Perhaps Dr. Knight's experiences in Palo Alto have come to symbolize the experiences of leadership among the changing social forces in the community particularly succession. Yet, the old problems remained; in some ways, while much has changed demographically and culturally in the city, but in other ways, the poverty and disenfranchisement of the population has remained the same, and perhaps this is the vision that persisted with Dr. Knight, and perhaps it was the motivation for her choice to stay instead of moving on to some new challenge. One can almost hear the unspoken, "I told you so" in her voice.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

My feasibility study prepared me to expect this case study to revolve around two critical incidents in the professional life of Dr. Charlie Mae Knight, California educator; but what I did not expect to find was the extent of the role played by the media as a stage for the unfolding events. While Dr. Knight's story parallels and intersects the critical social and political changes that are occurring in a small California town, the media played a major role in the construction of reality of those changes and Dr. Knight's role in them.

Dr. Knight is an African American woman for whom the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership has had consequences. Charlie Mae Knight arrived in East Palo Alto in 1985, the tenth in a rapid succession of Ravenswood School District superintendents, none of whom had remained more than a year or so, a relatively brief moment in time for a school District. Newly incorporated as a city, but with no tax base, East Palo Alto and its residents had been mostly abandoned or ignored by their affluent neighbors except as opportunities for good works through volunteerism or as objects of attention for efforts geared to prevent the spread of crime from East Palo Alto into the surrounding affluent communities. But in her high profile roles as educator, politician and businesswoman, Knight used her various forms of social capital, including political leverage, to attack the conditions in the community that she believed interfered with children's learning and welfare. In 2003, she reached a

termination agreement with the newly elected school board who had vowed to remove her, bringing to an end that phase of her tenure in the District. Her long tenure in the tightly knitted, impoverished city on the California Peninsula had occurred in a climate of (and perhaps set in motion) public scrutiny, demographic shifts, greed, and personal and professional opposition which played out against her in the media. With perhaps unexpected assistance from the media, these forces aligned to create the perfect storm not only in the life of Dr. Knight, but also in the lives of the people of East Palo Alto and the Ravenswood School District who were swept up in the wake of the storm.

Application of theoretical frameworks

I anticipated that *Feminist Standpoint Epistemology or theory* (Harding, 1993) would operationalize the case study methodology used to interpret Dr. Knight's experiences, and *Black Feminist Thought*, an iteration of standpoint theory (Collins, 2000), would influence and inform the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data, and they did. Feminist standpoint theory enabled a fresh perception of socialization into organizations and institutions (Allen, 2000; Bullis & Stout, 2000) that provided the context for understanding how, in their early careers, women like Dr. Knight are socialized into particular cultural roles in organizations and how those roles may develop attributions of leadership which they uniquely interpret to their communities. Further, the use of feminist standpoint theory also provided a foundation that enabled me to consider the emotional nature of qualitative research, especially as it involved interpretations

and investigations into women's lives (Gilbert, 2001; Wincup 2001). I often found myself captivated by the unfolding of the critical events in her life and by the players in those events which frequently were animated by the relentless coverage of the press.

As the first Black woman to serve as a state associate superintendent of public education in California, and later as superintendent, Knight demonstrated leadership through the "ethic of caring" (Collins, 2000), a demonstrated uniqueness, that suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process (p. 263). Her leadership was reflective both of the style of Black women superintendents (Jackson, 1999), and of her roots in the South and its traditionalistic political culture (Fowler, 2000): leaders are responsible for taking care of those whom they lead. She may have demonstrated the ethic of caring in a more limited arena as the first Black administrator in the Monterey Unified School District, but as Associate Superintendent in Sacramento, she had a much wider arena, the state as opposed to the local District, and her uniqueness was more prominent. Collins observed that, rooted in African humanism, the ethic of caring is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power or energy inherent in all life. She compared the ethic of caring to a quilt where strong colors are placed next to each other not with the worry that one color would detract from the other, but rather with the reassurance that each unique piece would enhance the entire quilt (p. 263).

Dr. Knight was an unlikely figure in Sacramento and in her first superintendency in Lynwood: an educational administrator from a Southern traditionalistic political culture who demonstrated a passion for the children and families whose futures and welfare were entrusted to her. Her skills for her position were unique, a combination of political savvy and intellectual acumen which she applied in equal doses, with passion, to her positions. For example, she was at that time, and still is a dynamic public speaker; in fact, my first personal memories of Dr. Knight are of hearing her speak at a Black History Month program when I was a college student. One Informant described her as a “force of public speaking”. “She was an excellent public speaker, and she was better than the politicians on the [East Palo Alto] City Council who thought they were really good speakers” (Former Board Member # 1). In Sacramento, she was able to use her speaking abilities combined with her political and intellectual acumen to rally other educators and community stakeholders to a Summit to analyze and to develop a discourse about what was happening to children in the educational system; this was a risky, difficult, and uncommon idea even at that time in the 1980’s. No doubt this puzzled and irritated her contemporaries, particularly the Black political figures who at that time did not share her perceptions of the connection between education and politics.

Arriving in East Palo Alto, Dr. Knight combined all the qualities of her uniqueness of spirit, her passion and emotion and her empathy for the community, especially its children, and the very appearance of the community must have reminded her in many ways of the rural south:

The backstreets are straight out of East Texas—they wander aimlessly with fits and starts as if laid out by someone who did not think residents had anywhere to go but where they already were, devoid of sidewalks, shaded by every imaginable variety of trees. The houses are cool and low slung, green-gardened and embroidered with religious icons of many faiths. Porch chimes tinkle in the hot summer wind (Retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>).

The isolation and primal beauty of the physical geography and the social culture must have reminded her of her birthplace in Georgia, along with all of the deprivations of the rural South: poverty, unemployment, substandard and inadequate housing, hunger, ignorance, poorly equipped schools and poor healthcare, plus the scourge of the 20th Century, drugs. By this time, her husband had retired from the Army and her youngest son was in college. She and her husband became fixtures in the community, not just as the Superintendent and her husband, but as citizens. Her husband was a well-loved volunteer in the schools and wherever he was needed to extend the resources of the community (“They liked him better than they liked me,” she laughed).

The idea that a superintendent personally would deliver food baskets to hungry families, would gather resources to set up a loan fund for an

impoverished community, increase housing options through Section 8 (Housing and Community Development Act of 1974) , would become the first superintendent to set up a clinic for babies prenatally affected by drugs in her District, and would accomplish those tasks with empathy was extraordinary, and firmly set in the tradition of Black women superintendents in other places who continue to “make communities” wherever Black people live (Jackson, 1999, p. 146). “Making community means the processes of creating religious, educational, health-care, philanthropic, political and familial institutions and professional organizations that enabled our children to survive” (Jackson, p. 147). To Dr. Knight, leadership of her school District meant that she had to take leadership in those areas that affected families in the schools.

As she and I discussed the community that she had helped to change and to which she had committed herself to for nearly 20 years, she contended that many of the people who claimed they wanted to positively impact East Palo Alto had no vision for its residents; they had no intent to commit the resources the community needed, or they were so out of touch they had no idea of the resources needed to benefit that community—they had no ‘big picture’ in mind like the one Dr. Knight had brought to this community. “None of the East Palo Alto city officials sent their children to Ravenswood schools,” she recalled. Noguera (2004), in his assessment of the social capital and capacity needs of Oakland, a neighboring city in the East Bay, observed that “...residents need decent paying jobs, affordable housing, health care, and a variety of social services for the quality of life in the city to improve. Such changes would help to

help to stabilize struggling families and in turn make it easier for schools to serve the needs of children” (Retrieved October 15, 2005, from Education Index data base). It was that very safety net which Charlie Mae Knight first worked to provide to her East Palo neighbors through loan funds, affordable housing opportunities, and other connections to social capital. Noguera also noted that “at the minimum other public agencies should work in concert with Oakland's schools to provide resources and services needed to address the health, welfare and safety needs of students” (Retrieved October 15, 2005, from the Education data base). Lacking resources from the city and the county, Knight substituted resources from foundations and corporations by applying her political leverage---her personal power and resources---in the appropriate arenas to address the health, welfare and safety needs of the students in the District. Particularly remarkable was Charlie Mae’s economic foresight: several years ago, before the most recent fuel shortages, Knight installed a fuel pump in the Ravenswood District’s corporate yard that not only supplied fuel to the school busses, but also enabled the District to sell fuel to the City of East Palo Alto. As of this writing, gas and diesel prices are at an all time high, but thanks to the often perhaps unacknowledged legacy of Dr. Knight, the busses of the Ravenswood School District have access to fuel at wholesale prices.

Stereotypes and legitimacy in the field

As women, particularly Black women, develop into leadership roles, however, they may be in conflict with the commonly held stereotypes of leaders.

These stereotypes use as a basis of analysis White men, and as a result, silence and devalue the roles and contributions of women, and of Black women like Dr. Knight in particular (Parker, 2001, p. 45). Nearly all of the Informants in this study observed that Dr. Knight was the kind of person who 'felt' what the community felt, especially young people. Perhaps that was because of her philosophy of living in the community; she was accessible, and she always listed her home telephone number. "Young people felt they could go to her, and people don't like you for that, especially the powers that be" (Internal Informant #1). Dr. Knight was also "self-directed," as one Informant described her.

She can take direction from the board but can go on her own ---very self-directed. She wouldn't always ask, would just do what she thought needed doing. Sometimes this caused friction between the board and Dr. Knight, particularly with the female board members, but the board and Dr. Knight were able to accomplish a lot together, despite the challenges of running the District (Former Board Member # 1).

