African American Superintendents' Experiences with a Midwest State's Hiring Practices
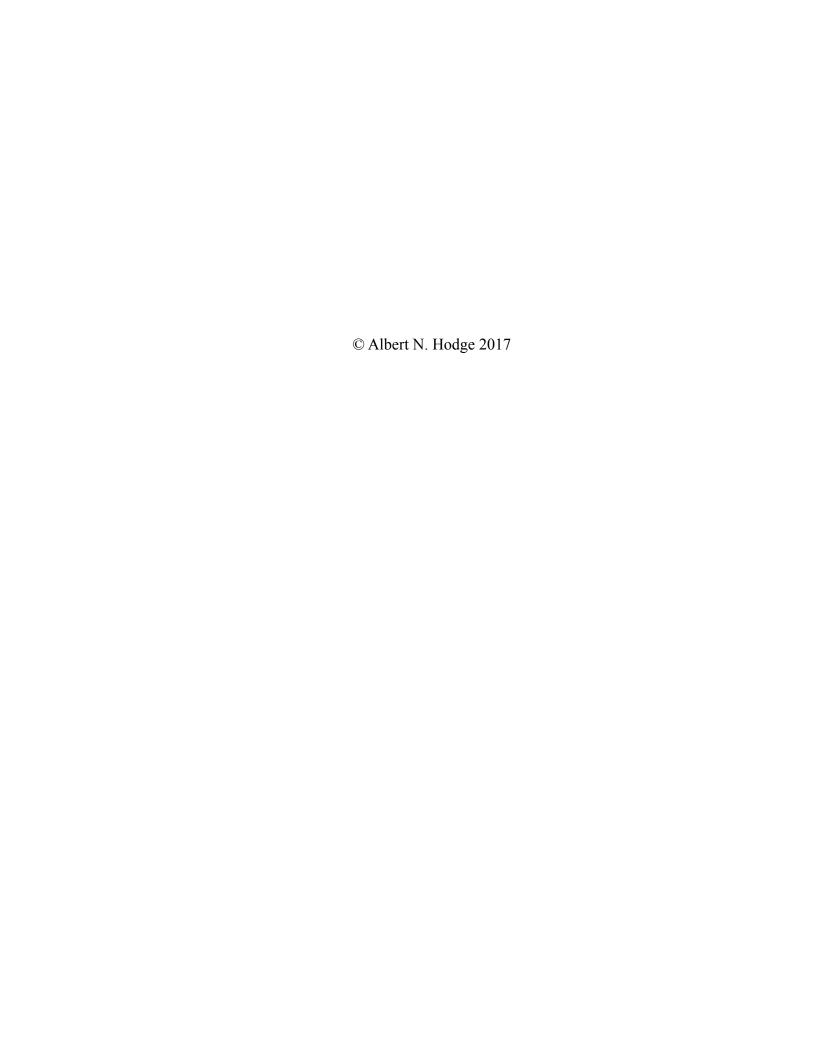
by

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Dedication

For the completion of this work, I thank, honor, and appreciate: God, who has given me the health, strength, and support – much more than necessary or deserved: my loving, patient, and supportive wife, Jackie, for the plethora of encouragement: my six children (Jackie, Albert II, Chris, Nick, Kristen, and David) and my many nieces and nephews who have also sacrificed for this accomplishment, and for whom I hope this is an encouragement and spur: my seven siblings (Ken, Karen, Clarice, Ray, Natalie, Vern, and Leslie) whose example and encouragement have been highly motivational: my parents (Clement and Eileen) who set the foundation for a result that they would not live to see attained: my pastors, friends, and colleagues who have cheered me on daily in this pursuit. These giants, on whose shoulders I stand, have enabled this achievement, and assisted in any benefits to be gained from this work.

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Abstract

This study examined the lived experiences of African American male superintendents with a Midwestern state's superintendent hiring practices. While looking through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), it reveals how understanding their stories can help in several ways. First, this study can help school boards and search agents realize perceptions and possible unconscious biases and stereotypes that may influence their decisions to recommend, interview, and/or hire qualified African American male superintendent candidates. Additionally, this study seeks to help superintendent preparation programs and superintendent mentors provide beneficial information to aspiring African American male superintendent candidates. A tertiary goal of this study is to benefit the state's educational leadership organizations, groups, and individuals by providing insight from these highly capable and current practitioners. Finally, this study will inform African American male superintendent candidates on what to expect, and how to prepare, when entering the superintendent-hiring arena.

Key Words: Superintendent Hiring, African American Male Superintendent, Black superintendents, Aspiring Superintendents, Critical Race Theory, CRT, Implicit Bias, School Boards, Search Agents, superintendent preparation programs, Educational Leadership, African American superintendents.

Chapter 1

A significant inequity may exist that could be detrimental to all K-12 public school students, and to the broader American society. The population demographics of our citizenry are vastly different than the population demographics of the leadership of our school districts, more specifically a 42 to 1 ratio of European American male public school superintendents to African American male public school superintendents (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011; NABSE, 2013). This phenomenon is prevalent in the majority of United States public school districts, with 16 states having no African American male superintendents at all (Harrison-Williams & Collins, 2014), as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of African American Male Superintendents by State

State	# AA Male Supts	% AA Male Supts	State	# AA Male Supts	% AA Male Supts	State	# AA Male Supts	% AA Male Supts
Alabama	13	9%	Louisiana	9	12%	Ohio	8	1%
Alaska	1	2%	Maine	1	.7%	Oklahoma	0	0%
Arizona	1	.4%	Maryland	2	8%	Oregon	0	0%
Arkansas	10	4%	Massachusetts	2	.7%	Pennsylvania	4	.8%
California	19	2%	Michigan	9	2%	Rhode Island	0	0%
Colorado	2	1%	Minnesota	0	0%	S. Carolina	12	14%
Connecticut	2	1%	Mississippi	27	17%	South Dakota	0	0%
Delaware	2	10%	Missouri	7	1%	Tennessee	1	.7%
Florida	3	4%	Montana	1	.4%	Texas	24	2%
Georgia	11	6%	Nebraska	0	0%	Utah	0	0%
Hawaii	0	0%	Nevada	0	0%	Vermont	0	0%
Idaho	0	0%	New Hampshire	0	0%	Virginia	11	8%
Illinois	16	2%	New Jersey	10	2%	Washington	1	.3%
Indiana	4	1%	New Mexico	1	1%	West Virginia	1	2%
Iowa	0	0%	New York	8	1%	Wisconsin	2	.4%
Kansas	0	0%	North Carolina	11	10%	Wyoming	0	0%
Kentucky	2	1%	North Dakota	0	0%			

Total U.S. Superintendents = 12,966
Total African American Male Supts = 237 or 1.8% of U.S. Superintendent Population

What is the reason for such vast differences when the citizenry population ratio is closer to 3.5 to 1 (United States Census, 2014)? This question will be explored in part via the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory and the stories and voices of practicing African American superintendents in one specific Midwestern state whose 2016 ratio is 70 to 1. So few African American male superintendents are employed in this state that enumerating them would reveal the Midwestern state of the study and deny the study participants' confidentiality. Therefore the researcher will remain purposely vague in identifying the exact number of study superintendents.

Background to the Study

During the spring, one can find school superintendent job postings in any Midwestern state's public school districts (Quinn, Solomon, Vranas, and Keith, 2012; IASB, 2014; MASB, 2014; OASB, 2014). Every district includes an equal employment opportunity statement indicating that the district considers qualified applicants regardless of their race, color, creed, etc. Yet many researchers (Johnson, 2005; Parker, 2009; Taylor, 2011) found that African Americans face either a glass ceiling or a glass cliff dilemma – highly-qualified African American candidates do not receive top leadership jobs (glass ceiling), or are hired only in districts that are in dire straits and seemingly destined for difficulty and failure (glass cliff).

When comparing states' current population demographics, the number of highly-qualified non-white superintendent candidates and the many studies on race and the superintendency, the existence of institutional racism appears to exist in this state's superintendent selection process (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Dawkins, 2004; Glass, 2001; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Jones, 2011; Tallerico, 2000; United States Census, 2014). The specific state in this study has a diverse population with approximately 79 percent European American, 14 percent African

American, 4 percent Latina/o American, 2 percent Asian American, and 1 percent American

Indian and Pacific Islander with many sub- and interwoven categorizations of all of the above

(United States Census, 2010). Yet, representation in the superintendency is far from reaching

parity. Jones (2011) states that, "Racism continues to have a pervasive influence on the career

development of Black Americans" (p. 63). Restated, in this proclaimed "post-racial" Obama-ian

society (Kristof, 2008), the benefits of diversity are being overlooked, discounted, or dismissed

based on either accidental or purposeful reasons. Quality candidates are being overlooked in

favor of "gut feelings" at interviews and emerging criteria block the hiring of African American

candidates (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Deems, 1994; Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Light,

Roscigno, & Kalev, 2011; McGinnity, Nelson, Lunn, & Quinn, 2009; Wells, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

While striving to provide the best possible education for students, this state's school

districts and education stakeholders are missing an important and beneficial factor to improving

the school systems and selecting their Chief Executive Officers – their superintendents. More

specifically, African American males are highly underrepresented in this state's superintendent

positions (Kowalski et al., 2011; IASB, 2014; MASB, 2014; OASB, 2014). For decades,

educational researchers and scholars have noticed this shortage in most other states throughout

the nation, with the vast majority of superintendents being middle-class European American

males (Dawkins, 2004; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Johnson, 2005; Kowalski et. al., 2011;

Mong & Roscigno, 2010; Moody, 1971).

Research Question

The central question in this study is: What are the lived experiences of the African

American male superintendents with a particular Midwest state's superintendent hiring

practices?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of a particular Midwestern state's African American male superintendent population in regard to the state's superintendent hiring practices – to seek the meaning in their experience, to document their stories and look for essential themes.

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant to a variety of audiences interested in educational leadership problem-solving benefits, K-12 education stakeholders, superintendent preparation program developers, and social justice activists because it will provide insight into the lived experiences of obtaining and maintaining the superintendency, and the benefits available to the educational system from a diverse and underrepresented source – the superintendents themselves.

Critical Theory

A theory, or philosophical belief system, is deemed a 'critical' theory when it serves the practical purpose of exposing circumstances that enslave and dominate people (Bohman, 2013). It is dedicated to freeing groups from the tyranny resulting from being viewed as expendable consumer goods due to the structural inequality and disenfranchisement of socio-economic capitalistic systems. Its goal, in effect, is to cause others to understand the root causes of a societal flaw and identify possible solutions. A critical theory exposes and analyzes social domination found in class domination and exploitation; asks questions concerning how and why resources are organized and utilized, how and why current power structures exist, who has access to power and why; and contests dominating positions of power. Largely, a Critical Theory is a

general methodology to challenge and destabilize customary knowledge, systems, and societal actions (Bohman, 2013; Jensen, 1997; Raushenbush, 2013).

A critical theory simultaneously 1) explains the current societal oppression, 2) determines the necessary participants and actions required for appropriate change to take place, and 3) clearly identifies the norms for criticism and the attainable goals for the desired social outcome or society (Horkheimer, 1982, 1993). Bohman (2013) states that, "it must be explanatory, practical, and normative" (p. 1). This study will use Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as a lens through which to view the experiences of the African American superintendents in a specific Midwest state.

What is Critical Race Theory?

Rooted in the legal field (critical legal studies), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a critical theory developed to address the unfair treatment of minorities from the oppression of the inequitable legal system orchestrated to give privilege to the elite white-dominated power structure. CRT's foundation dates back to the 1970s, when founders Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman concluded that minority groups were being inequitably treated and controlled via the legal system (Bell, 1987; 1988; 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Its elemental objective is to support a social justice agenda that removes all forms of racial, gender, language, generational, and class subordination (Matsuda, 1996). In educational studies, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) and others posit that CRT has revealed secrets and patterns of exclusion, license, and privilege with respect to race; it seeks to disrupt the dominant false stories and legitimize the true counter-stories and their importance for educational policy. This study will use Critical Race Theory as a lens to view the experiences of African American male superintendents from the Midwest United States because the theory may

provide an explanatory, practical, and normative life experience not often considered by the dominant culture. CRT will be used as a lens through which to examine the possibility of secrets and patterns of exclusion, license, and privilege with respect to race in the superintendent hiring process; and to disrupt false stories and legitimize the true counter-stories of superintendent hiring as understood and experienced by the study participants.

Tenets and Themes of Critical Race Theory

Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Lee (2008) and others help identify the six most basic and generally accepted tenets of critical race theory (CRT). These tenets include: 1) The Centrality of Racism, 2) Social Construction of Race, 3) Differential Racialization, 4) Intersectionality and Anti-essentialism, 5) Interest Convergence, and 6) Minority Storytelling. Though not wholly accepted by all critical race theorists, these six tenets will be discussed in detail to establish a foundation for understanding this study (Bell, 1987, 1988, 1992).

The centrality of racism / Ordinariness of racism. CRT's Centrality of Racism tenet states that racism is a central, fundamental, ingrained part of United States society. In 1992, Bell stated plainly that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (p. ix), so rooted in United States culture that change would require new stabilizing structures for society. A decade later, Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2003) express a similar position, asserting that race and race consciousness affect our daily decisions, identity, interactions, and even movements. Bonilla-Silva (2003) agreed, saying, "…racial considerations shade almost everything in America" (p. 1). An argument claiming the existence of racism throughout every era of United States history can easily be waged when one considers that slavery in the colonies was established and accepted 100 years prior to the nation's birth, the

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nation's first immigration policy limited naturalization to white people, and the cessation of slavery was quickly followed by Jim Crow laws (Alexander, 2010; Ewing, 2012; Franklin, 1906; Jackson, 2002; Scott, 2013). Nearly 200 anti-lynching bills introduced in congress but not passed, separate and unequal funding for education and other services, the necessity of a constitutional amendment, and multiple incidents of racial strife and allegations still being resolved, support that premise (Alexander, 2012; Fox News, 2005; Lopez, 1996). After hundreds of legal challenges, the Supreme Court determined that the existing United States citizenry shared a "common understanding" of who was and was not "white" (Smith, 1995), and by extension, a "common understanding" of who was and was not endowed with equal rights. The same "common understanding" is what Derrick Bell and other CRT theorists refer to as the centrality of racism. Without a clearly written statement, and being vaguely and broadly defined, the current "common understanding" of who is "white" includes European Americans, and quintessentially excludes people with socially accepted African American physical, linguistic, social, and ideological characteristics without sufficient social capital to satisfy the proximate power structure (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

Race is therefore a classification system based on individually or socially determined observable features and characteristics. (See the Social Construction of Race, below, for an explanation of race as a social cultural construction and not a biological construction.) Racism, then, is prejudice based on individual or social features and characteristics determined to be significant, and a racist is a person who believes that certain people are superior, or inferior, based on any number of these characteristics (AAPA, 1996).

This CRT theme is propagated in public policy, mass media, and our most prominent institutions. It is proliferated by conceit, ignorance, insensitive comedy, and a thoughtless

resistance to change. Citing the reduction in overt and violent actions as evidence of progress, the centrality of racism ignores covert actions perpetrated in typical daily activities that hinder equality in order to protect the status quo of privilege (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Frosch, 2010; Lambright, 2006; Lum, 2009; Rothacker & Ingram, 2012; Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004). Though for the sake of this study it is recognized that some school board members may maintain many racist activities naively, the fact that the activity is sustained reveals its ordinariness. Lum (2009) points out that, although the vast majority of such activities may continue to occur without a subjugative or racist intent, i.e. "racism without racists" (p. 14), the fact that they continue at all reveals the ordinariness of a legacy of racism and marginalization. CRT contends that marginalization still occurs, regardless of the "innocence" of the reason.