Another Informant recalled,

People started to look at her---here she is, an African American woman---how can she come in and make these changes?so here was a person who came in, had the commitment from the board, and was able to bring in money. When I came on board, the District had just

given its teachers an 11 percent raise, which was higher than any school District within the county. We had 17 percent in reserves, and she had built a lot of things--- we had the Boys and Girls Club located on our land which we leased to them; there's a public library on the Belhaven campus in East Menlo Park [part of the Ravenswood District] we provided the land and the city of Menlo park provided the librarian. API [Academic Performance Index; the API is the centerpiece of the state academic accountability system in California public education from the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999] had increased during her tenure. We have a lot of different entities that have some say [in what happens] for East Palo Alto. Dr. Knight insisted on having a voice in decisions that impacted the community (Board Member #2). [Note: I was not able to substantiate the improvement in scores for the time period from 1985 when Dr. Knight arrived in Ravenswood to 1999, when tracking scores by API was mandated. Scores for these dates predated the historical archives of scores available to me on line.]

The land on which East Palo Alto is located may have been the motivation for another set of players to get involved in removing Dr. Knight: land developers and their supporters had found her to be a tough business woman. She had led her board to play 'hardball' with developers as well as with the City Council of

East Palo Alto which often aligned itself with those perceived to represent economic opportunity for the city. The East Palo Alto City Council, searching for more opportunities for economic development, saw the 3.9 acres of land where the Ravenswood District Headquarters was located as a “prime site for future development,” including a long sought-after super market. Dr. Knight was not against the development, she recalled, but she was driving a hard bargain for selling school property to developers, citing relocation costs for the District staff, equipment, and fuel tanks (“Sees District as prime spot,” March 10, 2001).

An Informant noted,

Dr. Knight could deal in the streets as well as she could in the classroom...and [she] was very much in the developer’s way... They [developers] wanted to develop the waterfront [which would mean removing several neighborhoods of modest homes and apartments]. They knew she was aware, very aware of these things and they couldn’t move as readily as they could without her...

(Internal Informant # 1).

Corporations, however, also had lots to say about what went on in East Palo Alto. Another informant distinguished the corporations from developers, although the

...corporations played major behind-the-scenes roles in East Palo Alto City functions. They funded not-for-profits [agencies and organizations] and pulled the

strings of the City through funding, evaluation, and limiting the kinds of political activities the not-for-profits could engage in, including *not* [Informant's emphasis] lobbying for political purposes (Former Board Member #1).

In similar observations, all the Informants to this writing observed that Dr. Knight was an obstacle to powers which saw commercial and economic potential in East Palo Alto.

What may have eluded Knight, however, was a sustained opportunity to exercise what Parker (2001) identified as "leadership through boundary-spanning communication," one of the five themes related to leadership communication her research revealed in the narratives and observations of 15 African American women executives (p. 69). In Parker's research, African American women executives were seen by their immediate supervisors and by their subordinates as highly effective when they articulated the mission and purpose of their organization across organizational boundaries to those within the organization, and to those outside of it. As leaders, boundary spanning enabled the women to represent effectively their staff members' interests and develop rapport with those entities that affected their organization (p. 69).

For a significant time in the first ten years of her tenure at Ravenswood, Dr. Knight was able to use her bridging capital to boundary span and collaborate with corporations and others who could be enlisted to help the Ravenswood

District. It appears, however, that she was unable to develop or to sustain that collaborative support over the long term *within* the District. One reason may be found in Parker's (2001) research which observed that Black women executives worked out collaboration at the intersections of control and empowerment,

where control is redefined as personal and interactive. Directness and control become a means of collaboration. The focus is on the other, not as a means of affirming the other person---although that may be an outcome---but as a way of assessing points of view and levels of readiness to perform (p. 71).

Dr. Knight's challenge in building a strong base of sustained collaboration either in her staff or in her community that could be summoned on her behalf lay perhaps in the lack of civic capacity of the general community for whom she had long advocated. Alston (1999) observed that Black women "are given the poorly maintained and badly managed urban school Districts with high minority populations" (p. 83), like Ravenswood, for example. Knight found a significant portion of the East Palo Alto community impoverished, undereducated, and disenfranchised, and in many ways parts of the community became very dependent upon her to uplift them. One Informant noted that Dr. Knight "gave people advantages and helped them get to places they'd never been before, jobs they'd never had before...now they are all out of work" (Internal Informant #1). Sometimes this worked to her detriment. An article in the *Mercury News* said Violet Forbes, a staff member in the District's human resources office, pleaded

'no contest' to charges that she used a District credit card to pay for personal items and then attempted to cover up the evidence. In return for not prosecuting her, the article said that she "was used by the District attorney's office to catch a bigger fish---namely Charlie Mae Knight" ("East Palo School official accused...helped indict Ravenswood Superintendent," August 4, 2000). according to an Informant and Dr. Knight, however, Forbes really did not know anything that would help the prosecution, but she was used to make the prosecution's case seem more substantial than it was (Former Board Member # 1). "I think Violet was just dumb and exposed to things that she had never been exposed to..." (Internal Informant # 1).

Like the unfortunate Ms Forbes, as the community depended upon Knight for support, they lacked the readiness to provide significant support to her when she needed it. Further, the Silicon Valley corporate community among whom earlier she had built significant support, began experiencing its own challenges, including downsizing and loss of technology market share as well as leadership succession and evolution. The maverick generation of the Silicon Valley technology innovators and entrepreneurs represented by Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard who expected their employees to donate and volunteer for civic causes and who left 95 percent of their fortune to charity (retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_13/b3876054.htm) gave way to executives and corporations struggling to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized economy and technology market. Dr. Knight herself said to me at one point, "...none of this [the allegations against her] would have

happened if Dave Packard was still alive” (Packard died in 1996, and Hewlett died in 2001).

Another explanation for Dr. Knight’s challenges in establishing sustained support may be found in Alston’s (1999) research where she noted five special problems that women encountered on their way to the superintendency; among them she observed, “[a]ggressiveness usually is viewed as a negative trait in women” (p. 83); a similar finding also is reflected in Parker’s (2001) work when she noted that the directness that Black women often exhibited was considered a negative, “unfeminine” trait by the dominant culture (p. 50). By her own admission, Dr. Knight was (and still is) outspoken and direct in her communication: “I’m one of the most---I am the most---outspoken Black superintendent in California. If you speak out, you are going to take your knocks,” she was quoted as saying shortly after she was acquitted in 2001 (“Knight: Bloodied but unbowed,” August 15, 2001).

Alston (1999) observed that gender and race become “invisible social constructs” that place women and Black women especially in stratified roles that elicit different responses from them and to them than those experienced by male leaders, particularly White male leaders. The resulting incongruence results in social tension for women like Dr. Knight in administration (p.83). Despite the changes and evolution in her connections to sources of bridging social capital from people like Dave Packard, Dr. Knight continued to zealously advocate for her youthful constituents and to passionately defend her educational philosophy in the District. She would contend that the crises in the every day lives of the

children of Ravenswood had not changed and so her strategies for overcoming them remained steadfast. Over time, however, her steadfastness may have blinded her to the need to change strategies to combat the forces in the community that would try to overtake her, and this may have resulted in the social tension and loss of support she experienced from more dominant or diverse segments of the community.

Age versus Longevity

When I began this investigation into her life, I considered that *ageism* as well as sexism and racism may have shaped Dr. Knight's experiences of the two critical incidents in her professional life as Superintendent of the Ravenswood School District. Charlie Mae Knight was 53 years old when she became superintendent, and she was 71 years old and nearing 18 years in the District when her contract was not renewed. While generally underrepresented in the literature on women in leadership, women's own perspectives of their aging experiences in institutions (Trethewey, 2001) were important to coming to an understanding of the role age may play in the lives of professional women like Dr. Knight. In Dr. Knight's instance in particular, however, after substantial investigation and analysis, I came to believe that it was important to distinguish between the experience of aging in a youth-oriented, male-dominated society as opposed to staying in one place long enough to incite conflict over power and competing ideas of change. I do not underrate the impact that age has in the daily lives of professional women, particularly as it determines their image as

legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991) forces in the field when applying whatever cultural standard may be appropriate among their female peers, their younger female associates, and their male colleagues. In fact, Dr. Knight commented to me that she believed that she experienced more personally negative reactions to her work and less sympathy for her situation after her age appeared in the newspaper. Similarly, a Black woman who is a former colleague and a contemporary of Dr. Knight commented, somewhat unsympathetically, “She stayed too long. She should have retired years ago.” (External Informant # 2), which suggested to me that Dr. Knight’s age was not seen by some as a legitimizing factor that brought knowledge, power, and confidence into the community, but rather, it was a bright line that was some kind of determinant for usefulness and worth to the community; the older one is, the less value one has to the community in apparent disregard for all of the resources which have been brought to the community.

What I found more dominant than her chronological age in this instance, however, was that through her *longevity* in the Peninsula community, Dr. Knight had amassed financial and political power that contributed to her influence and to her network of resources which she had been able to wield effectively. In her dealings with CTA (California Teacher’s Association, a teacher’s union), for example, a former board member said, “She wouldn’t ‘roll over’ for the CTA. The teachers’ union would often use Ravenswood as a yardstick to gain more money from surrounding Districts, which they were able to do because Dr. Knight believed in paying her teachers as well as possible” at least partly to avoid

turnover (Former Board Member # 1). She accessed these resources adroitly as superintendent and as a civic leader, matching them with an attitude of power and autonomy in the small town of East Palo Alto. “She [Dr. Knight] was not quiet and humble like Black women were supposed to be; she was aggressive and outspoken” (Former Board Member # 1). Dr. Knight herself laughed when she told me of an incident in which a long-time associate from Cisco Corporation called to offer sympathy after reading about her in the newspaper. She said he compared her to himself, and noted that he had retired from Cisco because he thought it was time for a younger person to take over. “I told him that I owned Cisco stock, and that it wasn’t doing very well; it had gone from ninety two dollars to twenty four dollars a share and perhaps he would have better served Cisco if he’d stayed longer.” Charlie Mae said her reply really made him angry, and he told her that was one of her problems, “...you are too...” She recalled thinking that he came close to telling her that she was too ‘uppity’.