__The social construction of race.__ The CRT social construction of race tenet states that the United States power structure and society defines, and redefines, the term "race" in order to grant and signify privilege and power. The History of White People (Painter, 2011) provides an excellent understanding of the social construction of race. It traces the use of root terms, ideologies, and purposes of the signifier White from classical antiquity as a means to separate the Greco-Roman peoples from the less literate, less valued, and more barbarous Scythian, Celt, and Germanic people of the day (Devlin, 2010; Gordon, 2010). Painter (2011) points out that the identification terms continued changing in scope over time to become signifiers separating people for political, economic, and cultural purposes from those enslaved; these identifiers spread from Northern Europe to the United States. At first, the term White referred to Anglo-Saxon and lowland Scots. The Irish and Scandinavians were originally omitted, but then later accepted as White after the American Civil War for anti-black political reasons. After World War II, Catholics, Italians, Eastern Europeans and some Southwestern Latinos became accepted

as White. Many nationalities went to court to be legally deemed White, with some courts

changing their definition and reversing their own decisions numerous times as deemed beneficial

by the power system (Lopez, 1996; Tehranian, 2000, 2007).

What makes a person "White," "Black," "Asian," "Hispanic," "Indian," etc. is so highly

debatable that even the United States Supreme Court reversed itself multiple times and finally

settled on a non-scientific definition of popular consensus (Smith, 1995; Tehranian, 2000, 2007).

Physical traits such as skin color, stature, hair texture, nose and eye shapes are the most

commonly used determinants for many attempts to identify race biologically, all thwarted by

actual biologists and geneticists (NGRI, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1994, 2002). Although scholars

and scientists have attempted to establish dozens of people groupings based on biological and

heredity transmission and inherited traits, too many exceptions exist to make such

categorizations truly viable. "Pure races, in the sense of genetically homogeneous populations,

do not exist in the human species today, nor is there any evidence that they have ever existed in

the past *(*AAPA, 1996, p. 714)." Race is therefore better defined as a classification system based

on individually, or socially, determined observable features and characteristics whose value

fluctuates based on the desires of the power structure. Omi & Winant (1994) found that even the

"concept of race has varied over time" (p. 10), and that "barring decided prejudice, the social

sciences have come to reject biologistic notions of race in favor of an approach which regards

race as a social concept" (p. 11). Attempts to use the research field to promote a political stance

about race have been made by several well-known works such as *The Bell Curve* by Herrnstein

and Murray (1994, 2010) and "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Achievement?" by Jensen

(1969). However, these works have been disproven for their inaccuracies, omissions, and faulty

statistics, methods, and implications by many works and authors such as *The Science and*

Politics of Racial Research (Tucker, 1996) and others as revealed by Karten & Swanson (2009) and Thompson (2007). Gordon (2010) and Delgado and Stefancic (2012) point out that the political elite and employers are two groups that actively police the boundaries and standards of Whiteness as gatekeepers, applying those standards to allocate status and privilege, and a variety of tangible benefits such as best housing, education, and employment.

  Differential racialization. Racialization can be summarized as the hierarchal categorization of people groups and creation of propaganda to maintain and engrain the hierarchy. Employed throughout history by many and on many (i.e. England on the Irish, Nazis on Jews, English colonists on native Americans, Southern colonists on Africans, Western United States settlers on Asian American immigrants, etc.), racialization has been used to change and establish mindsets that sometimes last throughout decades, generations, and even centuries (Anderson, 2002; Gotham, 2014; Treitler, 2015). Orser & Wallman (2011) articulate, "racialization is a process in which individuals who are collectively classified as white maintained control and authority over people perceived as nonwhite, but that it is also highly situational and negotiated on a local-scale" (p. 3). Racialization does not need facts, has endured and adapted to circumvent facts that prove it a fabrication, and has been used to support nations and billion-dollar industries. Changes in the hierarchy or supporting propaganda to adapt to facts or changing public opinion define differential racialization.

  Differential racialization is the term for the changeable role, attributes, and reputation the dominant power structure ascribes to less influential subordinate groups in order to suit its own fluctuating desires. It is frequently used as a societal organizer, with the user's definition of race as its hierarchical determinant. It contends that ideas about race, whether through a common understanding, biogenic, or any other constructed ideology, can be identified and propagated

until the victims accept and self-ascribe the propaganda, hierarchical position, and subsequent privileges (Anderson, 2002; Gotham, 2014; Treitler, 2015).

In the United States, differential racialization champions White male superiority, and positions all others using various popular racial determinants, features, or attributes as identifiers. Tom Burrell (2010), businessman, media icon, and author of the book *Brainwashed*, describes how United States mass media has played an enormous role in the shaping of societal desires and thoughts concerning African Americans and other non-Northern Europeans since before the country was founded. He describes how society defines, values, devalues, and alters the focus and promotion of racial groups and their alleged attributes, at will and for convenience.

Intersectionality and Anti-essentialism. People are intersectional (able to be statistically placed in a multitude of categories/sections – American, male, college graduate, middle-class, professional occupation, middle-aged, etc.); but legally, they are only considered as members of one category at a time.

> When a group of Black women faced discrimination, they were held to have no
>
> legal cause of action because neither white women nor Black men were
>
> discriminated against in the same way. Therefore, they were recognized as
>
> victims of neither race nor gender discrimination (Grillo, 1995, p. 18).

Unfortunately, society members also rarely consider people to be members of more than one category at a time, and associated with each category are both its societally assigned privilege and its subordination, the category's pride and shame.

Secondly, the sum of a person's categories does not equal the whole. That is, neither discrimination against Blacks nor discrimination against women is the same as discrimination against Black women. Grillo (1995) points out that "[we] have all seen the many newspaper

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articles talking about the progress of 'women and Blacks'; Black women are completely lost in this description" (p. 18). Thus groups and organizations with a singular focus do not, or do only inadequately, meet many people's needs, concerns, and challenges (because their needs and concerns are often viewed as outside of the groups' agendas). Furthermore, a supportive ideology toward equality and fairness is to treat everyone the same way; yet a similarly supportive understanding is that there are multiple situations in which equality and fairness is not achieved by treating people the same way but by taking into account people's differences (i.e. disabilities, religious beliefs, age, gender, etc.) for which special provisions are required.

> The issue is one of the central dilemmas in policy making: is equality achieved through treating people the same or by recognizing their differences and treating them according to their distinctive needs. The answer is that both same treatment and different treatment are required in order to deal with disadvantage that occurs due to differing circumstances. …the problematic issue is *how* people should be treated differently. (Healy, Kirton & Noon, 2010, p. 3)

A superintendents' association, led predominately by male suburbanites, may not focus on the concerns of urban or minority superintendents, judging their concerns as outside of the group's vision. They may also ignore, or be insensitive to, ethnic minority superintendents or the different ethnicities. An ethnic minority superintendents' subgroup may not focus on female superintendent issues, even though the superintendent searching for an association may have intersecting characteristics such as being a minority female superintendent of a rural district (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Essentialism categorizes people according to a single attribute and treats them all according to a single presumption (i.e. all those people think __, they are all that way because __,

this is the best solution for those people with that problem, etc.). Anti-essentialism explores how

the many, and varied, nuances interact within a given situation (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Purdie-

Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). For example, essentialism may prescribe that all poor people get an

education, walk to the nearest place of business, and ask for a job. Anti-essentialism may explore

and find that some poor are already well educated, but that, due to physical health issues, over-

priced medical care, underfunded insurance, wages and job performance requirements, location

of the nearest business, and transportation issues, walking to the nearest business and asking for

a job is not the solution to their situation. To others in poverty, acquiring an education from an

underfunded and inadequately administered educational system and walking through an under-

policed high crime zone to earn a wage that confines them to the poverty level also is not the

answer. To profess that only the original suggestion is adequate would be to essentialize poor

people; CRT examines their uniqueness and intersectionality, and then seeks anti-essentializing

solutions.

  Interest Convergence – also called Material Determinism. CRT's Interest Convergent

tenet says that societal benefits to racial minority groups occur only secondary to, or as a bi-

product of, a greater benefit to the controlling racial group. Racism's permanency and

maintenance provides a stabilizing purpose and benefit to the material status of elite whites and a

psychological comfort to working-class whites (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012)**;** hence stopping

racism completely would present both a financial and psychological upheaval to United States

society.

  A major example of this tenet is expressed in the Brown versus Topeka Board of

Education United States Supreme Court case (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954).

The prevailing media attention for Brown was toward school integration. However, one key

aspect of the case, an aspect which represented the goals of the African American community, was fair and equitable funding and quality education for all students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Fifty years later, the implementation of school integration with all deliberate speed (as publicly stated by the controlling power structure) has resulted in the already underfunded, predominantly African American schools receiving 33% - 50% less funding on average than affluent, predominantly white suburban schools, which invariably contributes to lesser educational quality for African American students both sociologically and intellectually (Patterson, 2001; Tillman, 2004). Research on the causes of funding differences, quality differences, and administrative leadership reveals that these disparities are not the result of unexpected consequences but of deliberate planning and deceptive communication (Holland, 2004; McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Patterson, 2001; Tillman, 2004, 2009; Sugrue, 1996). Restated, the social system in the United States does not consider activity that would significantly improve racial equity, or end racial discrimination, unless there is some other interest (i.e. material, psychological, etc.) that benefits the self-interested portions of the dominant populace, which in the United States is commonly understood to be the European American power structure.

> *Minority storytelling.* The CRT tenet concerning minority storytelling states that the publication and communication of experiences can reveal important facets of interactions, situations, social injustices, concerns, and aspects of non-white life to a European American society unfamiliar with disenfranchisement, conceivably inviting societal improvement. Stories of non-whites which reveal experiences resulting from discrimination, provide analogies of prejudicial actions, and describe feelings of purposeful humiliation and other similar degradations can perhaps provide understanding of "ignored or alternative realities" (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2012, p. 45) that the dominant European American perspective would not normally imagine. The Voice of Minorities is a powerful tool. It expresses ideas and convictions. It directs and shapes individuals' lives toward productive and positive fulfillment of self-actualization, family and community goals, and national and societal improvement (McElroy-Johnson, 1993).

CRT Themes

Within the tenets of CRT are certain common themes. Lynn & Parker (2006), Parker & Villalpando (2007), Delgado & Stefancic (2012), and many others highlight the central themes that characterize CRT. These themes assert a particular view of race and racism that is rooted in United States society and central to American daily life and practices. One theme in CRT's Centrality tenet is that Whiteness is a privilege, and the privilege of Whiteness is both an advantage and a property right that is superordinate to all other races (McCray, Wright, and Beachum, 2007). Inside the privilege of Whiteness are the themes of Whiteness as property and the United States societal value of property rights over civil rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Property rights have value of control, and included in property rights are: Rights of disposition, Rights of use and enjoyment, Rights to reputation and status, and the Absolute Right to exclude. Applied to education, this theme portrays Whiteness as the primary represented and honored authority in textbooks, history, literature, science, music, medicine, discovery, and all other subject areas. It claims Whiteness should have, use, and enjoy the best and most aesthetic school facilities, educational equipment, instructional services, and academic supports. It further asserts that Whiteness deserves the foremost positions of leadership. Applied to educational leadership employment and this study, Whiteness as a property right denotes the Absolute Right to exclude others from control or influence in the educational system – the role of the superintendent. This is the case, argues CRT, in spite of state laws and the federal legal system.

(More information on, and a detailed application of, this theme will follow in the literature review section of this study.)

Located within the Intersectionality tenet is the black/white binary theme. This theme points out that discrimination laws, actions, paradigms, and attitudes are not restricted to only Black and White issues. Discrimination, injustices, and inequities can –and unfortunately do – happen to all people for a multitude of reasons. As stated earlier, 'people are intersectional.' People can experience discrimination because of a linguistic accent or speech dissimilarity, their height or weight, a continuously optimistic outlook on life, their academic intelligence or love for trivia – the list continues. However, the Black/White Binary posits that the quintessential minority is the African American Black Male. As discriminatory acts are judged, they are evaluated in comparison to the African American at the bottom of the scale and the affluent European Americans' premier treatment. In the United States, as one moves "up" the racialization scale, treatment improves and discrimination lessens.

Adding to the above (privilege, property, & premier treatment), a fourth CRT theme is the critique of programs and policies promoting status quo discrimination but using the terminology color-blindness, meritocracy, race neutrality, objectivity, and/or equal opportunity. The reason for this critique is that racist mindsets have often used these terms as "camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege" of majority members (Parker & Villalpando, 2007, p. 520). As stated in the CRT's Centrality of Racism tenet, these mindsets have been established and built upon for so long that they continue and persist as subconscious ordinariness, causing even well-intentioned programs to continue propagating bias.

Why Use CRT as a Theoretical Lens?

Critical Race Theory was selected because it encourages open discussion of race and

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discrimination as a major element of daily life in the United States. If equal opportunity and

social justice are to be attained, honest discussions of these themes must take place to overcome

the difficult task of defining equity, and how and when it is reached. Many current researchers

(Hartlep, 2009; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Spikes, 2014), discussed in the literature review,

offer a view that supports the discussion of race and discrimination in educational leadership and

the superintendency. CRT was used as a lens in this particular study to understand the

experiences of African American superintendents in a particular region of the United States.

Understanding the experiences of African American male superintendents may benefit the field

of education by revealing possible explanations for the demographic/employment ratios,

suggesting broader implications concerning issues of social justice, and offering insights into

educational and employment systems.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the exhibition of certain leadership characteristics moving

an entity toward its next developmental stage. According to Bass (1991) "transformational

leadership — occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when

they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they

stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group" (p. 21).

This differs from transactional leadership, which occurs when leaders and followers cooperate on

the basis of an exchange of resources, especially when characterized by inducements,

enticements, exploitation, and sanctions. The four elements of transformational leadership

include the leader's individual consideration and care about followers, inspirational motivation

by the leader, intellectual stimulation of the followers toward the work's purpose, and

influencing followers toward the ideal ethical character (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Judge & Piccolo,

2004). In history, some have argued that transformational leadership and transactional leadership form two ends of a continuum (Burns, 1978), while others consider that transformational leadership builds upon transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). However, the most recent and well-supported research proposition is that transformational leadership augments transactional leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

White Privilege and Implicit Social Cognition

White Privilege (McIntosh, 1988) and Implicit Social Cognition (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011) are two historically programmed viewpoints systematically maintained in our traditions, schools, government policies, and media practices, and camouflaged to support the existing power structure. Though they are related here to the hiring experiences of African American superintendents, they affect every area of society and reach around the world.

   White Privilege

Dr. Peggy McIntosh (1988) wrote what many consider to be a ground-breaking article on the "invisible package of unearned assets" (p. 165) accrued to White people based upon a classification of their skin color – White Privilege. This privilege, she described, is like a hidden "weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks" (p. 165) to which she was meant to remain oblivious, but which would endure for multiple generations and be used as the standard of normalcy throughout the world. Though White privilege does provide certain opportunities if, when and where it is successful, it can only do so via oppressing others. And in order to do so, it mus**t –** and has – developed, propagandized, systemized, and maintained lies, injustice, and violence to all who oppose it. Though the "oppressiveness was unconscious" (p. 166) and she was unaware of its existence, Dr. McIntosh wrote, the "unearned skin privilege" (p. 166) "confers dominance" (p. 168) and affords her many

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unfair advantages. One advantage was found in instilling the false belief that the lives of White people represent the normal, standard, ideal life and facilitating others to live like them represents a societal benefit. This belief is intertwined with social class, ethnic status, geography, religion, and culture, which she makes clear can all "take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which, as a member of the dominant group, one is taught not to see" (p. 169). Dr. McIntosh's article goes on to list several areas of life and daily occurrences in which her skin color "systematically over-empowers certain groups" (p. 168), disproving the "myth of meritocracy"(p. 167) and revealing that "many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own" (p. 167). She concludes her article with the contemplative statement, "it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base" (p. 169).