She was as an astute and successful businesswoman as she was an indefatigable, fearless advocate for the children in her community; but by not fitting neatly into the stereotype for women, especially Black women, Dr. Knight was very likely to disappoint if not enrage her critics. “If you stay long enough in one place, you make lots of enemies, and Knight was there a long time...there was time to build up a lot of resentment,” one former board member observed (Former Board Member #1). “I could understand why she was not the apple of everybody’s eye, ‘cause she messed with a lot of folks, and people didn’t like that” (Internal Informant #1). I concluded that while Dr. Knight’s age certainly

contributed to her experiences, her longevity enabled her to amass financial and political power and influence, and for a time, she was able to use them to benefit the children and their families in East Palo Alto; but she also built up jealousy, animosity, and resentment, which put her in the eye of the storm generated by the media and her critics.

Leadership from longevity

It is likely that Dr. Knight's longevity embedded her leadership not only in the school District, but in the community. I recalled again the comments of one Informant who said that when Dr. Knight interviewed for the superintendent's position, the board wanted to know where she would live, and they were pleased when she said she would live in the District. They were not pleased however, when they discovered what it really meant to have Charlie Mae Knight living in the neighborhood. She was into everything, and she was everywhere. She was accustomed to, in fact *thrived on* the dynamics of power and politics. She embodied leadership based on the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 1997). For her, conflict seems to have been a staple in her experiences, a central role in the organizational dynamics of the school Districts, and she expected to bargain, negotiate and compete for position with various stake holders, like the corporations that neighbored East Palo Alto, and like the City Council itself. (p. 163). "Power is a key political issue—its distribution and exercise. Power in organizations is basically the capacity to get things to happen" (p. 165). In her stories of skirmishes with the Black political leaders in Sacramento over the

Black Summit, she acted without them (and even switched political parties) because she was about “getting things done,” and believed they were not about the same thing.

More important for the analysis of that relationship with the politicians in Sacramento and of her relationship with the East Palo Alto City Council was her self-identified role as a “stakeholder,” someone with whom the others must negotiate and interact. “The final proposition of the political frame emphasizes that organizational goals are set not by fiat at the top but through an ongoing process of negotiation and interaction among the key players.” (Bolman & Deal, p. 165).

For her, the *hurly-burly* of politics was a natural occurrence, expected---it is how one “gets things to happen,” but this is not the expected role that women, even women administrators and especially women school administrators are expected to enact in the organization. I surmise that Charlie Mae Knight was socialized into the political frame as a child, beginning with the day she looked through the window of the darkened country church and saw her father and other Black men organizing a union for the mills where they worked, followed by his vicious beating by anti-union goons. From that time forward, Charlie Mae understood conflict, capital, and what people needed to do to get things done. She had learned to use power in ways that were contingent upon the situation and she had generally been very successful, but her encounter with the media

was an important reflection of how well she adapted to (and survived) new encounters with uses of power when they were used against her.

The galvanizing role of the media

If storms occur because of weather patterns, then the *San Jose Mercury News* must be given credit for forever altering the climate in East Palo Alto. At the time of the events covered in this writing, the academic year beginning in 1996 to the end of the academic year in 2003, the *Mercury News* was the largest daily newspaper on the Peninsula, and part of the second largest newspaper publishing corporation in the United States, with more newspapers in major cities than any other publisher. It also operated the Real Cities network of local news Websites in more than 110 markets nationwide (retrieved from <http://www.knightridder.com/index.html>). It cited among its “ongoing special projects” various investigative reports with ongoing follow-up coverage; extensive education reporting; innovative in-depth coverage; live community forums in which readers and journalists talk about coverage issues; the business section's quarterly and annual reports on corporate salaries, venture capital and company earnings. In fact, Knight Ridder newspapers have won 84 Pulitzer Prizes, including 14 Gold Medals for Meritorious Public Service (retrieved from <http://www.knightridder.com/index.html>). Launching a full scale investigation of a public school superintendent and the school District would have been part of the publishing and communication company's usual activity.

Knight-Ridder, Inc. was formed in 1974 by a merger between Knight Newspapers, Inc., and Ridder Publications, Inc. (Retrieved from <http://www.knightridder.com/about/corphistory.html>) P. Anthony (Tony) Ridder, 65, was named Chairman and CEO in 1995. He had served as president of Knight Ridder since 1989. He joined the Knight Ridder corporate staff as president of the Newspaper Division in 1986. Ridder moved to the corporate post from his job as president and publisher of the San Jose Mercury News. He joined the Mercury News in 1964 and was serving as general manager when appointed publisher in 1977. (Retrieved from <http://www.knightridder.com/index.html>). The company's headquarters were in San Jose, California, a few minutes down the Bayshore Freeway from East Palo Alto

Education was cited as a special interest of a related foundation, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which originated with the Knight family's belief in the value of education. The brothers' father, Charles Landon Knight, had a tradition of helping financially strapped students pay for their college education (Retrieved from <http://www.knightfdn.org/default.asp?story=about/history.asp>). The current Foundation mounted several projects to increase the diversity of voices in the newsroom by educating more students of color in journalism and related fields and putting them in the pipeline for employment. In its "Values" statement, Knight Ridder promised to "reflect the diversity of the audiences we serve, including viewpoints and cultures, in our content and in our work forces" (Retrieved from <http://www.knightridder.com/about/vision.html>) At one point, Knight Ridder supported a Vietnamese language paper, as well as a Spanish

language paper in the California Peninsula area. Knight Ridder was frequently cited in conservative or right wing blogs as an example of the “liberal media” (see for example, *Newsbusters* at <http://www.newsbusters.org/>; *Oh, that liberal media* at <http://www.thatliberalmedia.com/>; *Say anything*, at <http://sayanythingblog.com/>, and at least one more “centrist”, *Sirotablog* at www.Sirota.com which cited Knight-Ridder as dependable for accurate reporting of political news.

The *Mercury* was also cited for its comprehensive reporting by another media watch group. *Grade the News* was a media research project focusing on the quality of the news media in the San Francisco Bay Area, and based at San Jose State University’s School of Journalism and Mass Communications; it was also affiliated with Stanford University’s Graduate Program in Journalism. That publication cited the *Mercury* and its San Francisco competitor, the *Chronicle*, as “devoting considerable space on their front and local front pages to what we consider to be ‘core’ topics such as education, government, crime, environment and politics. All three devoted 14% or more of their coverage to government, and at least another 10% to politics; 7% or more to education.” (Retrieved October 8,

2005, from <http://www.gradethenews.org/feat/recentgrades/2004.htm>)

As Knight-Ridder’s pre-eminent paper on the California Peninsula and with a special interest in education, government, and crime, the *Mercury News* was in a powerful position to frame the issues in the Ravenswood School District. By framing the issues of Dr. Knight’s tenure in the District, the *Mercury News* created doubt in the legitimacy that Knight had carefully constructed to help the

community, and in the end, cast her as both the antagonist and the victim in its socially constructed reality.

To understand the impact of the Mercury's framing of the issues and the impact on Dr. Knight, it was useful to turn briefly to the work of media sociologists and the concept of frame. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992), observed that "facts, as much as images, take on their meaning by being embodied in some larger system of meaning or frame" (p. 374). Citing it as being both "indispensable and elusive," Gamson et al. observed that "frame plays the same role in analyzing media discourse that schema does in cognitive psychology---a central organizing principle that holds together and gives cohesion to a diverse array of symbols" (p.384). Events and experiences are framed but as readers, people also frame events and experiences, decoding them, or constructing meaning, in the context of their own cultural levels. "Frame transformation" (Snow & Benford, 1988, Snow et al, 1986, as cited in Gamson et al, 1992, p. 385) was offered, however, as a more accurate description of how frame or framing constructs meaning. In this more dynamic interpretation, a frame is more like a storyline or unfolding narrative about an issue...framing events as they occur over time (Gamson et al, 1992, p. 385). "Narratives are organizations of experience. They bring order to events by making them something that can be told about; they have power because they make the world make sense (Manoff, 1987, as cited in Gamson et al, 1992, p. 385).

Frame transformation, the authors observed, focuses attention on the media as an arena where social actors compete as sponsors for their preferred

definition and construction of social reality. Success or failure is determined by how well preferred meanings and interpretations are doing in various media arenas (Gamson et al, p. 385). When the *Mercury* focused its attention on Dr. Knight and the Ravenswood School District, it had the clear advantage in the contest for social construction of reality. Dr. Knight and the District had no media or public relations consultant. I asked her if she had a press officer or a media relations person when the *Mercury* began its investigations. She replied,

No, and that was the mistake...

I spent the money for one, but I was following the board's suggestion for a firm. These firms are extremely expensive. I wanted just a person who would just leave the job maybe at one of the known papers because they would have some contacts...that would be the best person to have for a school. ...We did hire a firm particularly when we started with the IDEA 97 [lawsuit]...spent a lot of money on those people, but they wanted something different. ... we found out that they didn't understand schools, so things that we thought were important, they said 'no, we're not going to illuminate that because it would just draw attention to it...' and so we didn't get our message out.

Knight recognized that she needed someone who could write well and who had media contacts, but she also noted that "I was too cheap to think of investing in it.