Though the concept was initially identified by McIntosh (1988), many other researchers have tested, supported, and noted many consequences of white privilege. Among other results, white privilege conveys a confidence of competence in European Americans simply because of their skin tone (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994). White privilege has produced positive artwork, media, literature, music, school curricula, and historical viewpoints all systematically praising a culture of leadership, prosperity, and dominion, while minimizing and masking negative unethical actions (Burrell, 2010). It minimizes or denies claims of racial injustice, monopolizes discourse, and manifests itself in legal disparities to reinforce a white comfort zone (Wildman, 2005). It minimizes concerns about ignoring or disparaging others' viewpoints or existence (Williams, Gooden, & Davis, 2012); it permits subordination and abuse to continue without redress or even acknowledgment of wrong-doing (Wildman, 2005).

Implicit Social Cognition

"It is easy to believe that there is more going on in people's minds than they say; it is not easy to believe that there is more going on in my mind than I say. This disconnect illustrates the compelling quality of introspective experience" (Nosek, Hawkins & Frazier, 2011, p. 1). This quote is an introduction to Implicit Social Cognition.

The definition of social cognition is still being refined, but the debate revolves around how people process social information and how they interact with others. The International Social Cognition Network promotes a definition that incorporates "an approach to understanding a wide variety of social psychological phenomena …" concerning "the perceptions, memory, and judgment of social stimuli …" and "the behavioral and interpersonal consequences of cognitive processes" (Macrae & Miles, 2012, p. 2). Greenwald and Banaji (1995) add to the definition the notion that, "An implicit [construct] is the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediates [the relevant category of responses]" (p. 5).

With roots dating back to Freud (1900/1972) and Helmholtz (1910/1925), the field of Implicit Social Cognition has found that people's mental processes and subsequent actions can escape introspection and "people can be mistaken, perhaps quite easily, about why they do the things they do" (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011, p. 2). In fact, people may intend to undertake a particular option and/or express certain beliefs about themselves or other things explicitly, but produce different outcomes because of implicit cognitions (Nosek, Hawkins & Frazier, 2011). Furthermore, with the development of measurement tools such as the Implicit Attitude Test (IAT), research studies have found correlations between implicit attitudes and actions that are significantly different from explicit self-reports, especially in the area of race relations and self-presentation.

Implicit measures were invented because researchers believed that social

cognitions exist that people are unable or unwilling to report. Inability refers

primarily to a lack of awareness of the content, and unwillingness refers primarily

to a motivation to report content that is accessible but personally or socially

inadvisable to report. … It could be that people are unaware of their implicit

cognitions or are unaware of the link between the implicit cognition and the

behavior. It could also be that people have some kind of relevant introspective

experience but fail to report it (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011, p. 32).

"The theorized ordinariness of implicit stereotyping is consistent with recent findings of

discrimination by people who explicitly disavow prejudice" (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 1).

Leadership Categorization, System Justification, and Fit

Leadership Categorization, System Justification, and Fit are three distinct but related

areas that impact the hiring experience of African American superintendents in the United States.

Given the racial and leadership dynamics of the country, and specifically the Midwest region,

theories within these areas of study add significant light revealing the possibility of subconscious

decision-making, status quo validation, and in-group preference, producing programmed

subconscious racist actions and camouflaged prejudice.

Leadership Categorization and System Justification

Leadership Categorization theory states that, over time and from a variety of inputs such

as experience, mass media, and commercial marketing, people develop a mental image of the

characteristics and behaviors of a leader – a leader prototype. People who possess and exhibit

those characteristics and behaviors are perceived as leaders (Lord & Maher, 1991). From a

leadership categorization perspective one would expect that, regardless of their racial group,

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individual Americans will most likely initially identify European American males as more favorable leaders than non-White males or females (Rosette, Leonardelli**,** & Phillips, 2008). Common examples of United States business leaders and leader prototypes will conclude that, "the average leader must be White" (Rosette, Leonardelli**,** & Phillips, 2008, p. 760). In system justification, Jost and Banaji (1994) posit that the existing circumstances, even if they are subordinating, are generally adopted, maintained, and defended**;** therefore leader prototype compliance supersedes in-group status so that the leader prototype (i.e. European American male) is hired as leader irrespective of the racial group electorate.

Fit

There are many types and aspects of the commonly-used term "fit" as it pertains to employment, hiring, equity, and promotion/advancement into new positions or organizations. The term generally refers to the mutual needs and/or desires of two parties in a relationship being met by one another. While perceived fit influences employee motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, tenure, and performance, it is still defined, conceptualized, pursued, and measured in many different ways by many different scholars (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). This study will consider fit as a topic of discussion regarding whether superintendents and school districts in a particular Midwest state each have needs and desires that the other can fulfill.

Mentoring and Networking

Mentoring and networking are key activities driving the quality development of both novice and veteran superintendents in the United States. Mentoring is a potential career- and psychosocial-enhancing relationship in which a more experienced individual – or mentor – provides knowledge, coaching, social capital, exposure/visibility, counseling, psychosocial

support, friendship, and challenging work assignments in an organization, field, or activity to a less experienced individual – or protégé (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Kram, 1983). In return and as motivation, the mentor gains recognition and respect from the novice, peers, and superiors, as well as self-satisfaction and/or a personal sense of quality contribution to the organization, field, or purpose of the activity. Networking is also a potential career enhancer because it deals with the sharing of physical, intellectual, and social resources within the organization, field, or activity. Although both mentoring and networking have multiple facets, they are considered essential introductory and ongoing actions for today's superintendents.

Agency, Structure, and Reflexivity

In sociology, agency refers to a person's ability to act in a given environment or situation (Baker, 2005). It does not necessarily address inquiry or concepts of morality (these are explored in the separate and distinct area of moral agency). Structure refers to factors in the social environment that appear to influence a person's (agent's) actions or opportunities to act (factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, or social class). Baker (2005) defines structure as the recurring societal patterns that influence or limit the agent's choices and available opportunities. Reflexivity refers to the circular relationship between cause and effect. In this case reflexivity describes the structure affecting the agent; the agent reacting to have impact on the structure, creating a slightly new structure; which then influences the agent again, to repeat the continuous cycle (Askland, Gajendran, & Brewer, 2012; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2005). The concept includes both a subjective process of self-examination and the agent's ability to recognize and react to forces of socialization. A low level of reflexivity means that the social structure/environment is shaping an individual while a high level of reflexivity means that the individual is reflecting and adjusting actions to shape his/her own outcomes and results, even the

structure/environment of which s/he is a part.

The longstanding debate among sociologists regards the extent to which a person's agency is affected by the social structure. The agent's ability to act is affected – in ways ranging from constraint to stimulation – by the agent's belief system, which in turn is formed by personal, cultural, and societal paradigms as well as the agent's circumstances, perceptions of the environment, and/or outcomes the agent anticipates will result from the action.

Similar to the disagreement between a resourceful and determined teenager (agent) and a powerful and determined parent (structure) as to what the teenager can, cannot, and will eventually do, the relationship between a resourceful and determined agent and the powerful and determined social structure can also range from violent and explosive along the continuum to welcomed and appreciative.

Agentic and Communal Behavior

Within the United States, agentic behaviors are historically, culturally, and gender-stereotypically considered masculine behaviors. Agentic behaviors include assertiveness, competitiveness, industriousness, ambition, imposition, confidence, self-sufficiency, independence, aggressiveness, dominance, courageousness, control, and a focus on the self. In contrast, behaviors considered feminine, or communal behaviors, include agreeability, timidity, friendliness, cooperativeness, dependence, cautiousness, expressiveness, subordination, and collaboration, all behaviors which place a greater focus on others. Using the parent/teenager scenario, an agentic teenager may be confident that s/he will attain a desired goal and use assertive, competitive, industrious, independent, aggressive, and/or controlling attempts to reach that goal within, or even outside, of the parent's set structure. A communal teenager may be more agreeable, cooperative, cautious, expressive, and/or collaborative in attempts to attain

goals.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the term "superintendent" refers to a person hired by a public school district as its Chief Executive Officer and answerable to an elected school board charged with the education of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The term "superintendent" does not refer to the leader of a charter or parochial school system, an administrator employed by a privately held educational business entity or Public School Academy (PSA), a state department of education-appointed or governor-appointed school district emergency manager, or a non-public or non-school board-appointed educational leader.

The term "stakeholder(s)" refers to the people, organizations, and fields that have a personal, posterity, emotional, educational, social, and/or financial interest or concern for the well-being of students and the educational system.

The superintendent hiring process and practices being described in further detail by the participants include, but are not limited to: preparation for the superintendency, application to the superintendency, anticipation of and participation in the search process, association with any search agents, the pre-employment interviews, any job offer/rejection acceptance/denial communication, and response to decision rationale.

"Search agents" are people and/or companies, paid or unpaid, who are charged to find qualified perspective candidates for employment, in this case the position of school district superintendent. The search agent position is often held by former superintendents, current or former school board members, or individuals and companies intimately familiar with educational and school district leadership. Search agents can specialize in local, statewide, and/or national search techniques. Some offer superintendent training, mentoring, short- or long-term support, as

well as longevity and satisfaction guarantees.

"Racism" in this study is defined as individually or culturally sanctioned, stereotypical beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, support or propagate a concept that people of different races have inherently different qualities and abilities and that some races are inherently intellectually inferior or superior to others, dismissing individual uniqueness (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Schmid, 1996; Wellman, 1977). Racism at the extreme includes prejudice or animosity toward people due to their belonging to a racial group. "Institutional racism" is defined as an established way of operating in a field or organization that stereotypes a race of people as inherently superior or inferior in skills or practices, or to show preference by extending opportunities to some while impeding inclusiveness and advancement of others, due to their race (Cornileus, 2013; Shelton, Delgado-Romero, & Werther, 2014). Institutional racism refers to the typical practice of superintendent search firms and committees, school board members and screening committees, superintendent training and preparation agents, as well as institutional leaders in charge of promotions, to alienate and exclude members of diverse races from inclusiveness and advancement to the superintendency – creating a racially-based glass ceiling (United States Department of Labor, 1995).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

What does the current academic, peer-reviewed literature say about the hiring practices toward and employment of African American superintendents? What assertions do scholars hold? Do African American superintendents hold the same assertions? This section will review the historical background of the local school board and the superintendent, identify accepted superintendent skill set standards and school board desires, and describe the process by which a superintendent is hired by the school board. It will also relate these topics to a critical race theoretical framework with the goal of identifying the research problem within past and current literature, revealing assertions, identifying informational gaps in the extant literature, and linking the research question to those literary gaps.

The History and Background of the Local School Board and Superintendent

In the United States of America, education is a function of state government because it is not provided for in the United States Constitution. State governments create local school boards as an elected administrative arm to oversee education. In 1642, with no standardized requirement for education in a community, Massachusetts became the first recorded state to legislate compulsory education. The roots of United States school boards can be traced back to a tradition that required parents and apprentices' masters to teach children to read the Bible, understand the basic principles of religion, attend catechism, and learn an employable trade (Ebeling, 1999; Fairlee, 1906; Hunt, 1999). Responsibility for supervising and evaluating this educational task fell to the town's Selectmen, males appointed or elected to serve as local government officials. In

1647, the Massachusetts court required every town of at least fifty families to found and fund an elementary school; thus the Selectmen's duties expanded to include hiring teachers, maintaining school building(s), managing school finances, acquiring supplies, and other related duties. This general practice set the stage for duplication throughout the rest of the growing country.

Because the majority of teachers and schoolmasters were not trained specifically for the task, teacher certification laws were created, requiring college degrees or letters certifying moral and academic appropriateness. As school systems grew, so did the necessity for regulation and dedicated oversight; trustees/clerks/managers were hired to check references, conduct evaluations, oversee school facilities, collect school taxes, and recommend and implement organizational and educational policy. This system built the foundation of the local school district superintendent position (Historian Martin Luther Riley as quoted in Lipscomb, 2005), which is the focus of this study (as opposed to state superintendents of education).

While both municipal government and educational governance duties grew, municipalities began shifting responsibility from the Selectmen to appointed and elected school board members dedicated specifically to school oversight (Fairlee, 1906; Lipscomb, 2005; McMaster, 1921). New Orleans' 1830 Board of Regents is cited as the earliest actual local school board in the nation, with oversight of three city schools (Peterson, 1962). Due to the constant presence, energy, advocacy, and dedication of this Board, the district boasted huge enrollments, a night school for students who worked during the day, a teachers' association to promote professional development, advanced classes for students, praise from its citizens, and admiration across the state and country (Lipscomb, 2005).

Within the contemporary public school system, local school boards' most important responsibility is that of hiring a superintendent, chief executive officer of the school district

(Boring, 2003; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Taylor, 2011). The first local school superintendents were believed to have been hired in 1837 in Buffalo, New York and in Louisville, Kentucky. By 1870, thirty of the larger urban/city school districts had superintendents (Chee, 2008; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Jackson, 1995; Kowalski, 2005).

The superintendents of this time were initially hired to fulfill a role comparable to school board clerk, assisting the school board and managing day-to-day operations of the district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). However, in response to individual state, board, and district demands, since the 1840s the role and responsibilities of superintendents have evolved and intensified, taking on increasing levels of influence on education and complexity within the larger context of the community. Callahan (1966), Kowalski (2005), and Kowalski & Brunner (2011) have identified five roles the position of public school superintendent has grown to encompass over the past 175 years: (a) teacher/ scholar, (b) manager, (c) democratic leader, (d) applied social scientist, and (e) communicator. Today's superintendent must be able to move fluidly among all five roles as situations dictate, while employing a leadership style that influences, motivates, intellectually stimulates, and individually considers all those with whom they come into contact during the educational process (Bass, 1991; Fenn & Mixon, 2011; Glass & Hord, 2013).

Superintendent as Teacher/Scholar and Manager

The teacher/scholar aspect tasks the superintendent, as the instructional leader of the system, with standardizing school subject fields and courses. Analytical and organizational skills are necessary to determine district strengths and weaknesses, identify and implement reform strategies, and evaluate student achievement (Kowalski, 2005; Takata, Marsh, & Castruita, 2007). By the 1890s the superintendent's role grew to include a broader scope including management of building concerns, transportation issues, material and supply demands, financial

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responsibilities, and bond passages. Leadership attributes became less relevant in the face of school financing, safety issues, and personnel problems (Houston, 2007; Kowalski, 2005; Rueter, 2009).

Superintendent as Democratic Leader and Applied Social Scientist

By the 1930s the superintendent position evolved to include a democratic leader function when it became evident that societal and political support was needed to compete with other issues for state and local funding. A major responsibility of the superintendency became – and remains – to "deal with conflicting expectations, multiple political agendas, and varying ideas without unduly creating enemies or distrust" (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006, p. 128). A focus grew toward equating educational administration with the social science skills of anticipating and solving societal challenges in socially and economically fluid communities (Culbertson, 1981; Kowalski, 2005, 2009; Wirt & Kirst, 2001).

Superintendent as Communicator

The responsibility of the superintendent to the board of education, the requirements of various moral, legal, and social justice issues, the often oppositional prevailing political agendas, and the human and cultural resistance to change require the contemporary superintendent to be a master communicator. Calm, accurate, and timely communication of progress toward solutions and improvement is necessary to maintain community support (Hayes, 2001). Maintaining and facilitating communication among all stakeholders (community businesses and employers, parents and non-parental community members, district employees and political entities) for the benefit of the students and community is also required; this communication must reach the entirety of ethnic and socio-economic groups (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

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Superintendent as Transformational Leader

In order to fulfill the above roles well, the superintendent's leadership style must be conducive to the educational environment. Researchers such as Bass (1991), Fenn and Mixon (2011), and Glass and Hord (2013) point to transformational leadership as a contemporary multiplier of a leader's skills toward fulfilling these responsibilities. Transformational leadership is when the leader cultivates a relationship that encourages followers to openly identify and suggest needed changes and ways they can contribute. Transformational leadership also seeks and welcomes follower input on accomplishment methods and improvements, communicates the importance of the vision, and demonstrates and encourages excellent moral character during the execution of the work. These four elements – Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Idealized Influence – are frequently called the "four Is" of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Given the nature and setting of the superintendency, transformational leadership appears to have been, and was self-reported to be prevalent across all district types, sizes, and instructional levels (Fenn & Mixon, 2011).