I always thought what my first commitment had to be to that classroom...I got to be sure that there is enough money for raises..." But her experience prompted her to add,

...as I, you know, depart from this business of being a superintendent, the first advice I would give is that if you can get an administrative assistant who had media relations skills, that is more important than your business manager. Because that is the person who can explain your actions.

Not having a media relations or press officer, proved to be more costly than perhaps Dr. Knight could have imagined after the *Mercury News* decided to investigate Ravenswood and her as its superintendent. Probably in its own internal struggles to upright itself after the storm of its controversial 1996 series of articles on the Contra-cocaine connection, the newspaper apparently felt the need to find a diversion, a new target for the hard-hitting, investigative journalism which had characterized the paper in the past. Gary Webb's series of articles in the *Mercury News* appeared in August 22, 1996 and the Pulitzer Prize winning reporter's description of an alleged connection between the introduction of crack cocaine into Black urban communities and the Central Intelligence Agency's funding of the Contras in South America drew disparagement and opprobrium for his once-supportive editors and the publishers of the paper, defensiveness from the CIA and the US Justice department, and finally resulting in his discrediting and demotion by his editors at the *Mercury News*.

For a number of Black officials including Dr. Knight, the 1996 articles provided perhaps the first substantive, logical explanation for the explosion of crack cocaine in urban, largely Black communities. But according to sources in the Alternative Presses,

Unintentionally, Webb also exposed the cowardice and unprofessional behavior that had become the new trademarks of the major U.S. news media by the mid-1990s. The big news outlets were always hot on the trail of some titillating scandal – the O.J. Simpson case or the Monica Lewinsky scandal-- scandal – but the major media could no longer grapple with serious crimes of state (Retrieved October 8, 2005, from <http://www.consortiumnews.com/2004/121304.html>).

Perhaps the analyses of some in the Alternative Press community were correct, for the *Mercury News* pulled the reporters from the continuing Contra-Cocaine investigation (and reassigned Webb, who eventually resigned from the paper; unable to find another job at a major newspaper, he was an apparent suicide in December, 2004). Perhaps it was a coincidence, but in the 1996 to 1997 academic year, the *Mercury News* launched a series of investigative reports on Dr. Knight and the Ravenswood School District. Kowalski (2004) observed,

Administrators cannot prevent media contacts, but they can affect the conditions under which they occur. Many superintendents and principals make the mistake of not

initiating the first contact with reporters. When reporters make the first move, they usually are not seeking to socialize; rather, they probably want to interview the administrator about a problem, a crisis, or a scandal (p. 258).

The Mercury News definitely was not looking to socialize and it had no end of opportunities to report the problems, crises, or scandals about Ravenswood and Dr. Knight; and as Informants for this study suggested, the newspaper appeared willing to spend time, money and a great deal of energy looking for the bad news. In fact, the *Mercury News* appeared to have set about to increase its own advertising revenue by selling papers that exploited the problems in the East Palo Alto community generally and the school District in particular. [Later, in 2005, the *San Jose Mercury News*, whose parent company is Knight-Ridder, Incorporated, “in a painful but necessary step,” would cut 60 positions from the *Mercury* staff, including 52 in the newsroom. Two other newspapers in the Knight-Ridder chain had cut a combined 100 positions earlier that same week (Associated Press, September 24, 2005, retrieved October 8, 2005 from <http://www.editorandpublisher.com>)]. Gamson et al. (1992) noted “[m]edia organizations use news and other programming as a commodity to attract an audience which they can then sell to advertisers. Beyond its size these advertisers are concerned with the ‘quality’ of their audience (defined in terms of purchasing power) and the company which their advertisements keep” (p. 377). No doubt Ravenswood School District and Dr. Knight must have appeared as targets of opportunity for the *Mercury News* to increase advertising sales revenue

while diverting attention away from the Gary Webb matter. Knight and the school District were part of an economically depressed, politically disenfranchised and marginalized community that was inhabited by impoverished, marginalized minority groups with no collective voice to tell its own story. As I noted earlier, in 1991-1992, for example, East Palo Alto was declared the “murder capital of the world” because of the high number of deaths per capita during the height of the drug wars; that was to be East Palo Alto’s enduring legacy. Yet Informants reported that when area policy-makers from the more affluent communities of Palo Alto and Menlo Park met as a task force to discuss crime in East Palo Alto, it was to discuss how to prevent crime spreading from East Palo Alto to their own communities, and East Palo Alto officials were not at the table to discuss issues like poverty, unemployment, housing, and healthcare which when considered from that community’s perspective may have helped them combat the spread of crime (Board Member #2). Similarly, when the East Palo Alto council decided to eliminate a section of apartments to make way for a new Home Depot retail shopping area, the Ravenswood School Board was not consulted even though the elimination of the apartments meant the loss of housing for students who were counted within the ADA (average daily attendance) of the District, which governs how much money Districts receive per pupil.

The newspaper had a broader cultural affect in the community by assisting in the creation of negative social capital (Gittell & Thompson, 2001), undermining of the social cohesion of the area through its relentless coverage of the negative, sensational or titillating events in the community. Negative social capital is often

ignored, but it results when businesses like the media, for example, use their vast influence to organize social groups and determine social trends affecting how social capital connections affect markets (p. 119). Gamson et al. (1992) noted the total media experience that goes beyond what the concept of frame captures leads to a “fragmentation” of meaning of the events like those reported in the *Mercury*, for example. The authors noted that the new global networks of information and communication have “compressed time and space” which lead to “a preoccupation with the immediacy of surface meaning and the absence of depth. News comes in quotations with ever shorter sound bites” (p. 387). “The fragmentation of information begins by emphasizing individual actors over the political contexts in which they operate. Fragmentation is then heightened by the use of dramatic formats that turn events into self-contained, isolated happenings” (Bennett, 1998, as cited in Gamson et al, p. 387). Fragmentation results in the delivery of the news in dramatic episodes that obscure the connections between issues or the development of one issue over time (p. 387).

Fragmentation by the media, particularly the *Mercury News* in its coverage of the events of East Palo Alto, Ravenswood School District and Dr. Knight, resulted in the apparent disconnect between the enduring poverty of the city, efforts like the loan fund to resolve it, and the issues raised in the IDEA 97 lawsuit. Dr. Knight as an individual actor was emphasized over the political context in which she operated, in this case, an impoverished school District in an impoverished, disenfranchised community. Even though dark-skinned people had operated the city since its incorporation in 1983, including the school District,

residents felt they were powerless to change the media image that they believed was fueled by racism: "...in an America still consciously and unconsciously dominated by race awareness, the idea that it is a Black-run city colors all thought and discussion about East Palo Alto" (Retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>). Stories in the Bay Area media about East Palo Alto covered violence or corruption, the digital divide, or gentrification, Allen-Taylor (2000) wrote in his Metro-Active article, citing his informants' belief that media coverage is skewed against a Black-run government like East Palo Alto: "Nowhere did I find any story that let responsible Black East Palo Altans...talk about their community on their own terms" (Retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.28.00/paloalto-0039.html>).

From the perspective of those in the broader, affluent communities, the only legitimate value of that community appeared to be its land and its access to critical lanes of commerce.

Social capital theory as a lens

Social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1991; Putnam, 2000) provided a means to understand the dilemma faced by the residents of East Palo Alto and the students of Ravenswood School District that made them so vulnerable, and so visible to public scrutiny aided by the harsh light of the press. Lin (2001) defined social capital as resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions. With that definition in mind, the theorist identified three ingredients of social capital: resources embedded in a social

structure (*structural / embeddedness*); accessibility to such social resources by individuals (*opportunity/accessibility*); and use or mobilization of such social resources by individuals in purposive actions (*action-oriented / use*) (p. 12).

Access to and use of the resources that are embedded in social networks can lead to better socio-economic status, but at the same time access is in part determined by one's position in the hierarchical structure (p. 12). Putnam described these positions in the hierarchical structure as weak ties or bridging ties (*to get ahead*) and strong ties or bonding ties (*to get by*).

Lin (2000) also identified the *inequality of social capital* that occurs when a certain group is clustered at relatively disadvantaged socio-economic positions (a structural/embeddedness process). The general tendency was for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socio-economic characteristics, that is, *homophily* (p. 786). Lin offered that unequal opportunities were structured by every society based on ascribed or constructed characteristics such as race, gender, or religion (p. 787), but the important fact to assess was the power of the network relative to the field, in this case, the Peninsula community, and the state at large.

Social capital functioned as a theoretical and conceptual framework to understand how women like Dr. Knight function in communities in every day, ordinary life with the structural constraints imposed by race and socio-economic status (Lin, 2000; Putnam, 2000). On another plane, the application of social capital theory and its attributions of *legitimacy* to individuals in leadership positions (Spillane, Hallett & Diamond, 2003; Bourdieu, 1991) also provided an

important reference point from which to understand the role and function of the media in its construction of reality for Dr. Knight as she actuated forms of capital in the Ravenswood School District and in the East Palo Alto community and the surrounding communities.

When Dr. Knight arrived in East Palo Alto, she found a community which substantially relied upon bonding or strong ties (to *get by*) but lacked the bridging ties (to *get ahead*) that were needed to develop civic capacity. The schools and the community existed in a pattern of social isolation, and they experienced both an inequality of social capital and negative social capital as they clustered in the lowest levels of the social hierarchy of the Peninsula in conditions of poverty, unemployment, housing shortages, crime, and poor schools. The institutions of the community, especially the schools, were particularly unresponsive to the families, (Noguera, 2004). No doubt, as the mothers and parents in the Sneak Out program tried to remedy the problem of low performing, unresponsive schools through bridging ties and social leverage gained from interaction with affluent White community of Palo Alto, others in the tightly knit city were working to lower the crime rate, to overcome the economic disadvantages and enduring poverty wrought by the city's incorporation which had resulted in the lack of a viable tax base. But East Palo Alto, in its racial and social isolation and poverty, simply lacked social support and social leverage (Keyes, in Saegert, Thompson & Warren, 2001, p. 161) which would have enabled it to meet the unmet social and financial needs of its citizens.

In his analysis of public schools in Oakland, a large city in the neighboring East Bay Area of California, Noguera (2004) noted that in impoverished urban school Districts, students come to school with a wide array of unmet social, material and emotional needs that affect their ability to learn. Children may come to school hungry, and stressed by living conditions. In the Ravenswood School District, which had problems nearly identical to its Oakland neighbor, Dr. Knight, used skills and knowledge she developed earlier in her career working with poor communities to build upon the foundations of the Sneak Out program to increase the social leverage of the bridging ties for the school District. Her ability to access and use the resources embedded in her social networks in Sacramento, Southern California, and Washington, D.C., and to identify and use those resources that she developed locally in the Peninsula improved the economic status and the academic performance of the schools in her District, according to Informants. “Test scores in the District came up with the improvement in the [school building] facilities, play grounds, and the Boys and Girls Club” (Former Board Member # 2).

Each of the Informants interviewed for this writing talked about Dr. Knight’s incredible ability to raise money and resources through grants and other support that she converted to assets for the District, and for the community. When companies came to her to offer five and ten thousand dollars, she would take that money and put it into a fund for children who could not afford

uniforms....there were times when parents would come to her because they could not afford to buy Christmas gifts....the community supported her, and passed [two] bond measures that helped get the library, the Boys and Girls Club, the football playing field, and the state of the art gymnasium, all due to Dr. Knight” (Board Member # 2).

As I note earlier, Informants recalled that because of experiences with prior superintendents, the city officials who interviewed Dr. Knight wanted to know where she would live---in or out of the city, and when she said she would live in the city of East Palo Alto, the officials were pleased. “But once she got to town and really began to immerse herself in the city and in the District, they believed she was into too much” (Former Board Member # 1). For example, Informants each described how Knight’s fundraising abilities and extracommunity contacts on the Peninsula outstripped those of the City Council. In fact, factions on the City Council were described by various Informants as jealous and resentful of the money and other resources that Knight pulled into the Ravenswood School District and of her relationships in the early days with computer entrepreneurs like Hewlett and Packard, and many of the other Silicon Valley powers; the City Council felt that some of the resources Knight raised for the school District should have gone directly to the city (Former Board Member # 1; Former Board Member #2); External Informant #1)

Perhaps because there appeared to be some kind of natural progression or hierarchy from the school board to the City Council suggested to some that Dr. Knight and the District were expected to defer to the council's judgment of matters relating to land use in the city. Elements on the council would act on their feelings of competition or opposition by filing injunctions against the school board in attempts to stop them from using school land resources with their extracommunity contacts; for example, the arrangement with the Boys and Girls Clubs netted a safe, after school haven for children in exchange for making school land available to the group at a below-market price so they could build the clubhouse. Although the City Council attempted to stymie the project by claiming environmental impact, Dr. Knight said the District built a baseball diamond on a vacant lot enabling inner city students to have the same access to Little League Baseball as suburban children. "There are few Black American baseball players [as opposed to those from the Caribbean] today because Black inner city kids don't have anywhere to play baseball," she reasoned. Through a series of similar "nit picking" incidents, the City Council was often in opposition to the school board and Dr. Knight. In fact, "...opposition to the board and Dr. Knight lined up in the community because of Dr. Knight's ability to use her power on behalf of the students and the community; while the city [City Council of East Palo Alto] gave away its land, under Dr. Knight's leadership, the school board kept its land and used it strategically for the kids" (Former Board Member # 1).

Collins (2000) observed that being one of the few groups negatively affected by multiple forms of oppression; African-American women have been in

a better position to see their interrelationships, for example, the relationship between racial oppression and gender inequality (p. 217). Throughout her career, Dr. Knight understood the connection between education and politics, and in East Palo Alto, she applied that understanding to the delivery of public education and the uses of capital to leverage power for school District. She understood not only the cost of land, but its value to her District, and in advocating for the District, she maximized the value of its land.

Prior to Dr. Knight's arrival in East Palo Alto, the intracommunity ties were strong and dominant among the predominantly Black population providing community cohesion which worked well on one level. But *extracommunity* networks are necessary to create leverage ties for poor communities, for example, access to higher paying jobs. Despite its location in the Silicon Valley, unemployment was always high in East Palo Alto and as consequence, civic capacity and social, economic, and health resources in the community were always in low supply. Individual social capital, like that brought by Dr. Knight to the community through the loan fund she developed, can be developed through *extracommunity* ties, and made available to others at the community level, however. Individual social capital and collective social capital are then mutually reinforcing (Keyes, 2001, p. 161). Through various strategies like the loan fund and the District credit cards, Dr. Knight was making progress towards developing stronger *extracommunity* ties, although efforts were not without problems. But the passage of the two bond measures even while she was under fire in the press,

indicated broad community support for her, even though it was neither reported nor interpreted that way in the press (“Third time Proves to be a Charm” 2000).

Noguera (2004) also noted that demographic shifts in urban communities had the effect of diminishing community cohesion through language and cultural differences which have contributed to fragmentation and distrust between new and older residents. East Palo Alto, like its neighbor Oakland in the East Bay, experienced a substantial demographic shift as Mexican and Hispanic families moved into the city in larger numbers. Noguera also observed that rather than leading people to work together in pursuit of common community interests, growing diversity has increased the level of competition over community resources, which in turn has heightened tensions and fueled intergroup conflict (Retrieved October 10, 2005, from Education Abstracts). Dr. Knight was able to put in place instructional and administrative resources to meet the bilingual education needs of the new families; in fact, at this writing, the acting superintendent is a Hispanic woman who had been hired several years ago by Dr. Knight and brought up through the ranks to the position of assistant superintendent. One of the Informants described Dr. Knight as “a positive force for relationships with the Hispanic parents” (External Informant # 1). However, as another Informant noted, “No District does an adequate job of bilingual education... [however, there was] never a position that you [the board] could take that would satisfy all parents regarding bilingual education” (Former School Board Member #1).

The perceived lack of adequate resources for bilingual education seems to have been a “combination of real issues and pretend issues,” continued the Informant (Former School Board Member #1). The Ravenswood District certainly needed more bilingual teachers employed in the District, in which there was “a major under representation of Mexican and Hispanic teachers, and over 3,000 students were of Latino background, nearly 80 percent of the children in the District. To recruit bilingual teachers, the board traveled to Spain, Mexico, and even Cuba,” but these trips became a source of criticism in the press for “excessive spending on travel by the board and Dr. Knight” (“School Chief Benefits While Students Lag,” 2001). Further complicating the delivery of bilingual education in the District was the political reality that the Latino populations were not a monolithic group as revealed in the arguments around Proposition 227 which appeared on the California Ballot in June, 1998. The measure, which passed in the election, was aimed at eliminating bilingual education in the schools and established English as the primary language of instruction (Retrieved October 22, 2005, from <http://primary98.ss.ca.gov/VoterGuide/Propositions/227yesarg.htm> . “The board took a position against Prop [proposition] 227, but there was a split in the Latino community (between recent immigrants and those who were born in the US or whose families had immigrated to the US in earlier generations) for support of the proposition, especially over the issue of the primary language of instruction. “The [Ravenswood] board was more progressive than the general community was, including the Hispanics. The board did all that it could do legally under the law

[based on Proposition 227] regarding bilingual education. In fact, it had more certified bilingual teachers and recruited more than local Districts” (Former Board Member #1). Nearly 85 percent of the Latino population were not citizens and could not register to vote; yet, the number of people five years of age and older who spoke Spanish at home increased by 125.1 percent , from 6,438 to 14,492 between 1990 and 2000 (Wildflower Institute, 2002). The groups like Padres Unidos were ”...not a substantial voting population but because of press coverage by the *San Jose Mercury News* and the other media who followed the *Mercury News* coverage of East Palo Alto, Padres Unidos took on a major role in criticism of the District “(Former Board Member #1), a role that was disproportionate to its actual numbers.

I think she [Dr. Knight] was in a climate [here in California] where there was constant change in Districts and City Councils. Dr. Knight brought change, whether it was in the table of organization for the District, whether it was introducing Open Court [a reading program] as a new reading program to stimulate student literacy, whether it was to join forces with the cities and organizations that are non-profit and have after school programs, create a new library...that’s not been done [before]. ...in those early years, there was no one at the city level with leadership skill to band these people together to work towards removing somebody until more recently. And it took three people running on the slate as new, incoming board members to get the votes for changes. This is what they said: ‘the board

supports Dr. Knight, the existing board, and things are moving along, but it's now...it's all stabilized and it's not accommodating the new cultural group of Latinos who come with little education from different countries or from Fresno or Stockton (cities in the Central Valley of California with strong agricultural environments) where they worked in the fields...it's time to change, and the currently elected board will not remove her, then we need to remove the board, so that we can remove the superintendent...that was their theme for the election (Former Board Member # 2).