Superintendent Skill Set Requirements, Standards, Training & Preparation

Having evolved from its original clerical and managerial tasks to chief executive officer, sometimes managing budgets larger than those of many countries, the 21st century superintendent has an unusually broad, intense, and complex skill set requirement to accomplish the board's agenda (Eichman, 2010; Taylor, 2011). Although the typical career path begins with teacher and progresses through building principal and central office administration, Eichman (2010) states that the skill set needed by new superintendents is different from any other position; even those with a building principal, assistant superintendent, or business background may not be adequately prepared. Therefore formal mentoring, internship, or a preparation

program is needed; even then, it is unlikely that novice superintendents initially will grasp the enormity of their responsibilities.

School Board Standards for Superintendents

Because each state has constitutional power to regulate education as it sees fit, school laws, codes, and requirements may differ from state to state. National organizations (i.e. the National Association of School Boards, American Association of School Administrators, and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration), through state affiliates and other stakeholders, have helped mold, shape, and identify desired attributes and best practices of superintendents, somewhat standardizing the requirements to obtain and maintain the position.

Reeves and McNeill (2013) suggest nine (9) factors for evaluating superintendents. These factors and their characteristics are the qualifications for which many school boards are encouraged to look in a standing superintendent and a high-quality superintendent candidate. (See Table 2.) Yet many boards veer away from giving these standards proper weight when preparing to hire a new superintendent. Doty (2012) in her study, *School Board Members' Perceptions of Superintendent Leadership Behaviors in Upstate New York*, found that school board perceptions of superintendent requirements differ from real and ideal leader behaviors. Other research found that school boards generally spend too little time defining the needs of the district in the rush to publicize an opening and search for the next superintendent (Patrick, 2006). School boards that conducted longer, more thorough, and broader searches and better educated themselves about superintendent quality and the search process were more likely to find superintendents that they rated "very successful" than boards who naively rushed the process (Patrick, 2006).

Table 2. Superintendent Evaluation Factors (Reeves & McNeill, 2013)

Factors	Characteristic Area of Knowledge and Skill
1) Vision for Learning and Achievement	Mission and Vision Goals and Expectations
2) Culture Factors	Values, Beliefs, Principles, Diversity, Language, Traditions, Celebrations, and Stories
3) Leadership Behavior Factors	Informed Strategic and Systemic Fair, Legal, Honest, and Ethical Adaptive and Resilient
4) High Quality and Reliability Instructional Program Factors	Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum Research Based and Differentiated Instruction Standards Based Assessment and Feedback Technology to Expand Learning Opportunity
5) Safe, Effective, Efficient School Operations Factors	Policies and Laws Systems, Processes, and Programs Fiscal and Material Resource Management Human Resource Management Non-instructional Technology
6) Community Building Factors	Board Relations Leadership Team Relations Internal and External Stakeholder Relations Communications and Media Relations
7) School and District Improvement Factors	Systematic Use of Multiple Data Sources Data Systems Aligned Improvement, Monitoring, & Reporting Processes
8) Human Capacity Development Factors	Professional Learning Leadership Development Adaptation and Innovation Performance Evaluation
9) Contextual and Political Factors	Contextual and Political Awareness Education and Advocacy

African American Educational Leadership Research

Though little research has explored African American male superintendents specifically in the Midwest United States, there is a small body of existing literature from around the country. From the *Brown versus Topeka* Supreme Court case, through Moody's (1971) foundational study of African American superintendents, to contemporary educational leadership research, certain commonalities stand out and warrant consideration.

Superintendent Pipeline after Brown versus Topeka

Dear Miss Buchanan:

… If the Supreme Court should rule that segregation in the elementary grades is unconstitutional, our Board will proceed on the assumption that the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ negro teachers next year for White children. …

Sincerely,

Wendell Godwin, Superintendent of Schools

(1953 Letter to Darla Buchanan, found in Tillman, 2004)

Immediately after the Brown vs. Topeka case, there was a "wholesale firing of Black educators" (Tillman, 2004, p. 280) across the country and especially in the Southern United States. The 82,000 Black teachers employed in all Black schools were reduced by 38,000 within the first decade and by another 21,515 by 1989 (Fenwick, 2010; Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Seventy-three percent of the African American role models in the education field were cut. Many school districts in states from Florida to Missouri fired all of their African American teachers regardless of their experience and credentials; and retained less experienced and less credentialed European American teachers. When a discrimination lawsuit was filed in Moberly, Missouri, the judge ruled against the teachers, opening the door for the Moberly Ruling to allow even more

such firings throughout the nation. Though the bulk of the firings happened in the South, Northern states also eschewed integration and employment equity. As Black schools and staffs were eliminated and students were bussed for integration, Gary, Indiana's African American population was 50,000, yet only 300 of its teachers were African American. Cleveland, Ohio's African American population of 175,000 had only 700 African American teachers. Columbus, Ohio's African American population was 52,000 with only 131 Black teachers; Milwaukee, Wisconsin's population of 45,000 had only 50 African American teachers; and New York City's African American population of 850,000 had just 2,500 African American teachers. This represents 3,681 African American teachers interspersed among 1,172,000 African American students – 318 students for every one African American teacher – among just these few examples. Furthermore, many places like Moberly, Missouri, and Mound City, Illinois, merged their schools and fired all of their African American teachers while retaining all of their White teachers (Tillman, 2004). Such actions were unnecessary and examples found elsewhere illustrated that these mass firings did not have to occur (or example, in 1965, Milwaukee's Urban League worked with the school district to retain and reach population percentage parity among the teaching staff [Dougherty, 1998]). This 1965 generation of students now would be at the typical age of today's superintendents. Could the lack of African American teachers affect the pool, interest, inspiration, and/or desire to enter the educational leadership field? Is it possible that the lack of gender, cultural, and ethnic role models or the belief, support, and encouragement from teachers influenced these students?

> The race and background of their teachers tell [students] something about
>
> authority and power in contemporary America. … These messages influence
>
> children's attitudes toward school, their academic accomplishments, and their

views of their own and others' intrinsic worth. The views they form in school

about justice and fairness all influence their future citizenship (Carnegie Forum

on Education and the Economy, 1986, p. 390).

These "wholesale firings" (Tillman, 2004, p. 280) didn't happen just to teachers but to principals

as well. Principals were also fired, demoted, or reassigned, to avoid Blacks supervising Whites in

any capacity (Yeakey, Johnston & Adkison, 1986) and to penalize Blacks for political activity

(Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2000). It was believed that Blacks could not effectively lead the

districts (Jackson, 1995), and that Whites would not cooperate with a Black leadership (Tillman,

2004). Even though some Black employees were retained after being demoted to assistant

principal, these assistant principal positions did not translate into future principal jobs (Valverde,

2003).

North Carolina released 580 of its 620 Black principals. More than 90% of the Black

principals from Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and

southern border states were displaced when schools were integrated (Coffin, 1972). Even given

increases in the Black school-aged population and the addition of 165 schools, 166 Black

principals were cut from Florida's 67 school districts, with 27 districts eliminating all of their

Black principals (Abney, 1980).

Abney (1980) surmised that the reduction and inadequate representation of Black

principals in Florida could be credited to the all-White racial makeup of the school boards and

superintendents.

Clearly, one of the consequences of *Brown* and the subsequent desegregation of

America's schools was the loss of Black principals and thus the exclusion of

voices and perspectives that were critical to the education of Black children. Not

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only were positions lost in the numerical sense, but more importantly, there was a

loss of a tradition of excellence, a loss of leadership as a cultural artifact in the

Black community, and a loss of the expertise of educators who were committed to

the education of Black children (Tillman, 2004, p. 294).

Pertinent to this study, there was also significant loss in the teacher-to-superintendent pipeline,

loss of available administrators to encourage and mentor Black educators, and loss of the

network to connect them. These educators lived in the communities where they taught and were

active leaders in church and civic activities, present at social gatherings, resources for entire

neighborhoods, and role models for the Black middle class, who became lampposts for what

could happen if you entered the field of education.

Initial African American Superintendent Experiences

Many consider Moody's 1971 study, *Black superintendents in public school districts:*

Trend and conditions, to be the foundational study on this topic. He interviewed the nation's

only known Black public school superintendents – 21 in total – and found that, although a person

was known to be highly qualified, capable, academically well-prepared, and a successful teacher

with internationally commendable leadership skills, the opportunity to become superintendent

was still minuscule if the person were African American. One of Moody's study participants

said, "The most difficult thing about being a Black superintendent is ... getting the job in the first

place" (p. 376). Another said, "We have been systematically kept out of the top positions for

years – and we still are" (p. 376). Financially, all but one said they "inherited school systems

with grave financial problems" (p. 379), and that they were rarely appointed to districts that

provided them with necessary resources or provided students with relevant educational

programs. One superintendent claimed his budget "represented only half the per capita resources

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available to the rest of the county" (p. 378).

Moody also found that all these superintendents were employed in districts that had a Black majority student body, community population, faculty, and school board membership, and a higher percentage of Black central office and school building administrators.

Contemporary African American Superintendent Experiences

Wright (2011) conducted a case study interviewing seven of the nine African American male superintendents in North Carolina to examine whether challenges encountered by other Black male educational leaders in advancing toward and into the superintendency paralleled his own experiences. "My own struggles in these environments taught me that the challenges for African American males who strive to attain leadership positions in education are especially great. I also learned that many of these challenges were heightened because of the color of my skin and had very little to do with my ability" (p. 6).

Wright (2011) examined barriers to the superintendency, critical race theory, the history of African Americans in education, and the need for better preparation than White competitors. He reported that the 2008 African American population in North Carolina was 21.6%; yet the population of African American male superintendents in North Carolina was 7.8%. Thirty-six years after Moody, Wright's participants echoed the participants in Moody's study saying, "Very often, qualified African American candidates are not even considered for administrative positions" (p. 16), and "… the African American superintendent often faces seemingly insurmountable odds arising from the problems endemic to low-income schools" (p. 23). A summary of Wright could include:

> … African American routinely face biases that hinder equal consideration for the
> public school superintendency. While historically significant changes are being

made with regard to African American leadership, African Americans still are not

getting enough opportunities to lead. … The literature review also considers

Critical Race Theory and its usefulness for understanding the mindset of assumed

racial inferiority, a mindset that African Americans and their White colleagues

must work to overcome (Wright, p. 29).

Within his study, Wright (2011) stresses a viewpoint on leadership diversity made by Robinson (1973):

There are many reasons why a school system must have minority administrators.

Minority students need individuals of their own ethnic groups with whom they

can identify and in whom they can confide. White youth, too, must have

opportunities to work with and observe members of other races in positions of

leadership if they are to develop non-prejudicial attitudes. But minority

administrators are not needed for the young alone. Administrative positions carry

prestige, power, and high salaries. These practical benefits must be shared among

all ethnic groups if their members are to participate fully in the life of the nation

(Robinson, 1973, p. 8).

Wright (2011), Taylor (2011), Dawkins (2004), Johnson (2005), Ethridge (1979), and

others expand our understanding of African American males in the nation's superintendent

positions. It is the researcher's desire to add to this understanding by sharing the experiences of

superintendents in the Midwest.

CRT and Superintendent Hiring Practices

As in most industries, there is a prevailing seasonal aspect to the searching and hiring

practices for superintendents and there are individuals, agencies, and organizations that

specialize in servicing the superintendent hiring market. According to Quinn and colleagues (2012) from the professional search agency PROACT, most open, nationwide searches for superintendents take place across 10-14 weeks, beginning early in the calendar year. This scheduling allows time for community involvement, profile creation, candidate recruitment, interviews, board deliberation and selection, and contract negotiation to take place and be concluded before the fiscal year begins in many school systems. It is upon these practices and procedures that this study will primarily focus, seeking the lived experiences of African American male superintendents and exploring them through the lens of Critical Race Theory.

The Centrality/Ordinariness of Racism in Superintendent Employment

The CRT tenet concerning the centrality of racism states that racism is a central, ordinary, fundamental, and ingrained part of United States society. This idea is supported in past literature and scholarly studies. As a country, from early in its colonization (via slavery and immigration policies) through the Civil Rights Act of 1965, it is easy to see that United States society sanctioned culturally stereotypical beliefs that supported and propagated the concept that African Americans and other minorities were inherently intellectually inferior to European Americans (Karten & Swanson, 2009; Thompson, 2007). Yet although the historical literature on the topic makes that point abundantly clear, some people still question whether racism continues to be central and nationwide since the Civil Rights Act, and even more since the affirmative action era and the election of an African American president (Alexander, 2010, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012).

Many researchers have indicated common findings that African American leaders – and applicable to this study, superintendents – are still viewed as less competent than European Americans, and must prove themselves over a much longer time period as well as meet a substantially more stringent, and often fluctuating, employability standard (Cox, Welch, &

Nkomo, 2001; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999; Wilson, 1997; Wright, 2011). This culturally disparaging perspective is echoed and perpetuated in our educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), our mass media communications (Burrell, 2010; Monk-Turner, Heiserman, Johnson, Cotton, & Jackson, 2010), and our everyday verbal language (Bonilla-Silva, 2012).

Johnson (2005) in Texas, Parker (2009) in New York, Odum (2011) in the Southern United States, Taylor (2011) in Virginia, and Wright (2011) in North Carolina all attest to additional challenges, difficulties, and impediments African American educational leaders face solely because of their race. African American superintendents and reported:

- a perceived lower vote of acceptance due to race,

- a greater societal comfort for African American superintendents leading only African American students,

- many African American candidates thwarted from leadership opportunities despite their preparedness, ability, and students' achievement,

- extensive questions of African Americans' ability to be effective leaders,

- criticisms despite academic gains in student achievement,

- dissatisfaction in paying African Americans a competitive salary,

- the requirement of a higher academic status/degree, along with

- the requirement of a research and/or visionary plan before consideration for the superintendency (not a requirement for European Americans).

Throughout the country, these superintendents still struggle with people questioning their skills and leadership abilities. In Wright (2011), the study participant ascribed the name Superintendent Evans believed that most African American male superintendents serve in majority-minority districts because the environment and selection process may be more

equitable, due to less negative preconceptions about African American candidates. This leader pointed out that majority-minority districts frequently have boards of education containing more minority members, which lend themselves to situations where African American candidates receive more trust. Superintendent Evans also stated that there are still people who assume that African Americans are somehow not as intelligent as European Americans. Despite a greater percentage of doctoral degrees among African American superintendents than their European American counterparts, another superintendent said, "American society still very often views African American leaders as inferior" (Wright, 2011, p. 9), supporting a later observation that "the perception of the competence of the African American male must be changed" (p. 89). In Parker (2009), nine of the ten African American practicing superintendent participants in the study voiced the opinion that "there was a general feeling in America and in education specifically, that black men were not capable of being good leaders" (p. 26).

Wright (2011) points out that women facing sexism in their pursuit of executive leadership positions share five commonalities with minorities facing racism. Usually, women who face sexism 1) must be substantially better than their male competitors, 2) are viewed as the exception, 3) are viewed negatively when aggressive, 4) typically receive a lesser salary for the same work, and 5) are frequently dissuaded to compete for the executive job. "The domination of the superintendency by middle-aged White males affects the outlook and assumptions held by women and minorities aspiring to be superintendents" (Wright, 2011, p. 27). Over 50 years of research concludes that both women and minorities must overcome stereotypes that portray them as ineffective leaders for European American majority school districts (Banks, 1995; Foster, 1995; Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker, 1991; Tallerico, 2000; Wright, 2011).