This message of "change" went out not only to those new residents, but also to those who had experienced change under Dr. Knight, older residents. The demographics of the community shifted, and they shifted underneath the feet of Dr. Knight. It seems probable that lacking the votes to gain access to the City Council (SFGate.com, October 26, 2004, <http://www.sfgate.com>, *Latinos seek power in East Palo Alto, Council makeup doesn't match city's latest demographics*) some Mexican and Hispanic politicians targeted the school board which had been made vulnerable by the series of newspaper articles. The *Mercury News*, especially, disparaged the Ravenswood Superintendent and highlighted the deficiencies in the District for special education and bilingual education. This in spite of the fact that the District in its current state was superior to the disarray Dr. Knight found when she arrived in 1985. In any event, by churning the issues that divided the communities, the media's coverage of events seriously damaged Dr. Knight's credibility and made it difficult if not impossible to

build networks of trust among ethnic communities in East Palo Alto (Former Board Member # 1; Former Board Member # 2; Current Board Member #2; External Informant #1).

One major challenge for Knight was not having a press agent or media relations manager and a District media contact policy to handle the media image for the school and for her, especially for her activities for the community as a whole. Bad rumors became newsworthy for the *San Jose Mercury News*, for example, simply because no one was there to manage media relations for the District. Oppositional and resentful council people and disgruntled teachers always found a sympathetic ear in the media. Knight cited an example of a few teachers who complained to the media that they did not have supplies, and had to spend their own money.

I used to go into classrooms, and I would see teachers who'd be in the press...it would be in the press where some of my teachers said, "oh, well, I would do a better job but we don't have books, and we don't have this and we don't have that. I said, 'what do you want that we don't have here?' You have the State [of California] required text book...we're required to do that...they give us the money to buy text books. So, it's a myth. Now if you give a text book to a child, and then you say, 'oh but these children are so irresponsible. I gave him the book, and he took it home.' They want me [Dr. Knight] to give them another book...those books

sometimes cost forty and fifty dollars, even sixty dollars. I said, 'oh no...let's find out why Johnny didn't bring that book back'.

Dr. Knight challenged the teachers by telling them that, having read in the newspaper that they did not have the supplies they needed, she would make available to them a District credit card; and further, she offered to take their classes while they shopped off campus for the items they needed for instruction. In hindsight, Dr. Knight admitted, the District credit card may have been a mistake because "it may get one into trouble," as it did for her. But she argued that "if you use credit cards efficiently they are better than the purchase order process." The point of the story, however, was that after complaining about lack of supplies to an eager news reporter, Dr. Knight said only two teachers accepted her offer. "And it almost put a stop to them running to the press. Because my response to them was that's why I have this credit card."

In its coverage of the events in East Palo Alto or in the Ravenswood School District, the *Mercury News* rarely if ever mentioned the lack of a tax base or the lack of any power or financial framework within the City as the possible contributor to the impoverishment and disempowerment of some groups in the area. Further, the connection between the absence of banks (or any type of financial institution) in East Palo Alto and the emergency loan fund which led to the allegations of conflict of interest against Knight was absent noticeably in the *Mercury* article of February 17, 1998, for example. At the very least, the *idea* of a District loan fund and its high utilization (over 100 people had used the fund at that time, according to the article) might have triggered more questions in the

minds of the *Mercury's* editors and reporters as to *why* the fund was necessary in the community. In an article the following year, *The Mercury* reported:

Frustrating Bank Delay East Palo Alto: California Bank & Trust seems ready to fill a 15 year old gap in the city (August 1, 1999). It should be noted that unlike the article in the loan fund which appeared on page 1A of the Front section, the article about the lack of a bank appeared in the Local section, page 1B. Even more noticeable, however, was the newspaper's failure once again to draw any connections between its own stories the prior year on the loan fund and credit cards scandal with this story about the delay in getting a bank for the city. The article even referred to East Palo Alto as a "cash strapped Peninsula town of 23,000" (1999, p. 1B). Certainly, it appeared that the editors and reporters at the *Mercury* not only lacked understanding of the financial and social complexities of what it meant to be poor and members of minority groups in an area surrounded by properties described as the most expensive in the nation, but it also mounted a concerted effort to discredit Dr. Knight by constructing a reality which cast her, the Ravenswood School District, and the city of East Palo Alto in the worst possible public light, despite the challenges of poverty and unemployment experienced by the city and the District. Dr. Knight herself recalled that the only decent article they printed about her was actually about the death of her husband in December, 2000. "The Mercury News wrote a nice article...that really surprised me. I had decided not to talk to them again, but I was glad that I did that time."

Perhaps the most egregious example of such an article appeared in the June 28, 2001 edition of the paper (“Superintendent profits while.....,” 2001), shortly before Dr. Knight’s acquittal on the nineteen conflict of interest charges. Relying upon information gained primarily in interviews with teachers, teacher aides, and even from special education students who were interviewed in the classroom, reporters cited a litany of examples that included :1) excessive spending on travel by the board and Dr. Knight; 2) audits showing improper documentation of federal monies spent for special education and school lunches; 3) “fraudulent claims” filed by the District after a school fire in 1997; teachers told reporters the District never had the furniture; 4) District failure to promptly address dangerous conditions in schools resulting in the 1997 electrical fire in the school; 5) suspiciously higher [than usual for Ravenswood] test scores that were inferred to be the result of wide spread cheating after two teacher aides in the District claimed they were told to fill in the answers for special education students. Reporters contended that the claim was substantiated by a special education student who was interviewed in the classroom; 6) an extraordinary number of teachers lack proper credentials; 7) District practices diverting hundreds of thousands of dollars from education into costly legal battles.

In each case, reporters legitimized the opinions of those who fit their investigative stance by giving more weight to their opinions (Bourdieu, 1991; Lin 2001) without counterbalancing weight from Dr. Knight, her supporters, or from the board. Perhaps if the *Mercury* reporters had more historical research at their disposal, they would have written about how the schools had improved since the

arrival of Dr. Knight, and perhaps they would have provided a different portrayal of the school District. A media person could have been particularly helpful in generating “breaking news” through press releases and explaining the improved test results to the public in the newspaper. For example, the *Mercury’s* proffered evidence of cheating on standardized test scores by Ravenswood middle students centered on the fact that students, whose scores had improved while at Ravenswood, did so poorly when they went to Sequoia High School in Redwood City, the high school for East Palo Alto middle school students (*San Jose Mercury News*, June 28, 2001). Apparently, the reporters did not conduct an in-depth investigation (or at least the findings did not appear in print) of what the students from the Ravenswood School District were experiencing at Sequoia High that may have created or contributed to the environment in which they did poorly or failed. When Dr. Knight, the Ravenswood teachers and board offered explanations, including the fact that the students were “not in their community so the students are mixing with peers from towns as affluent as Atherton and Portola Valley,” the *Mercury* appeared to have brushed by their explanations, faintly acknowledging them with no obvious deeper investigation into what it may have meant to Ravenswood students, in terms of their academic performances, to be out of their community.

A media specialist might have helped reporters from the *Mercury* to comprehend and accurately convey to readers how children from the poorest neighborhoods in the Peninsula often felt stigmatized when they arrived by school bus at Sequoia High School. Reporters might have asked them how it felt

to arrive from a city called the “murder capital” along with students from other feeder schools from among the richest neighborhoods *in the nation*, including Atherton, Menlo Park, Las Lomas and Portola Valley. Follow up questions might have asked students how it felt to be in class with these other students, or to be in physical education or in the lunch room with them, issues that Dr. Knight, parents, teachers, and board members readily understood. No doubt children from these affluent neighborhoods arrived in their own private cars which enabled them to take part in after school activities and other programs that enhanced their high school experience, and no doubt, they had little if any interaction with students from Ravenswood. A media contact person for the District also might have explained further to *Mercury* reporters that students from East Palo Alto might very well have a different kind of high school experience, one that might translate into lower standardized test scores, particularly if the experience included culture shock and different expectations from their peers and teachers.

An effective media contact person might have established their own cultural capital with the newspaper that would have enabled them to vet the informants from the staff for the *Mercury* article, allowing the media person to effectively challenge reporters for the veracity and weight the newspaper gave to some statements and not others in the article; perhaps this at least would have given the reporters and editors pause to consider whether what they were printing was accurate, or even true. More importantly perhaps, a media relations manager could have intervened early in the process by setting a District *media*

contact policy that all staff and faculty had to abide by while working on District time. For example, in the story in which reporters implied that higher overall test scores were probably the result of cheating by District special education staff (2001), a special education student was actually interviewed in the classroom by reporters, which probably was a violation of the child's right to privacy, if not his IEP (Individual Education Plan which all special education students are supposed to have to guide their educational experiences in the schools). In the case of overpayments for lunches or proper documentation for special education money noted in the same *Mercury* article, no one seemed to have explored how many other schools in the state or even in the county may have incurred the same problems; veteran school administrators would know that such issues, while not proper or excusable, were not uncommon in many Districts, particularly urban Districts where 90 percent of the children may receive free or reduced lunches as well as myriad other federal and state programs that require stacks of reports to state and federal government agencies on a weekly if not daily basis.

Ravenswood should not have stood alone in that harsh light. Much of what the reporters wrote was not supported by in-depth research including testimony from credible, higher ranking officials, or in the alternative, equally if not more plausible explanations that may have existed for what actually occurred. In fact, one could argue that the *Mercury News*, and those news agencies that followed its story leads actually created the climate that encouraged many of the situations that fueled the discord in the District.

As it happened, there was no one to challenge what the *Mercury* editors printed or when they printed it. A former board member observed, “Whatever the problems may have been, the *Mercury News* made a point of highlighting the problems, not the successes” (Former Board Member # 1). Without the artful challenge from a competent District media relations manager, the *Mercury* appears to have conducted numerous ‘investigations’ in which reporters and editors drew their own unchallenged inferences from a mixture of facts and innuendoes, which they socially constructed and proceeded to print with little regard of the consequences to the lives of struggling children, administrators and an entire community, let alone personal and professional reputations. Such constant public scrutiny apparently so lacking in the complete truth and its resulting opprobrium cannot have had a positive impact on academic performance for the students of Ravenswood or its staff. With no media relations policy, no media relations manager, and a naïve, and often self-serving or disloyal staff, resentful and unsophisticated city officials, and a school chief beleaguered and preoccupied by legal charges and personal tragedy, the paper was able to write what it wanted to write and the only people to disbelieve or contradict it could be discredited or could be silenced handily.

The effects of the articles from the *Mercury News* and the media that followed its course were to devastate the credibility of the District and of Dr. Knight. The *Mercury News* especially kept alive the image of lawlessness and incompetence, a socially constructed reality of the minority community of East Palo Alto. I asked each of the Informants separately: Who or what was ultimately

responsible for the upset in Ravenswood and East Palo Alto? Their replies were very similar and can be summarized:

1. External progress---there were those who resented seeing people of color be successful and to begin to be independent---animosity was generated against people of color? (“Was it racism?” I asked one Informant, “Yes,” was the quiet answer);
2. Internal conflict with and jealousy of Dr. Knight, not only of the power that she held in the District and in the community, but also of the financial gains she made in the community. Certain Black women and White men seemed to be especially jealous of her;
3. Dr. Knight’s personality---she was not quiet and humble like Black women [and women generally] were supposed to be. She was aggressive and outspoken. “She liked to win, and everyone knew when she won, especially her opponents.” (Former School Board Member # 1).

An Advocate, True believer, and a Conundrum

Dr. Knight’s image is one of strength and resolve, but it would be callous to ignore the toll extracted from her personal reputation and professional credibility by the conflict of interest charges and the IDEA 97 lawsuit. It is also apparent in speaking with her that she believes that she was betrayed by someone close to her; this is not an unreasonable supposition since several Informants expressed the same sentiment. At 74, Knight looks twenty years younger, and she still shows the effects of regular exercise and good nutrition;

these good habits surely contributed to her longevity, her resistance, and her endurance in the face of overwhelmingly mean-spirited attacks and perceptions shaped by *ad hominem* fallacy against the things she (and many others) believed brought good to the community.

Linking the two critical incidents is the overarching political philosophy of Dr. Knight which connects the forces of educational and political reform to deliver public education to urban children. A sense of personal mission seems to propel Charlie Mae: sometimes she is a nurturing and tireless advocate for impoverished urban core and its children, at other times, a battle-hardened politician, or at another time, the astute business woman. Each role she inhabits appears to give her a different angle of vision (Collins, 2000), a global perspective that enables her to see the “Big Picture” of issues, like the connections between community poverty and children’s ability to learn, political empowerment and education, or capital and self-sufficiency (“you must be self-sufficient---if you can walk into that room and sit at that table, and bring something to it, you have a better chance to negotiate. But if you have your hat in your hand, you can’t...”). She is direct and unflinching in challenging the *status quo*. “I want to do something for people who are marginalized, people who live in Section 8 housing. I want to show them that you don’t have to live in squalor and I want to make it possible for them to purchase a home.” Her mission-driven, single focus is evident in the intensity with which she discusses the social and political issues of education; in her willingness to fully commit her personal vision to a project and its fulfillment; and in her apparent willingness to engage in

battles of principle whenever she feels it is necessary. Her independence and self-reliance, her willingness to “go it alone” are likely the result of her *habitus* and the trajectory (Bourdieu, 1991) from her family life; early experiences contributed to her aggressiveness, independence, and perseverance. Kets De Vries (2001) described what he termed “the transference trap”:

What transference says is that no relationship we have is a *new* relationship; all relationships are colored by previous relationships. And the relationships that have the most lasting potency, coloring almost every subsequent encounter, are those that we had with our earliest caregivers. Thus we often act toward people in the present as if they were people from the past: we behave toward them as children do toward their parents, for example, forgetting that we’re now adults (p. 85).

Like Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of *habitus*, Kets De Vries’ use of the concept of *transference* further articulated the enduring dispositions we all bring from childhood into our interactions with others as adults. I recalled Dr. Knight’s reflecting on how her leadership abilities developed: as the older daughter, Charlie Mae became the caregiver to siblings after her mother died and her father remarried a younger woman who knew little about making a home. With her father injured and often unable to find employment, Charlie Mae probably was looked to often by the others as the nurturer, coping with and defending the family from the injustice and oppression of the South, while persevering in getting

an education for herself and for her siblings. A family member recalled how college graduate Charlie Mae bought the family its first gas stove to replace the wood burning stove they had been using in their home. I believe Knight brought these coping and surviving personality characteristics with her into adult hood and used them to help vulnerable children and their families first in Monterey, followed by Sacramento, Lynwood, and finally, East Palo Alto.

At the same time, however, these qualities of aggressiveness, independence and perseverance may have created a “blind spot” in her perspective of the world around her as she operated in a political frame. Bolman and Deal (1997) observed that conflict is central in organizations and makes power an important resource. “The political frame asserts that in the face of enduring differences and scarce resources, conflict is inevitable and power is a key resource” (p. 164). Power is the capacity to get things to happen in the organization, but organizational goals are set “through an ongoing process of negotiation and interaction among key players” (p. 165), not by a force from the top. Dr. Knight’s disadvantage in operating independently from the top as superintendent, but in the political frame, was in not forming and sustaining the necessary coalitions and collaborations that she could work within to get things done in the Ravenswood District and in East Palo Alto. Coalition members are interdependent, “...they need one another, even though their interests may be only partly in synchrony.” Instead, Dr. Knight was often at odds with various key groups in the community, like the East Palo Alto City Council, for example, or

even members of her own board as she pursued her own vision of what the District and the community needed.

In not building and sustaining coalitions, it does appear that more often than not she may not have always observed the social cues from others that would help her to determine whom to empower so that they could help save themselves as well as the community. Sometimes effacing a poignant naïveté, I observed that Dr. Knight believed in the essential “salvageability” and uplift of all people and the belief that if she provides enough resources to them, she can save them from danger: hunger, homelessness, unemployment, injustice, and lack of educational resources. But acting as an independent force, in her zeal to nurture and provide resources to her community, she either missed or ignored important social cues inherent in relationships with others, including critical social forces in the community. While she thrived on the conflict in the hurly-burly of political life, distracted by the criminal allegations and the IDEA 97 lawsuit, she may have missed the predictable impact of residential or ecological succession on the community, for example. To survive such a social force, however, she would have needed a coalition of others to enact an appropriate, coordinated response to ethnic succession; instead, most of the time she would act independently when others did not share her vision, and as a consequence, she did not have a coalition when she would have most benefited from one.

In one of our last conversations, I observed to her that I thought one of the enormous challenges she faced was that her “perimeter” was not protected from

her critics. The conflict inherent in the political frame requires setting up and defending one's perimeter, and to do that, one must work through an interdependent coalition with those who can provide mutual and competent support. For example, lacking a strong media relations person and building staff, the *Mercury News* was able to get into school buildings and interview anyone who had a personal issue with her or with the District. But her blind spot resulted in her not protecting her perimeter even when she was in conflict, which was often, apparently. I was struck by how similar challenges seemed to plague her throughout her career, prompting similar reactions from her; I was reminded of her late husband's concerns about her welfare because of her kind heartedness, and also her family member's comment about her easy willingness to help others. She is a nurturer who may build loyalty among those for whom she advocates but not a competent "machine" or team that she can call upon for support after she has empowered them. As a result, when an insurmountable conflict appeared, she found herself standing alone, as she observed, "in the silence of her friends." That's the critical difference I saw between her and the successful African American women executives in Parker's (2001) study; among the five leadership themes cited, "empowerment of employees through the challenge to produce results" may have been the most elusive to Dr. Knight.

Perhaps it is also the case that those for whom she advocated not only lacked the capacity or the will to perform, but also, for whatever reason, she did not develop it in them, or hold them strictly them accountable when they could not perform their tasks. I asked one Informant who is her supporter if Dr. Knight

had a leadership succession plan, and the amused reply was, “I don’t think she ever planned to retire!” (Former Board Member #1). In my opinion, Dr. Knight thinks of her job as nurturer and as such, her job is always incomplete because there is always someone to nurture; thus she appears not to think of succession--of preparing and empowering others to take over for her so she can move onto another project. A persistent external perspective of her Ravenswood District organization was that her key people, especially in special education and in school records, the critical areas that caused so many challenges for her, simply lacked the capacity to get the job done even though she had entrusted them with critical tasks.

Impact of age and longevity

In one of our conversations, Dr. Knight pointed out to me,

No matter how vibrant you are, when you are over 70 people believed you should go somewhere and give up the reins...they have no respect for experience, for knowledge. For the Japanese, the older you are they think you have wisdom. We have no respect for age in this country, except for judges, and you don’t see that many female justices. It’s a male kind of situation here...even the people who supported me said ‘she is 70 years old---she shouldn’t be running a school’.

Certainly her age had an impact on her experiences, but I also believe that her longevity had more of an impact on her image as one who could, and who would, change with the social forces in the community. I think gender played a role in perceptions of her attractiveness to form coalitions of power, as well. Indeed, I did wonder if Dr. Charlie Mae Knight were Dr. Charles Knight (and perhaps younger or perhaps even the same age) ---would the outcome of his experiences have been the same as hers? Would similar forces have created a fortuitous alignment to first try to discredit him and then push him out of office? If someone made a movie of a female educator's life, would the toughness, independence and resilience of a woman superintendent like Dr. Knight be portrayed in the same manner as Jaime Escalante, Coach Carter, and the many other male figures in education who have movies depicting their lives, with her tragedies and challenges emerging as triumphs in an impoverished, crime infested community? From another perspective, however, would a male educator working in the same political frame have formed more beneficial coalitions? Would he have balanced nurturing his constituents with empowering them?