Interest Convergence in Superintendent Employment

The CRT tenet concerning interest convergence states that United States society will condone benefits to people of color only if there is also a benefit to the European American power structure. This notion is corroborated in the current literature. For example, the percentage of African American superintendents has surpassed the population demographics in the limited area of predominantly large urban minority and economically disadvantaged school districts, because these districts are not desired by European American superintendents (Scott, 1980) and neighboring school districts do not want the poorer and/or minority district to merge with them (Alice, 2008; Newkirk, 2014). Since minority superintendents are willing to fill this leadership void, their interests converge with the European American power structure needs; hence a 38% White male (62% non-White male) superintendent ratio is found in this venue, versus a 92% White male (8% non-White male) superintendent ratio in other venues.

Scott (1980) – seeing the emerging trend of Black superintendents being hired only in larger, urban, financially struggling, school districts – pointed out the interest convergence aspect of CRT and the superintendency. He stated that underfunded minority school districts would become less fiscally solvent and more difficult to lead, thus less attractive to White superintendents; and as Whites are reluctant to apply for the positions, Black superintendent candidates would then be called upon to lead. "The expansion in the ranks of black superintendents will be related to whites not wanting to deal with the engrossing problems of cities" (p. 188).

Social Construction of Race in Superintendent Employment

The CRT tenet concerning the social construction of race states that United States society defines and redefines 'race' at its desire, in order to classify and signify those granted privilege

and power within the European American power structure. Other CRT tenets, current literature, and scholarly studies in leadership validate this precept.

Thomas and Gabarro (1999) state that "virtually everyone writing on the career experiences of minority and women managers and professionals identifies race-based, and gender-based, prejudice as a major – perhaps the most major – barrier to advancement" (p. 26). According to this tenet, European American men lead the hierarchy, arguably regardless of their qualifications; European American women are "valued" as superintendents less than European American men, but more than men and women of color – i.e. women are second from the top of the superintendent food chain, and men and women of color follow within a constructed order. As stated earlier, this hierarchical racial categorization, in which those with visible European American attributes maintain control and authority over those who have less visible European American attributes and are perceived as nonwhite, is called racialization (Orser & Wallman, 2011). Carolan (2008) presents this point in a study of New York's Department of Education, pointing out that changing the above hierarchy to accept nonwhite-male leadership often requires coercive and mimetic isomorphism, especially in politically-based organizations such as school districts.

The perception of participants in Wright (2011), Taylor (2011), and others is that they were treated differently either during recruitment, the application process, and/or the superintendency itself, because of the color of their skin. One superintendent in Wright (2011) pondered the question whether society would rather see fewer superintendents than hire the existing, well-qualified African American and other nonwhite male superintendents: "… one might ascertain that the dwindling numbers of practicing superintendents is a direct reflection on the continuance of the perception of the existence of racism" (Wright, 2011, p. 85). This thought

might be given even more credence when it is revealed that two African American superintendents in Wright's study were both replaced by European American superintendents between the study's proposal and study completion.

Banks (1991) found that African American leaders often face mixed messages and increased scrutiny when both acquiring and executing the position. The superintendency calls for leaders who are strong and competent, yet strength and competence in African American males is viewed as threatening and arrogant. The position calls for leaders who are resourceful and equitable, but equity exercised by African American males is often feared and considered favoritism. The position calls for leaders who are approachable, but among African American males approachability is criticized as being "too forward." In general, African American male leaders are criticized for being unable to assimilate into a leadership role, while these mixed messages render such assimilation impossible.

Whiteness as a Property Right in Superintendent Hiring

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) expound on a certain aspect of CRT – the view, use, and actions of Whiteness as a Property Right. Property rights have our facets: the Right of Disposition, the Right to Use and Enjoyment, the Right to Reputation and Status Property, and the Absolute Right to Exclude. This section discusses these facets as they apply to educational leadership and the hiring of non-white superintendents.

The Right of Disposition. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) equate the "Right of Disposition" to the "right to act in a certain way" (p. 59) and do as one pleases regardless of others, policies, or rules. Concerning superintendents, the Right of Disposition equals the right of search agents, school boards, and society to claim equal opportunity employment adherence, while manipulating the value of all aspects of their employment profile to discriminately select a

candidate of their choice via unequal opportunity. Brooking (2006) relates how, despite layers of safeguards, the hiring process can be manipulated to hire desired individuals and bypass an equitable job applicant interview process. The Right of Disposition renders European American cultural practices (e.g., dress, speech patterns, conceptions of knowledge) as white norms and white property, alienable and worthy of the reward of employment, allowing those with "whiter" cultural norms and stereotypical traits (e.g. softer-spoken, baby-faced, and lighter-skinned African American males) to be more accepted in leadership positions. Conversely, their peers with fewer stereotypically white traits and other non-European Americans are generally viewed as less capable leaders than their equally credentialed and experienced European American peers (Livingston, 2009; Livingston & Pearce, 2009, Staff, 2009).

Furthermore, superintendent training and preparation and educational research deal more with middle-class European American issues than urban non-white American issues. Access to training and preparation is more available to white aspiring superintendent candidates due to K-16 educational issues non-whites face (e.g. disproportionate racial representation in high ability and AP classes, over-representation of people of color in special education and behavioral modification programs, undergraduate access and attendance issues, and educational financing for people of color) (Brown & Beckett, 2007). Add to this list the systemic issues that wreak havoc on the poor and non-white (i.e. achievement gap, employment gap, parental economic and income gap, non-academic experiential learning gap, inheritance gap, cultural norms and expectations gap, health gap, health care quality gap, nutrition gap) (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Lyubansky, 2013; Williams, 1999).

One theory that encapsulates this CRT theme as it pertains to this study is Leadership Categorization Theory. Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips (2008) posit that United States society

has developed beliefs about behaviors and characteristics of leaders – a leader prototype. In four

studies, Rosette et al. (2008) supported their prediction that Whites are viewed as more

prototypical leaders than racial minorities because the leadership prototype included the

presumption that the perfect, model, ideal leaders were White: "… when individuals abstract

attributes that are common to examples of business leaders but are perhaps less common to

examples of non-leaders, they will conclude that the average leader, the prototypical leader, must

be White" (p. 8), and that regardless of their racial group, evaluators were likely to perceive

White leaders more favorably than non-White leaders.

Thus, in four studies on the topic Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips (2008) found that 1)

White group members have a stronger association of universal leadership traits with White-

majority targets, 2) White group members (compared to ethnic minority members) have a more

positive leadership evaluation of White-majority targets because of their in-group

prototypicality, 3) both White-majority and ethnic minority group members assume leaders in

general to be White, and 4) targets' in-group prototypicality does not necessarily affect the

perceivers' evaluation of their fit to general leadership prototypes. This finding is supported by

Gündemir, Homan, de Dreu, and van Vugt (2014), who surmise that "people expect (business)

leaders to be White, so when they estimate an individual's organizational role, they assume

White targets to have leadership positions to a much larger extent than objective information

(i.e., racial demographic composition of a company) would suggest" (p. 1). "In sum, the general

finding that people tend to associate universally valued leadership traits more with White rather

than with ethnic minority categories – at least partially – illuminates why ethnic minorities may

be less likely to obtain higher level leadership positions in Western society" (p. 9).

     The Right to Use and Enjoyment. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) equate the Right to

Use and Enjoyment with a right to properly-functioning, aesthetically-pleasing educational tools, which may include buildings, space, equipment, materials, supplies, funding and culturally appealing networks and resources. When applied to educational leadership and superintendent hiring, the Right to Use and Enjoyment allows the property owner (in this case the owner of the property of Whiteness) to use and enjoy all of the above at will, while others (people of color) may use and enjoy the above only with permission and for an allotted amount of time.

The term "Glass Cliff" has been created to refer to this right's temporary permission or allotment of authority (Bowles, 2013; Fitzsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen 2014). Accordingly, via the Right of Use and Enjoyment minorities often are allowed to lead a school district or organization once it gets to the point where Whites do not want the position because restoration is difficult or failure is inevitable. Minorities are given the opportunity to give it their best shot and/or go down with the ship. Then, for some unseen reason (glass cliff), the district/ organization may file bankruptcy, clear their debt, and reclaim the district with White leadership when it is ready for reinvestment and rebuilding. The Right of Use and Enjoyment allows search agents, committees, and school boards to manipulate EEOC policy, set certification requirements, and determine hiring practices to enjoy benefits developed for their property, while others (people who do not own the property of whiteness) are restricted from use and enjoyment regardless of academic credentials and experiential qualifications. It is extremely important to note that this paradigm is so taught, propagated, and infused in United States society via the educational system, mass media, and other systems that even people of color accept and align their actions within its boundaries (Burrell, 2010; Jost & Andrews, 2011; van der Toorn & Jost, 2014).

The Right to Reputation and Status Property. The Right to Reputation and Status

Property equates to a right to be considered the best and/or exclusive by Ladson-Billings and

Tate (1995). This right, as it relates to "Whiteness and the right of reputation and status," alludes

to devaluing a school district when it is bound to people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995,

p. 60). If the "One Drop of Black Blood Rule" (Bryc et al., 2015) is a foundation, and Bissinger

(1994) or Howard (2007) are correct, then the common person can see that those espousing this

right would feel that they suffer reputational damage if they have significant non-white

involvement in their school districts. Being led by an African American would then appear to be

a far greater condescension to those school boards and district personnel. (The One Drop Rule

once defined anyone as African American if there were any African heritage in their ancestry; a

definition which now, by the way, would encompass millions of European Americans who pass

and self-identify as 'White' [Bryc et al., 2015]. Bissinger [1994] wrote that, "Whites respond to

integration by abandoning their communities the moment blacks move in" [p. 4]. Howard [2007]

found it commonplace for educational stakeholders to feel exasperated by a demographic

change.)

     The Absolute Right to Exclude. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) equate the Absolute

Right to Exclude with the right to control, acknowledge, or influence destiny. They reveal that

this right may be invoked to exclude others in order to: 1) control one's reputation, status,

environment, or future; and/or 2) maintain status or demonstrate power, authority, and

supremacy. Wright (2011) discussed a current example of this 'Right to Exclude' directed

toward someone whom many may consider the most prominent person of color in the world

today. Wright explains that in September of 2009, President Barack Obama addressed the school

children of the United States during school hours. Due to both external and internal public

pressure many school districts refused to allow students to hear the address and/or provided

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alternative activities for students whose parents requested the boycott. Wright (2011) states that opposition to the speech was not due to the message being delivered by the former congressman, Harvard Law professor, and nationally-elected President of the United States of America. Rather, the opposition was because so many Americans oppose the country's leadership being African American, and thus invoked the 'Right to Exclude' President Obama from their lives and the lives of their children. "What did people possibly think he would say? Drop out of school and do drugs?" (Wright, 2011, p. 22).

Participants in Parker's (2009) study explained that their experiences with CRT's Absolute Right to Exclude were made prominent at large superintendent conferences when they were excluded from networking opportunities and other social gatherings. A second example, also in Parker (2009), is the exclusion aspiring superintendents face when seeking mentor relationships. Shakeshaft (1987) alluded to the need for and lack of mentors, Coursen (1989) pointed out that African Americans were not accepted by possible mentors, and Parker (2009) reveals the difficulty and exclusion African Americans face when trying to acquire mentors, or when they are not mentored wholeheartedly. Without the guidance, advice, and introduction to network relationships that mentors offer, African Americans begin their careers at a significant disadvantage.

Moody (1983) offers another typical scenario illustrating a White and a Black superintendent candidate, each of whom graduates with equivalent knowledge from a preparation program. However, informal networks (mentors, comfort level, associations with other professionals, and residential connections more frequently available to Whites) provide valuable experiences, inside knowledge, advice, and recommendations that put White candidates on a "faster track." These informal networks and advantages can prove to be as valuable, possibly

even more valuable, than formal criteria. Introductions, references, social endorsements, and inside or early information about open positions from socially and culturally accepting mentors greatly expand a candidate's opportunities for success (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005; Simmons, 2005).

Differential Racialization in Superintendent Employment

The CRT tenet concerning differential racialization states that United States society will redefine and assign virtue and importance to non-white people and groups as convenience and needs dictate. The scholarly literature concerning African American urban education leaders substantiates this tenet.

Non-white people groups have been discriminated against, in different ways and for different reasons, throughout American history based on the needs and desires of the European American power structure. They also are characterized in various manners to justify such treatment. In United States media, African Americans are portrayed as less favorable people than their European American counterparts. This portrayal, says Burrell (2010), acts both to support and to justify less favorable treatment by society. They are characterized as savage to justify treating them as wild and in need of taming and domestication, or shooting them to death because they are uncontrollable. They are characterized as loud and undignified to justify treating them as unfit for gracious and regal environments. They are characterized as lazy to justify treating them as unworthy of assistance or equal compensation. They are characterized as happy in servitude to justify maintaining them in menial positions as opposed to offering them chances to serve in decision-making leadership. Conversely, the elite European American power structure characterizes themselves as Superman, Tarzan (King of the Jungle), Tony Stark (Rich, Captain of Industry & the superhero Iron Man), saving and benevolently civilizing the world.

(See Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*.)

In regard to African Americans in leadership positions such as the superintendency, the portrayal supports less favorable consideration as a candidate, less favorable treatment in the screening process, less perceived believability and trustworthiness during the interview process, and misgivings about the candidate's technical and social capabilities, regardless of existing qualifications. Berry and Bonilla-Silva (2008) found that reasons used to support hiring individuals by members of a study's screening committee changed when the candidate's race was changed. This differential acceptance reflects a truth not reflected in the stated qualifications: the fatal attribute of 'Only Whites Need Apply'. A participant in the Wright (2011) study, Superintendent Gaddy, stated that the definition of being prepared for a superintendent interview includes having a terminal degree. He felt that African American candidates need to read job posting statements like "doctorate preferred" as "doctorate required," in response to an equal or lesser requirement for their White counterpart. "The notion of doctorate preferred doesn't apply to us," stated Superintendent Gaddy (p. 74).

Thomas and Gabarro (1999) describe the common scenario of advancement for fast-tracked European American leadership candidates in comparison to no model or track for people of color. The reason, according to these two Harvard professors, is,

Racial prejudice, whites' need for comfort and avoidance of risk, and the apparent difficulty of identifying minorities as high-potential candidates, each constitute major hurdles to the career mobility of minority managers. Overcoming them is possible, but it places the equivalent of a 'tax' on minorities (p. 73).

This "tax" refers to the talents, creativity, qualifications, credentials, time, and work that African Americans, people of color, and even women must possess to reach the fictitiously-created

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hierarchal equivalent of a European American male.

The surrender of a financially troubled, large, urban, non-white dominated, distressed school district to non-white superintendent leadership also demonstrates the tenet of differential racialization. The movie "Lean on Me" (Avildsen, 1989) dramatized the true story (although with substantial license) of a tough, dedicated but overly controlling African American educational leader who is not heeded during the initial decline of a school, but is called upon to turn it around after it descends below the control and value of the European American power structure. Although the school is completely turned around, academic achievement is dramatically increased, and student and staff morale reaches new heights, the African American educational leader is not acceptable to lead other non-urban schools – as if non-urban schools are not in need of increased achievement, improved student and staff morale.

After Brown versus Topeka, society had no need for African American educational leaders, firing over 90% of the nation's African American principals (Odum, 2011; Patterson, 2001; Tillman, 2004; Wright, 2011) and absorbing and decimating each state's African American teachers' union/organization (Tillman, 2009). As urban schools are inequitably funded and thus deteriorate (Biddle & Berliner, 2002; 2003), African American principals and even a few superintendents are increasingly welcomed because European American administrators view those jobs as less desirable.