She defines *herself*, identifying and taking on any number of roles to get the job done while rejecting controlling images. In at least one definition, she may be the one who looks after the welfare of her own family and the children and families her community---taking on the role of "uplifting" community. I believe Knight claims the description of nurturer and makes it work in ways that define her leadership style; it works for her, even as other women might shy away from the often perceived stereotype of women managers as "nurturing". Collins

(2000) observed that “Resisting by doing something that “is not expected” could not have occurred without Black women’s long-standing rejection of mammies, matriarchs and other controlling images. When combined, these individual acts of resistance suggest that a distinctive, collective Black Women’s consciousness exists” (p. 98). Such a consciousness was present when Dr. Knight was on the witness stand during her trial for conflict of interest. The newspapers had placed her personal fortune at eight million dollars (“...a *real* [her emphasis] exaggeration!” she laughed). The prosecutor asked her, “how did a woman like you making your salary manage to buy so much property?” She replied to him that “I do just like the White men do. I buy property, borrow against it and buy some more. My husband and I were both working and we saved our money. If I were a White man, you wouldn’t ask me that question. Because I’m a Black woman, you want to call me a thief!” Informants who were among the courtroom observers, as well as Dr. Knight herself believed the prosecutor’s questions were edged in racism and sexism.

Here, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) provides a lens to see the “both/ and” contradictions racism enacts in and exacts from the daily life of African American women like Dr. Knight---at once invisible and highly visible, and who draw strength from that visibility (Lorde, as cited in Collins, p. 100) . The implication of the prosecutor’s question was, Knight and her supporters all believed, “how does a Black woman manage to acquire wealth without being a thief”? Collins (p. 99) posits that self-definition pre-occupies African-American women because our lives “are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the

contradictions separating our own internally defined images as African-American women with our objectification as the *Other*". In defining herself on the witness stand, Dr. Knight demonstrated that, as an African American woman, she understood, later rather than sooner, perhaps that she had to construct her own reality; she had become cognizant of what her public image might mean to others, and she was prepared with an answer that defined who she was not only in her privately reality, but also in her public image (Collins, p. 99). Knight acted on a definition of nurturing as creating financial independence and amassing financial power that enabled her to remain personally independent, and at the same time address the critical needs in her community, including providing affordable housing to those who needed it.

Knight herself is a conundrum, a complex fusion of politician, social worker, and educator. She once described herself in an interview: "It's unusual to see a Black being a Republican that is still pro-Black, and [who] will still go after the hard issues." Perhaps that is because Dr. Knight considers herself a Rockefeller Republican, "to those members of the Republican party who hold moderate views similar to those of the late Nelson Rockefeller, governor of New York in the late 1960s and vice president of the United States under President Gerald Ford in the mid-1970s. In other words, Rockefeller Republicans are quite moderate (or even 'liberal') in their positions on domestic and social policies" (Retrieved November 1, 2005, from http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Rockefeller_Republican). Government has a role in creating the frameworks where the least among its citizens can be

productive (Fowler, 2000). This attitude stands out in stark contrast to the current image of the Republican Party, one that is dominated by its Conservative and Neo Conservative members who believe generally, among other things, that government should be small and taxes cut to stimulate economic growth. Social programs like Medicare and Aid to Dependent Families do not contribute to economic growth and should be cut, but since the U.S. should dominate the world economically and militarily, defense spending should be increased.

“Neocons” do not like the concentration of services in the welfare state and are happy to study alternative ways of delivering these services. (Retrieved November 1, 2005, from

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/000tzmlw.asp?pg=2>) This attitude became painfully clear during this writing after Hurricane

Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in August, 2005, stranding thousands of the poor without shelter, food, water, or other resources for several days without any assistance from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency); this was a scandal of epic proportions which had world wide exposure through the media.

Leadership: strength from conflict and adversity

Parker (2001) argued for a socially constructed view of leadership: “...I see leadership as a localized, negotiated process of mutual influence that would theoretically accommodate multiple viewpoints and diverse situational challenges” (p. 44). As a Black woman and a leadership scholar, Parker gave weight to the idea that Dr. Knight’s leadership style cannot be overlaid with a generalized paradigm of leadership theory; she is an aggressive leader, yet she

is nurturing and empowering. Knight chose to work in impoverished Districts, or she was selected by them to be a messiah, scapegoat, or sacrificial lamb as Alston (in Brunner Ed., 1999, p. 83) observed. But unlike the Black women executives in Parker's (2001, p. 59) study, Knight's vision and goals for the Ravenswood District was compromised by the lack of capacity of the impoverished people who lived in the District, people who perhaps could not be empowered (and in some cases, even entrusted) to carry out the goals and vision that Knight had for the Ravenswood School District, even though she worked hard to make something positive of the challenges in the District and in East Palo Alto. At one point, I asked her what she would do differently to avoid the outcome that she had just experienced, and she replied, "Inspect what you expect!" She went on to explain that her mistake was in trusting others to manage critical details without sufficient oversight. Alston (1999) also noted that among the barriers women educators faced

...are more clearly articulated through the questions raised, such as, [i]s it not a societal expectation that women solve other people's problems rather than define problems for others to solve? How is an individual woman's communication pattern interpreted, given a commonly held stereotype of women as caretaker? (Green & Manera, 1995, cited in Alston, p.81).

Women like Dr. Knight work in a complex, confusing environment where people's expectations of them change rapidly and even unpredictably, even as they may

conform to commonly held stereotypes of “women leaders” or “women’s experiences.” Parker also noted that in theorizing women’s experiences, she worked out the multiple experiences of Black women at the intersection of race, gender, and class and other socially constructed categories (Parker, 2001, p. 49). Universal gender symbols of masculine and feminine leadership are often generated within dominant-culture institutions and they privilege White middle-class cultural norms and values, but they exclude Black women’s experiences (Parker, p. 51). The image generated by Dr. Knight is reflected as outspoken, hardworking, and economically independent; she uses the range of her voice and appears to draw strength from adversity.

Someone asked her how she withstood the mean-spirited things said about her in the newspapers. She said, “I don’t read the *Mercury*. I know who I am!” She defines herself but it is not about *herself*. This image, however, is inconsistent with dominant-cultural norms for women, especially for Black women, and it invited unwelcome scrutiny, and even hostility directed against her. I surmise that had Knight looked out for her welfare and moved on after seven or eight years in Ravenswood, perhaps taking a foundation appointment or the executive directorship of an educational association, she would not have experienced the drama of the two critical incidents. I asked her if all of this adversity--- these critical incidents--- were they about power? “Yes,” she replied. “...and about the uses of power. If I had used my money on *me*, I would not have been a problem. But I saw a need. My blessings come because I look out for the least of these.” Unlike many others who had come into East Palo Alto, she did

have a vision of something better for the community, even if it was not universally or consistently shared by others. Her answer to my question, however, reflected her attitude as independent, single-minded, and as a nurturer, contributing to my own image of her as a conundrum---a woman toughened in the hurly-burly of politics, but who effaced a need to attend to the vulnerable in society, especially children. I have a photograph of her that I came across that endures in my memory: she is hugging a small child who is obviously delighted with the attention from her, and Dr. Knight herself is smiling happily.

Conclusion

I do not underrate Dr. Knight's focus on urban children and their well-being. In one of our last interviews, Dr. Knight said that "there is a climate in this country that Black really does not matter; we don't have enough leadership now to make it matter... the marching won't help us ...there is no galvanizing force..." But she believes there are still roles for her, and she continues to seek them out, even though she has come into conflict with forces in the community as she acts on those roles. I see her uses of power not in the context of unwillingness to change, but rather as steadfastness in her own vision of the intersections of power and change. Perhaps Dr. Knight was blind to the changes taking place in the East Palo Alto community, including the ethnic succession of Blacks by Latinos, or the social cues presented by other cultural forces or individuals. Certainly, she was often overwhelmed; "beleaguered" by legal battles, as one Informant described her. I think it is likely, however, that she clearly believed her work was not complete, and the changes (and the battles behind them) taking

place reinforced the notion in her mind that she *personally* had much more work to do to remedy the problems in the community. The IDEA lawsuit and the resources it consumed (over two million dollars for the plaintiff's lawyers which the Ravenswood District had to pay) she saw as principles worth fighting for until they were resolved to benefit the children. In an unexpected turn of events at this writing in a 6-2 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "the burden of proof in an administrative hearing challenging an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is properly placed on the party seeking relief, whether the disabled child or the school District" (Schaffer v. Weast, No. 04-698, U.S. Nov. 14, 2005). This decision seems to vindicate her position on the delivery of special education services.

Jackson (1999) observed of Black women superintendents today, "[t]hey and other Black women leaders do not use the phrase so dominant in the late 19th and early 20th century but their actions suggest the same idea: "Lift as we climb." (p. 147). I believe Knight sees herself not as heroic, necessarily, but rather as continuing her role as the family nurturer and provider, except now she works for her community. Standpoint theory tries to capture Knight's unique view and her uses of power to improve the Ravenswood School District. While she was compromised by the social and economic forces in her community, Dr. Knight nevertheless provides a strong image and model for women leaders, especially African American women leaders. One lesson to be learned from her leadership experiences, however, is if women leaders work in the political frame, it is necessary for them to develop strong political coalitions in order to survive in

that frame so they can continue to work in their communities. Even Dr. Knight herself said, “You can’t do it alone!”

The limitations of this study like most qualitative studies, is that its results cannot be generalized, but it does contribute to the ability to construe knowledge and values from the multiple perspectives of women leaders, particularly African American women leaders, and it contributes to the rarely heard voices of African American women superintendents.

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