Intersectionality and Anti-essentialism in Superintendent Employment

The CRT tenet concerning intersectionality and anti-essentialism states that people are multifaceted members of various biological, social, cultural, and other categories; United States society views the needs of the European American power structure as primary, and the needs of non-white people groups as secondary in virtually any group setting. Therefore members of non-

white groups often do not receive the resources, services, attention, or assistance they need and desire, suffering typical patterns of oppression because their needs do not fully align with the needs of the white power structure (Crenshaw, 1989).

In the superintendent selection process, there is plenty of agreement on the qualifications a superintendent should possess (Akers, 2016; Boring, 2003; Glenn, Hickey, & Sherman, 2009; Orr, 2015). However, agreement regarding qualifications appears to end, in most cases, when the candidate is an African American. This mindset groups all African American superintendent candidates into an essentialized massive out-group that correlates with historical media-driven stereotypes, and places all European Americans into a prototypical in-group from which the final choice will come. It ignores leadership traits that an individual African American candidate may have that align with the needs of the district, or added benefits that an individual may bring, making him/her the desired 'perfect candidate', which may not require that candidate be European American and male (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008; Wright, 2011).

Many issues and concerns addressing leadership and learning affect all superintendents; however, many issues affecting the general superintendent population – which is 92% European American male and serves in adequately-funded suburban and rural districts – do not intersect with issues facing African American male superintendents in underfunded non-white districts and economically disadvantaged communities.

Avilés (2010), Kozol (1991; 2005), Cody (2011), and Alice (2008) express the distinct view that sufficiently funding non-white, poor urban districts and providing their superintendents with identical support to equitably educate their students is unimportant to, and undesired by, the established power structure. The author Alice (2008) stated that the affluent and powerful stakeholders (educational policy-makers and financiers) with whom she was familiar have

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knowingly and purposely constructed the playing field to give themselves great advantage, and will not be moved to change the system.

State and national superintendent associations attend to the concerns of the superintendency, but fail to proportionally address the concerns (anything beyond the intersection) of African American or non-white superintendents, even though many African American superintendents educate more students in their urban districts than do their European American counterparts.

The Black/White Binary

CRT's Black/White Binary theme posits that the quintessential minority is the African American 'Black male', and that total assimilation into European American culture is required for receipt of all inalienable rights and premier treatment (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). While many African American males may make extra efforts to project an amicable posture that is culturally accepted by European Americans, the total shedding of one's ethnicity or identity is an unacceptable course of action for people of any race. Multiple superintendents stated that the selection of African Americans for the superintendency is often based on a level of comfort among school board members and that there is a common tendency for search agents, recruiting personnel, interview and screening committees to want to work with someone like themselves (Wells, 2013; Wright, 2011). Thus the conscious or subconscious requirement of assimilation presents a barrier to career advancement. And by denouncing pluralism and intergroup negotiation, school boards construct a barrier when they require assimilation for advancement to the superintendency. "The challenge to pluralistic and impartial participation in this country appears to be alienation, isolation, and differences based solely on the color of one's skin…African American men are a necessary component in the leadership of a district whose

constituency continues to be more and more diverse" (Johnson, 2005, p. 27).

Critique of Camouflage Programs

The CRT theme that criticizes programs and policies which promote the terminology: color blindness, meritocracy, race neutrality, objectivity, and equal opportunity, does so because racist mindsets have often used these terms as camouflage to continue status quo racism, self-interest, and privilege (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Within superintendent hiring practices, several researchers and participants have also identified the existence of this theme.

In *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America*, Thomas and Gabarro (1999) write that "there remain companies in which no amount of individual effort, preparation, or performance is likely to propel a person of color into an executive position with the power to shape key business decisions" (p. 6). This theme is echoed by study participant Superintendent Baker in Wright (2011), "There are some school districts where you could be the greatest administrator ever, and they still wouldn't want you" (p. 44). Without exception, all of the school district leaders interviewed by Wright (2011) noted that barriers to obtaining and retaining the superintendency were not only present but significantly more challenging for African Americans.

In Wright (2011), one superintendent firmly stated that barriers to the superintendency are different for African American males than they are for European American males, and that race is still a barrier – certainly the most visible barrier. When asked what challenges an African American male candidate would encounter when applying to a White majority district, he voiced the belief that the African American male would have to be substantially better than his European American counterpart to overcome additional obstacles (expectations, requirements, and qualifications) placed in front of African American candidates. This represents a second

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individual pointing toward the equivalent of a non-Power Structure Prototype (PSP) 'tax' of talent, credentials, and qualifications. Superintendent Drake stated that he would have been more optimistic about his future chances prior to the assumption of his current post. Another African American superintendent indicated that his district was giving him a hard time despite unprecedented academic growth in the district. This leader was certain that this challenge was because of race. Still others talked about the additional trouble they face gaining support for innovative ideas because of racial ramifications.

The superintendency is not the only occupation that experiences disproportionate homogeneity. *The Atlantic* magazine produced an article entitled *The 33 Whitest Jobs in America* in which Thompson (2013) reveals that several occupations experience the same effects as the superintendency. It is interesting to note that some professions are known for purposefully excluding or discouraging Blacks and other non-whites from participating despite equal opportunity employment laws, merit-based policies, and colorblind statements. Progress in these fields often requires approval by gatekeepers positioned at various places along the career path.

Dover, Major, and Kaiser's (2016) article, *Diversity Policies Rarely Make Companies Fairer, and They Feel Threatening to White Men*, found that companies encouraging diversity increased the threat level felt by their White male employees and employee candidates. Propagandized promotion of diversity policies also resulted in a more hostile environment for people of color to succeed, due to the White power structure restricting advancement for less powerful, and more diverse, employees of color. Furthermore, without adequate accountability and enforcement, the policy simply protected the companies from legal action; it did not increase diversity, did not change the perception belief paradigm for people of color, and angered a significant portion of the European American employee population.

Minority Storytelling in Superintendent Employment

Exploring the CRT Minority Storytelling tenet reveals perspectives from practicing superintendents in Wright (2011), Johnson (2005), Taylor (2011), and others who indicate that the playing field is not level for African Americans seeking or maintaining the superintendency. Additional leadership and preparation, education, communication skills, a broader range of emotional reactions and sometimes cultural distancing for assimilation often are required of African American superintendents but not of European American superintendents (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) point out that storytelling helps reveal multiple sides and perspectives to a phenomenon, helps break the negative circumstance being exposed, penetrates inaccurate paradigms, decreases feelings of isolation, and helps heal victims who suffer in silence and self-blame. Many racial minority aspiring superintendent candidates feel alone in the struggle for a fair playing field and equitable consideration for the position. Storytelling allows them to hear the experiences of others dealing with the same circumstances in other districts and states. It reveals that their experiences of being dissuaded to advance, passed over for promotions, and having their quality work discounted may not be their fault or attributable to any lack they may harbor; but quite possibly may be due to social justice flaws in the structural system built to vehemently resist African Americans as superintendents or educational leaders.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) point out through CRT that, unfortunately, all human beings resist surrendering any advantages they believe they have over others; thus gains made during the Civil Rights Era are still being attacked fifty years later and complete system displacement will cause considerable societal tumult. This part of human nature caused many superintendents in the cited studies to wonder whether the gains obtained during the Civil Rights

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Era are systematically being reversed. "Time and time again, we see evidences that the perception of our participants is that they were treated differently either in the process of application and/or during the superintendency itself because of the color of their skin" (Wright, 2011, p. 85).

Research such as Johnson (2005), Parker (2009), Odum (2011), Taylor (2011), and Wright (2011) must continue to tell the story of events throughout the nation. These studies show similar results – African Americans are well-educated, capable, and concerned, yet overlooked and devalued. African American and other non-white leaders must be respected, regarded, and recognized as contributors to the continued growth of this nation and the world; they must be allowed to reap the benefits of mutually-developed national progress.

Challenges to Attainment in Previous Literature

Previous literature has documented some challenges experienced by African Americans in pursuit of the superintendency. Those challenges include 1) difficulty in acquiring mentors, 2) difficulty in attaining network inclusion, 3) faulty historic and now societally ingrained character information, and 4) the necessity of satisfying search agent/gatekeepers' desires. The literature on these topics will be briefly discussed in this section.

Mentoring and Mentoring Relationships

There are many definitions, facets, and variances found in the mentoring activity or process (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007). Formal and informal (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992), personal and business (Meyer & Warren-Gordon, 2013), single or multiple mentors (Huizing, 2012), superordinate or peer mentors (Bozionelos, 2004), cross-gendered (O'Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2008), and cross-racial (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002) mentoring relationships all deal with the intended guidance of a lesser-informed individual by better-

informed individual(s) in the particular area(s) of interest. There is even a concept of Negative Mentoring in which protégés reported behaviors that caused adverse results to their careers and psychosocial development (Davis, 2008; Eby et al., 2000, 2004).

Since the focus of this study concerns a workplace/career mentoring relationship and often a cross-racial relationship, the involvement of the mentor and the guidance of the protégé to and through their career development will be reviewed. A successful, positive mentoring relationship entails facilitation of knowledge, social capital, exposure-and-visibility, counseling, coaching, psychosocial support, a level of friendship, and challenging work assignments in an organization, field, or activity. It requires an investment of time, the creation of a trusting and communicative relationship, a certain level of harmony or tolerance of each participant's values, work-styles, and personalities, and understanding and agreement on the goals of the mentoring process (Eby et al., 2000). Thomas (2001), Sims (2002), Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (2002, 2004), and Moss (2013) also reveal very important issues in cross-cultural mentoring. They point out the difficulty in establishing this type of mentoring relationship due to "unrecognized patterns of stereotypical behavior that is encoded in the American psyche, a paradigm that dictates 'staying in one's place,' refraining from being aggressive or threatening, and avoiding the perception of intimacy" (Moss, 2013, p. 34). However, Sims (2002) informs us that those mentoring relationships wherein racial issues are discussed become more trusting and beneficial. Thomas (2001) tells us that, in mentoring relationships that result in the most successful outcome (protégés reaching the highest executive positions), both mentors and protégés invest themselves and grow their trust relationship to the place where race issues are discussed in detail, avoiding what Thomas (2001) called "protective hesitation: [where] both parties refrain from raising touchy issues" (p. 105).

Research indicates that an effective mentoring process involves both mentor and protégé taking an active role in building the relationship, identifying performance areas and setting goals for the protégé, assisting the protégé in finding and employing resources to accomplish the goals, and encouraging and inspiring the protégé (Phillips-Jones, 2001). Multiple studies have found that a successful, positive mentoring activity within a business setting yields better job performance, greater job and career satisfaction, less employee turnover and transience, increased promotions and advancement within the organization or field, and higher earned wages (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007). Eby and colleagues (2008) found that mentoring often correlates with beneficial outcomes in behavior, attitude, physical and mental health, relationships, intrinsic motivation, and career outcomes. Carraway (2008), Wyatt and Silvester (2015), and Robinson and Reio (2012) examined the nuances of mentoring relationships between African American male protégés and European American male mentors, the relationship found most frequently in this study. Palmer and Johnson-Bailey (2008) point out that historically there have been "tensions between Whites and African Americans" (p. 45) that have impacted the mentoring process due to dissimilar backgrounds, values, cultural beliefs, and a lack of training in cross-cultural mentoring. However, quality mentoring – cross-cultural and otherwise – has proven very beneficial, especially to the protégés' career success. African Americans who receive quality mentoring report greater perceptions of fit in their fields of pursuit than those who do not, and the self-efficacy supports high agency in negative social structures (Mejia, 2011; Pascall-Gonzalez, 2016). "Structural and attitudinal barriers" (p. 46) preventing African Americans from full acceptance in many European American male professional networks have also limited both African American mentors and African American protégés from maximum inclusion in networks and thus limited them from receiving the totality of professional benefits available from the

mentoring arena.

A major consideration raised by the importance and necessity of a mentor is the question of whether aspiring African American superintendents can get mentors from within the existing European American near-monopoly. Research (Johnson, 2005; Parker, 2009; Taylor, 2011; Wright, 2011) reports that African Americans have difficulty acquiring mentors, especially ones connected to the existing 92% European American male superintendent network. Cross-race mentoring research has indicated that African Americans mentored by European Americans receive a greater income advantage and greater access to network resources, but less psychosocial support than African Americans mentored by other African Americans, and difficulties exist in finding those who are willing to accept and dedicate themselves to quality mentorship. "White men appear to continue to hold the keys to the doors that need to be opened for women and non-White men to financially advance" (Zellers, Howard & Barcic, 2008, p. 561).

Networking and Inclusion

Networking, like mentoring, has evolved and expanded into a complex term that revolves around the concept of relationships that facilitate the transmission of resources whether those resources are physical, intellectual, or social. Well-known theories such as Granovetter's (1983) strength of weak ties theory and Burt's (1992) structural holes theory, as well as lesser-known theories such as model-based network theory (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011) identify key considerations of social networking. One major consideration is one's position in the network (network location), with centrality (the position of being an exclusive or rationed source of, and outlet for, resources from many other network participants) being the position of strength and influence. New network members typically enter on the periphery and have no influence unless

they can supply the needs of other network members or connect them to a supplier (filling a structural hole in the network/betweenness). Networks, and clusters within networks, form due to similarities of interests (ties), with connections being the participants in multiple clusters of different similarities (weak ties). A greater source of information and other resources can flow from cluster to cluster or network to network along these weak ties, because of each cluster's different interests and attraction. Katz and colleagues (2004) explained that "strong ties are particularly valuable when an individual seeks socio-emotional support and often entail a high level of trust. Weak ties are more valuable when individuals are seeking diverse or unique information from someone outside their regular frequent contacts. This information could include new job or market opportunities" (p. 309).

Another consideration in the study of networks is cognitive consistency theory, which focuses on the impressions of what some network members think other members like. This is important to this study because Wingfield (2014) reports that contemporary society tends to continue white privilege not with an intention to discriminate against people of color, but as an attempt to benefit their family and friends. Wingfield (2014) also references DiTomaso (2013) who found that

> While working, middle, and upper class whites stated their commitment to and
> belief in equal opportunity, they often acted in specific ways that undermined this
> in practice. One such pattern included similar processes of opportunity hoarding
> and reserving mention of job opportunities for white peers, colleagues, and
> friends. In other words, social networks were racialized in ways that created
> additional advantages for white job-seekers, while excluding black candidates for
> positions (Wingfield, 2014, p. 241).

Many of these racialized relationships employ, and benefit from, the "invisible hand of social capital" (Lin, 2000; Orser & Wallman, 2011) by providing information, contacts, references, and job offers even to people who are not actively seeking jobs – elite non-searchers. These elite non-searchers are of good enough reputation, influential, and connected well-enough in their networks that employers seek them out instead of the typical reverse. McDonald (2016) reports that many elite, high-wage managerial jobs are filled from network ties without those positions ever being made public.

In an article entitled *Anything but racism: How sociologists limit the significance of racism*, Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2007) write:

> …in societies in which resources are distributed partly along racial lines, social networks (social capital) will also be racialized. This means that social networks may be mobilized to further or defend racial projects, and this also means that social networks may not always be a "public good" whose benefits are equally available to all. In a racialized society, the benefits of collective associations and friendship ties will be deeply structured by racial rules (p. 92).

Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi (2007) go on to say that "social networks and norms of social behavior are often mobilized to defend racial exclusion in a racialized society" (p. 92). They also reference Waldinger (1995) in pointing out how "social capital in ethnically based job networks help exclude other ethnic groups, … individuals in a racialized society do not have equal access to networks, and networks themselves are racialized" (p. 92), concluding that "African Americans suffer labor market disadvantages by virtue of segregated networks" (p. 92). Additionally, Holland and Leinhardt (1976) argued that network members would experience a discomforting tension if a newcomer were welcomed to the network of whom some members

didn't approve, confirming the colloquialism, "We like to be friends with friends of our friends, and we experience tension when our friends are not friends with one another" (Poole & Hollingshead, 2004, p. 287). Avoiding this tension could be why Stainback (2008) found that same-race job-seeking network contacts dramatically increase managerial job acquisition, but cross-race network contacts only produce lower-level supervisory jobs for African Americans and Hispanics.

Furthermore, Borgatti et al. (2009) reference Durkheim's argument that the reason for repeated social behavior is not individuals' intentions, but the makeup, network expectations, and pressures of the social environment of which they are members. Krackhardt and Kilduff (1990) also said, "People's attributions are to some extent controlled by the need to be in harmony with others in their friendship networks" (p. 151). The existing literature on small group networks and cognitive consistency theory's affective ties – the participant connections that focus on who likes whom – provides a possible correlation to African American superintendents and their difficulty in attaining substantive posture within existing superintendent networks.

A network of professional peers and supporters is necessary to provide both professional and emotional insight and advice, gather and share information, and meet needs that organizational networks fulfill. Santa Ana (2008) and Sanchez & Thornton (2010) indicated that these networks are vital, especially for African Americans, because they provide vital information concerning superintendent openings prior to attaining the position, professional counsel and advice when difficult situations arise after obtaining the position, and emotional support during both circumstances. Tuitt, Sagaria, and Turner (2007) reveal that during the employment application screening process, search chairs and committees can and have declined

or discounted information provided by people unknown to them or their networks. Also, candidates unfamiliar to them or their networks raise skepticism. Ultimately a candidate's connections, affiliations, pedigree, and/or letters of recommendation from prestigious network members may be the deciding factor on job offers. Excellent skills, credentials, and references from out-group applicants may easily take a back seat to inferior, second-rate, basic qualifying information from a known network member. Wright (2011) encourages networking as a means to increase productivity and share prominence. Many professionally fruitful bonds and introductions are also formed during the social activities and environment of professional networks (Johnson, 2014). When excluded from these networks, African American superintendents and aspirants are blocked from meeting peer superintendents, search agents, and other well-connected individuals who play crucial roles in marketing, hiring, and advancing professionals in a variety of career opportunities. When female superintendents from Indiana, Illinois, and Texas responded to a survey asking about networks, 62.3% indicated that a lack of a professional network was either somewhat of a barrier or a serious barrier, and 67.5% specifically indicated that exclusion from the *Good-ole'-boy* network was somewhat to a serious barrier (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). Sagaria (2002) reported that a candidate's qualifications and credentials become a secondary factor in determining the candidate's worthiness to be a part of the exclusive network, and Tuitt et al. (2007) reported that, "in addition to personal filters … debasement filters grounded in racial misconceptions are used to discredit a candidate's qualifications" (p. 518). Thus from Sagaria (2002) and Tuitt et al. (2007) it appears that if you're not a part of the network, you risk your qualifications being discredited and debased.

Without employing cross-cultural skills and productive efforts to find ways to create

inclusion, African American professionals will find themselves, and may remain, "isolated from networks of responsibility, power and influence. Their professional credibility and acceptance depends on receiving organizational access and negotiating relationships" (Carraway, 2008, p. 22) with other connected professional colleagues.

Applicant Pool Sufficiency

Concerning the number of current African American superintendents, some have stated that there simply aren't enough qualified applicants. Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) researched the quantity of educational leadership graduates qualified for the superintendency and found that there are more than enough well-qualified aspiring African American candidates to meet and surpass demographic parity. Superintendent Frink, from Wright's (2011) study, states quite succinctly that, even if there weren't enough qualified candidates for demographic parity, "More African Americans are qualified to be superintendent than the 12 or 13 of us that are holding positions now, that's for sure" (p. 71).

Parker (2009) points out that in the state of New York there were 25 well-qualified African American male applicants for superintendent postings, for which none of them (0) were hired. Upon further questioning of board members, search consultants, superintendents, and the African American superintendent candidates, the following facts were discovered:

1) The search firms, board presidents, and school boards from the beginning did not consider hiring anyone other than a White candidate.

2) The search firms thought it would be "controversial" to bring and/or recommend African American candidates. So often only White candidates were recommended.

3) The African American candidates felt that the few first-round interviews that they received were disingenuous token actions to satisfy any diversity inquiries.

4) African Americans were viewed negatively within some communities, and board members felt that their communities were not accepting, or ready for, an African American superintendent. (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003; Parker, 2009).

Despite the publicized shortage of superintendents in New York, there was no change in the hiring of qualified aspiring African American superintendents when comparing 1995 to 2005 (Kamler, 2009). Glass and Bjork (2003) maintain that the advertised shortage in the superintendent applicant pool is a myth.

Faulty Rationale, Fabrications, Falsehoods and Facts

Faulty rationale, historical fabrications, and competency falsehoods, both told and accepted by society, may lie at the heart of many barriers to African American males obtaining the superintendency and other CEO positions. Some argue that since African immigrants and slaves first arrived in the United States in the 1600s, an ongoing 400+ year propaganda campaign has been conducted in order to create and maintain the disenfranchisement of African Americans, especially the African American male (Anderson, 2002; Burrell, 2010; Embrick, 2006; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Travis, 1991; Treitler, 2015; Wright, 2011). One tool employed by the propaganda campaign is perpetuating psychological exclusion from mainstream society by engraining beliefs of inferiority about, and in, African Americans.

Jackson (2002) wrote that fears and stereotypes tainted society's opinion of African Americans since they sailed into Jamestown harbor in 1619 (as cited in Wright, 2011, p. 13). Johnson (2005) states that, "Historically, stereotypes and myths were used as propaganda to oppress and control African Americans. Through covert and overt racism, discrimination is a subtle reminder of African American's selective exclusion from mainstream society" (Johnson, 2005, p. 18).

Many falsehoods were told and repeated, apparently to denigrate African Americans, after the Civil War. In a series of reports sent to General Howard by J. W. Alvord as he personally toured the Freedmen's Bureau's schools proved the propaganda was false. General Howard published several of Mr. Alvord's letters as proof to the general public that the allegations and rumors were untrue. Howard stated,

> ...with a view to correct the false impressions which have gone abroad with regard
> to the colored people of the South. We find it a very easy task on the part of those
> who predict evil, and earnestly desire it, to deceive travelers from the north, even
> old and tried abolitionists; to have rehearsed in their ears, on the cars, in hotels, in
> steamers, everywhere they go, stories enunciating such propositions….It is
> wonderful with what pertinacity, and how universally such stories are reiterated.
> They have been told so often that they are doubtless believed by themselves
> (Alvord, 2013, p. 7).

General Howard published 17 of Alvord's letters, documenting how the schools for African Americans in most every city and area were thriving educationally, the crime rate for Blacks was lower or equal to that of Whites, and that thrift and eagerness to work and learn were plentiful. Alvord went on to add that Blacks were often cheated or intimidated out of their legal rights and troubled by low wages, fraud, ill-treatment, discriminatory arrests by police, and Ku Klux Klan intimidation, that African Americans are intelligent, prosperous, industrious, and of high commendation, and that society must not ignore the evidence of their improving and quality life (Alvord, 2013). Unfortunately, falsehoods, essentialism, misgivings, and employment discrimination continue today (Cornileus, 2010, 2013; Jackson, 2014; Spencer, 2013).

Search Agents as Gatekeepers

When a superintendent search is conducted by a board representative, be it a board member, external individual, or company, that search agent becomes a *de facto* gatekeeper. His/her/their regulation of the screening process and access to the interviewers is the third of many barriers that previous study participants indicate qualified aspiring superintendents face. The first gatekeeping occasion is the admission process to university and other credible superintendent training and/or mentoring programs (Jackson, 2006; MLI, 2013; Pappas & Tremblay, 2010; Tallerico, 2000; Taylor, 2011).

The second instance is equitable treatment throughout the completion of the superintendent training. Literature concerning this step reveals that many non-white graduate and post-graduate students must work within an environment that is often hostile to them. A single advisor or powerful antagonist can delay and/or derail a superintendent career (Chang & Astin, 1997; Chang, Chang, & Ledesma, 2005; Jaffer, 2008; Trower & Chait, 2002). Although United States society may revel in certain African American stereotypically accepted strengths (i.e. athletics, entertainment), the centrality of racism places an inordinate amount of skepticism and resistance on other areas of African American life and scholarship (i.e. leadership, technology, and achievement in academia).

The third gatekeeper, the search agent, plays a crucial role in the superintendent hiring process, being in many cases the sole determiner(s) of access to district leadership, and subsequently student achievement and community benefits from hiring superintendents of color. Existing literature has stated that when particular search agents conducted searches, African Americans familiar with those agents knew that they might get a token first-round interview but were not going to be seriously considered for a real, or even a second-round, interview. Some search agents have established reputations of inequitable consideration toward African American

candidates (Hoyle, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Wright, 2011).

      White Privilege

      Pertinent to this study on African American male superintendent hiring experiences, white privilege conveys a false sense of confidence that a White person (as male privilege conveys that a male) is the normal and ideal leader (McIntosh, 1988) – in this case, superintendent. The embedded form of White privilege has also taught society (search agents, board members) not to see the privilege but to assume that the benefits received are due to merit (Grant & Zwier, 2011). White privilege allows European Americans to raise questions of race without seeming self-seeking (Mahoney, 1995). It conveys greater credibility for European American education, credentials, and experiences (Burwell-Chen, 2015). It greatly improves the ability of European Americans to find same-race people who would be willing to be advisors and/or mentors, especially those already connected and active in professional and social networks (Maier, 1997; Roth, 2004). It provides greater opportunity for board members to feel in-group congruency with white male candidates (Anthony, 2012). It is supported by positive media and societal stereotypes and typecasts (Burrell, 2010). It provides a nearly unlimited amount of social, political, imaginative, or professional activity options wherein the European American would be accepted or allowed to pursue their desires (Squires & Kubrin, 2005), while an African American is doubted, questioned, and rejected. Perhaps this White privilege, combined with CRT's Ordinariness of Racism, is why Pager's (2003) study found that "it is easier for a White person with a felony conviction to get a job than a Black person with no felony convictions, even among applicants with otherwise comparable credentials or where Blacks had slightly better employment histories" (Squires & Kubrin, 2005, p. 54). This is another example of the PSP tax. White privilege creates the fictitious ideology that almost any

white male leader will be better than any non-white male leader – a leader prototype (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). It attempts to create that ideology, quite successfully, subconsciously and implicitly, at least to the young, naïve, and uninformed (Matthews, no date; McIntosh, 1988; Pinterits, Poteat & Spanierman, 2009).

Implicit Social Cognition, Leadership Categorization, and Fit

There is a growing body of literature concerning Implicit Social Cognition and its findings regarding self-presentation of racial preference, stereotypes, and discriminatory actions. "… Preference for one's own group (others with whom one relates) is a fact of human social relations" (Baron & Banaji, 2009, p. 918). Bigler (1995) found that children demonstrate in-group preference as soon as they can identify themselves into social categories. By age two, children show identification with and preference for their own gender in-group (Maccoby, 1988); by age three preference is shown for social groups to which children are assigned (Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997); and by age four preference is shown for racial in-groups with which the child identifies (Aboud, 1988; Hirschfeld, 1996). By the age of five, children's in-group preference is indistinguishable from their parents', insofar as their knowledge and acquaintances go. Research findings seem to indicate that preference is adopted once an in-group category is perceived or formed (Baron & Banaji, 2009). This in-group preference appears across all cultures studied; it may be a core aspect of human psychology and a representation of self-love as an extension of oneself. In-group preference only changes when the in-group is subordinated to a dominant group (Baron & Banaji, 2009; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald, Pickrell, & Farnham, 2002; Yamaguchi et al., 2007).

When in-group preference, or the amount or scope of preference, is socially unacceptable, people may publicly and consciously try to curtail that preference to socially

acceptable levels, but fail due to subconscious attitudes and beliefs, especially in less thought-out, rushed, spontaneous activities. Others may profess having curtailed in-group preference, or even claim to have none purely to avoid its attached negative connotations, while knowingly continuing inappropriate preference. Regardless of its conscious or subconscious underpinnings, positive association with in-group preference now can be measured via implicit attitude testing tools. These measures, when administered appropriately, indicate various implicit positive and negative attitudes regardless of people's explicit statements.

> Implicit measures were invented because researchers believed that social cognitions exist that people are unable or unwilling to report. Inability refers primarily to a lack of awareness of the content, and unwillingness refers primarily to a motivation to report content that is accessible but personally or socially inadvisable to report (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2012, p. 32).

Using implicit measures, researchers found that, despite explicit self-reports, job recruiters had a 77% slight to 56% moderate negative stereotype association with incompetency, laziness, and inefficiency for minority study participants than for their majority peers; a second study revealed a 93% slight to 82% moderate negative association with unpleasantness (Rooth, 2010). Rooth (2010) also found that, although a clear majority (77%) of employers explicitly stated that there are no productivity differences between the employed majority and minority workers, more than half (54%) of the employers have a more positive feeling toward and preferred hiring majority male employees over minority candidates. This finding offers a third example of a PSP tax.

> On self-report measures of race preference, whites tend not to report a strong explicit preference for their in-group, typically not as strong a preference as black

Americans do for their own group. On the other hand, white Americans show a
robust implicit preference for their own group and far more so than do black
Americans (Baron & Banaji, 2009. p. 920).

In a study with more than 700,000 participants, the explicit response to the question,
"Who do you prefer, black people or white people?" was "I have no preference," yet the implicit
measure revealed more than 70% preference for Whites over Blacks (Cohen's $d = 0.86$) (Nosek
et.al, 2007).

Gonsalkorale, Sherman, and Klauer (2009) found a stronger implicit preference for
Whites over Blacks among elderly adults than among younger adults. McConnell and Leibold
(2001) found more negative automatic associations toward Blacks than Whites as demonstrated
by more negative nonverbal behaviors, such as less speaking time and less smiling, during an
interaction with a Black researcher relative to a White researcher. Implicit measures predict
behavior better than explicit self-reports on sensitive matters such as racial prejudices and
stereotypes (Nosek et al., 2012), and when time or activity limits do not allow for lengthy
contemplation (Dovidio et al., 1997).

Åslund and Skans (2012) found that, despite anti-discrimination legislation and the
potential for hefty fines, labor market discrimination in Sweden continues for ethnic minorities
and women with majority women benefiting the most from equal opportunity programs, similar
to Anti-Discrimination and Affirmative Action program benefits to European American women
in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Oreopoulos and Dechief (2012) also reveal
'subconscious' statistical discrimination against employment applicants of Indian and Chinese
heritage, similar to name-based assumptions and discrimination in the United States (Bertrand &
Mullainathan, 2004). With multiple countries affected by similar problems, Rooth (2010)

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concludes,

> What our results then indicate is that there are recruiters who implicitly
>
> discriminate, but who would not explicitly do so. The results present evidence that
>
> recruiting behavior is being affected by implicit prejudice rather than by explicit
>
> discrimination being observed by a new and better empirical measure (p. 25).

Leadership Categorization and System Justification Theories

The theory of Leadership Categorization (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984) posits that people create mental constructs of the ideal leader. What a leader should look like, sound like, their attributes, personality traits, even their names, tastes, and nationalities are taken into account when interview and hiring decisions are being made (Oreopoulos and Dechief, 2012; Rödin and Özcan, 2011; Trichas & Schyns, 2012). That ideal image, the leadership prototype, is closely tied to the dominant culture. Gündemir, Homan, de Dreu, and van Vugt (2014) found that "… leadership roles are more strongly associated – automatically and largely unconsciously – with White-majority group members than with ethnic minorities" (pp. 1-2). This mental construct is stronger than the subordinate culture's in-group preference, creating an even greater barrier for cultural minority members to ascend to leadership positions – even in minority communities. Gündemir et al. (2014) also confirmed their hypothesis that, "a major cause of the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in leadership positions in the Western world is that this group does not fit the predominant 'image' or prototype of a leader" (p. 1). From interviews through hiring to performance evaluations, Rosette et al. (2008) determined that, "From this perspective, White evaluators will rate White leaders more favorably because White leaders are more prototypical of the evaluators' racial group. By contrast, a leadership prototype explanation would predict that, regardless of their racial group, evaluators will be likely to perceive White

leaders more favorably than non-White leaders" (p. 760).

System Justification Theory (Jost & Andrews, 2011; van der Toorn & Jost, 2014) posits that when multiple in-group preferences converge, the dominant in-group's preference takes precedent in order to maintain the mental and sociopolitical status quo, reinforcing the legitimacy of the existing sociopolitical system. As young as age five, children adopt the same social group valuation and stratification as their parents and the dominant culture (Baron & Banaji, 2009). As stated in an earlier study (Eagly & Karau, 2002) a "potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles" (p. 574), in this case school district executive leadership.

Taking Leadership Justification Theory and System Justification Theory further into the areas of hiring and promotion, Johnson and Hekman (2016) found that not only is European American male the perceived favorable leader prototype, but women and non-European American males who hire and/or promote anyone except non-European American males are summarily penalized. Hekman, Johnson, Der Foo and Yang (2016) revealed that those women and non-European American males who did decide to hire/promote minorities were judged 'less competent,' a judgment the researchers attributed to historical negative racial and gender stereotypes. Thus diversity-valuing behavior proves detrimental to the careers of those who are non-European American males.

Gollwitzer (1999) and Ajzen & Fishbein (2005) suggest that forming implementation intentions (bringing to light these implicit possibilities and discussing goals and intentions) inhibits the automatic activation of stereotypical beliefs and prejudicial feelings. It doesn't eliminate those beliefs, but rather brings their possible existence into conscious consideration.

"These data imply that forming implementation intentions can be used as an effective self-regulatory tool whenever goal pursuit is threatened by the intrusion of unwanted habitual thoughts and feelings…this self-regulatory tool comes in handy, because more often than not unwanted stereotypical thoughts and prejudicial feelings interfere with successful goal attainment" (Gollwitzer, 1999, p. 500). A person's memory-based attitude is presumed to be resolute and resists opposition to outside influences, opinions, and rulings; it guides overt actions, but "given sufficient motivation and cognitive resources, the more favorable, egalitarian attitude may be retrieved and can override the effect of the implicit prejudicial attitude" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, p. 205).

Fit

Because of the abundance of theories and beliefs, fit has become a broad-based, multi-faceted term. It has been used to indicate complimentary relationships within and similarities among employees' and/or organizations' values, skills, attitudes, goals, strategies, preferences, communication and leadership styles, personality traits, cultural interests, hobbies and activities, and lifestyles. Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) provide insight in a meta-analysis of 172 studies that examined person–organization (PO) fit, person–job (PJ) fit, person–group (PG) fit, person–supervisor (PS) fit, person-environment (PE) fit, demands–abilities fit, needs–supplies fit, and more. Rivera (2012) discusses cultural fit as a key assessment factor in interviews of elite professional service firms, and how hiring decisions include fit with current employees' hobbies and lifestyle activities. Still others have used the term fit to represent compatibility between one's need–satisfaction match, demand–ability match, and the supplies–values of both parties (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013; McCulloch & Turban, 2007; Talbot & Billsberry; 2010).

Person-job (PJ) fit frequently references someone's physical, mental, and technical ability to accomplish the tasks required of a job (e.g. can s/he operate the required equipment, prepare the reports standard to the field, ask the appropriate questions to gather the necessary information for a particular job, etc.) (Grogan & Youngs, 2011). Person-Group (PG) fit refers to a person's engagement, commitment avoidance, and conflict with other group members toward goal achievement (Paquin, Kivlighan Jr, & Drogosz, 2013). Furnham (1997) and Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) consider Person-Organization (PO) fit to pertain to agreement and personal ownership of the organization's goals and values. Yet Rivera (2012) discusses a fit that asks "would I like to hang around this person after a long day and a delayed plane flight?" Rivera's (2012) fit includes leisure pursuits, recreation and relaxation activities as well as entertainment and non-vocational interests.

These theoretical concepts and the applicable benefits of various types of fit toward reaching organizational goals, workforce diversity, and hiring strategies all have important roles in employee satisfaction, workforce turnover, employee and organizational productivity, and production quality. However, unless the type(s) of fit is specified, its assessment will be subjective, arbitrary, or elusive at best. In basic lay terms, fit can mean whatever the employer wants it to mean. Andersen (2015) and Friedman (2015) explain how an ambiguously-defined term such as fit can simply mean that the applicant is not what the interviewer wanted as opposed to what the job calls for, what is best for the organization, or matching the core needs and goals of the company.

Some executives I've dealt with over the past few years have used the phrase "not a cultural fit" in exactly this negative, let's-maintain-the-status-quo way; to mean "that person is too black/female/old/young/non-degreed/linear/non-linear"… in

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other words, "that person is not enough like me" (Andersen, 2015, p. 1). In many cases, there is no amount of talent, ingenuity, or meeting, or exceeding the posted requirements, to satisfy the PSP tax. Because the term fit is so multifaceted, the general populace has applied it to mean anything they want (or don't want) to see in someone else, regardless of that person's ability to meet the requirements of the superintendent's position (Andersen (2015).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's fact sheet (EEOC, 2008) on race and color discrimination outlines many items that constitute racial and color discrimination, prohibiting "employment decisions based on stereotypes and assumptions about abilities, traits, or the performance of individuals of certain racial groups" (p. 1). Yet it is difficult to determine whether and what assumptions are non-verbally or implicitly made concerning candidates during resume screening, interview, hiring, and promotion decisions, especially when the concept of fit is involved and/or used as a camouflage term.

Methods of assessing fit vary along a continuum from blatant subjective assumptions, through asking individuals, comparative goal list matching, and trial periods, to specifically designed tests and evaluations of particular characteristics via ipsative (a "*forced choice*" scale) and normative statistical data. Fit assessments, such as reviewing reference letters, work samples, multi-round interviews, and testing are more accurate, but even these measures are not completely viable. Most current tests are limited in scope to a single dimension of one type of fit, and many interviews limit findings to explicit responses to constructed scenarios. Research is needed to identify methods, benefits, and detriments of testing multiple types and dimensions of fit as a pre-employment activity, because accurate identification of all fit characteristics is so difficult (Kristof-Brown et. al., 2005). Trevino, Hartman, and Brown (2000) also caution that an interviewer's perceived fit with ethical values may be far removed from the interviewee's actual

fit, because so little time is devoted to explicitly discussing each other's moral principles or probing implicit views. One's gender, agency, and an advertisement's scripts and graphics also play a role in self-ascribed fit according to Bosak and Sczesny (2008).

Additionally, Talbot and Billsberry (2010) found that demographic factors were infrequently cited in relation to fit or misfit perceptions, suggesting at least three possibilities. One possibility is that Elfenbein and O'Reilly (2007) and Jackson and Chung (2008) were correct: that neither fit nor misfit results from people being similar or different in race, age, gender, religion, education or socio-economic background –that fit/misfit is not superficial but rather a deeper, psychological construct. A second possibility is that Nosek, Hawkins, and Frazier (2012), Rooth (2010), and Baron and Banaji (2009) are correct: that people are unaware or unwilling to cite fit or misfit perceptions based on demographic reasons due to their implicit cognitions and the social ramifications. A third possibility is that additional reasons and input must be considered. Greater understanding and standardization must be reached toward defining the multiple types of fit.

Talbot and Billsberry (2010) point out that fit and misfit are often considered opposite ends of a continuum, when in fact they are not. Both fit and misfit have multiple dimensions, and every relationship will demonstrate areas of fit and misfit. These areas will be weighted, valued, and pertain to job efficacy differently – "it is possible to perceive misfit with some areas of the environment yet to fit strongly in other areas" (p. 3). There is also evidence that employing people who may be considered misfits in certain areas may still provide many positive outcomes by presenting new paradigms and preventing excessive ingrown/ inbred tendencies and innovative stagnation (Friedman, 2015). Kristof-Brown and Jansen (2007) also present a theory of spiraling in which a misfit area is determined and a cycle of justification begins to identify

other factors that will support the misfit viewpoint. Heilman's (1983) lack-of-fit model posits that minority group members will engage in self-limiting activities due to internalization of stereotypes held by the in-group and differences from the prototypical leader (Bosak & Sczesny, 2008; Pascall-Gonzalez, 2016; Peters, Ryan, Haslam, & Fernandes, 2012). Heilman (2001) argued that being a competent woman did not ensure advancement to the same executive level as an equally competent man.

Pertinent to this study, and due to the mutual satisfaction that causes the relationship to be beneficial, both parties (the superintendent and the school board) must define and look for fit as they seek to identify the qualities of candidates and present their own qualities as attractive. Findings from Tom's (1971) study suggest that individuals will be most successful in organizations that share their personalities, and that subjective factors play an important role in the recruiting process. However, the definition of "successful" covers a wide spectrum of outcomes. Conversely, there is a mutual cost for lack of satisfaction by either party, pointing to the equally broad term misfit. If the aspiring superintendent's (personal) values and the school district's (organizational) values are congruent, the likelihood of forming a lengthy, mutually enjoyable relationship greatly improves. If the aspiring superintendent's values are insightful and enlightening, and the school board is open to attempting a new or different concept that produces improved results – i.e. trusting a seeming misfit's solution that works – success is also attained and the relationship should improve. There will always be areas of divergence. If either party is unwilling to consider, research, negotiate, and/or tolerate plans or activities different from their own, then a true misfit relationship exists that possibly will override other areas of fit. An underlying question posed by this study asks, is race a negative – a misfit's penalty – that must be counterbalanced by multiple other areas of fit? Does an African American male's race

override all the other educational leadership expertise he may bring to a school district? What are the experiences of African American male superintendents with fit and misfit perceptions among school districts in this particular Midwest state?

The Rooney Rule

The NFL publicizes the Rooney Rule as an attempt to give African American head coach aspirants an opportunity to meet and share their qualifications with team owners. This came about because the NFL is another institution in which African Americans have traditionally considered incapable of leadership (Collins, 2007). The Rooney Rule requires team owners, with the consequence of a financial fine, to interview an African American head coach aspirant prior to hiring a new head coach, thus encouraging a momentary pause in *Good-ole'-boy* network hiring while others share their expertise in an interview setting. Many sports aficionados profess that historically team owners did not believe African American men had the intellect and skill to successfully execute the multifaceted challenges of leading a football team to a national championship, or to be the public representative and face of the team to its White fan base (Collins, 2007). It was to their surprise that two African American coaches led teams to face each other in the 2005 Super Bowl, having defeated all of the White head coaches in their divisions. However, although the league now has some African American head coaches, the hiring of African Americans for top NFL leadership positions is slow. "… Blacks' ability positively to affect hiring beyond what a white peer might do is highly dependent on where they are in the hierarchy. When not in the head coach or CEO role, blacks may be even more constrained than their white counterparts in hiring blacks" (Hill & Thomas, 2010, p. 34). African Americans are even penalized for hiring anyone other than European American males, according to research by Johnson and Hekman (2016) with more than 350 executives as study participants.

Participants rated nonwhite managers and female managers as less effective when

they hired a nonwhite or female job candidate instead of a white male

candidate…managers were judged harshly if they hired someone who looked like

them, unless they were a white male (p. 3).

Agency, Structure, and Reflexivity

In sociology, there is a great debate regarding the definitions of agency, structure,

and how the two interrelate (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). For the purposes of this

phenomenological study, an agent is an individual – the African American male

superintendent – who exists within a social group and structure, employed by a particular

Midwest state's school system. This study will examine the superintendent's (agent's)

experiences (actions imposed upon, produced by, and existing around him) with the

hiring practices (social structure) of the Midwest state. The action and the ability of the

superintendents to act will be referred to as agency, based on Giddens (1984) and

Hewson (2010).

Agents act within a structure, whether the action is supportive to and reproductive of the

structure's current activity, or obstructive and transformative to the structure's current activity;

and an agent's action (agency) critically determines how the structure (society) evolves. Agents

draw upon their knowledge of the structure's past, present, and anticipated social context (i.e.

possible benefits and repercussions, constraints, supports, perceived capabilities, and

understandings) and internal and external limitations to determine their actions; they can always

decide to act or not, and the decision not to act is also an action. Thus, agents experience an

autonomy that is affected by their dependence on the structure, and their understanding of a

situation influences their agency (Metcalfe, Eich, & Castel, 2010). These African American male

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superintendents' experiences will impact their feelings of self-determination and agency based on their dependence on the social structures of school boards, employment networks, and the field of educational leadership. However small or great, their agency will impact the same structures.

Agency.

Hewson (2010) describes three types of agency: individual, proxy, and collective. Individual agency is when the agent takes action in his/her own self-interest. Proxy agency is the agent's action for the benefit of others (i.e. other African American superintendents, the students and communities they can benefit, or the field of education as a whole). Collective agency is when a group of people act in tandem (i.e. professional organization or social movement). Intentionality, power, and rationality are three properties that give rise to human agency. (Intentionality is the purposeful goal of the action; power refers to the resources and abilities that can be brought to bear for the cause; and rationality refers to the wisdom and sensibility motivating actions.)

Unfortunately, people tend to underestimate their dependence on the structure and overestimate their autonomy, especially when under stress or when they reach their desired outcome (Wegner, 2003). Yet, despite this misperception, agents do have causal power to reproduce or alter social practices; neither the structure nor the agent can be fully understood when studied in isolation, because agency and structure co-create and are co-dependent upon each other (Dreier, 2008, 2009).

Structure.

There have been many contributors to the concept of social structure and agency. Friedrich Nietzsche maintained that people made choices and decisions based on their perception of the power they could gain or retain within the social system (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Karl Marx also contended that the social structure (values and principles) of the middle class entrepreneurs, the bourgeoisie, was the main influence on and regulator of the people (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Thus the popular social structure, which referred to both material and cultural ideologies, traditions, and norms, can act to the detriment of the majority – especially the other classes. Structural fundamentalists such as Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Auguste Comte, and Talcott Parsons compare society to a living organism with a balance between agency and structure, exploring the question of whether social structures determine individuals' behavior or whether their actions and feelings of self-determination (agency) determine their behavior. A question related to this study is, how does the social structure, especially hiring practices, influence the feelings of self-determination or agency of the African American superintendents? How do their experiences cause these superintendents to adapt to the environment in order to survive? What holds the superintendents together with society and their immediate school communities? How do their experiences support the continued existence of the very structure (Durkheim, 1977; Simmel, 1896)?

Two prominent theorists emphasized the concept of combining structure with agency: Anthony Giddens (Structuration Theory) and Pierre Bourdieu (Practice Theory). Giddens (1984) argues that structure sets the rules and competencies agents use to determine their agency (actions upon their decisions about self-determination, confidence, ability to control their destiny), so that the social structure is both the medium and outcome of their agency. Bourdieu

(1977, 1990) posits that the existing social structure is already embedded in the agents' decisions; thus there is an external display of relationships within the structure, and a structural internalization/amalgamation of the agents' external actions. A more historic figure, Georg Simmel (1896), espouses the idea that agents and structures have a wide array of responses available but can only act after the other's response; and contemporary researcher Baker (2005) suggests that the structure versus agency debate can be viewed as a socialization versus autonomy issue, and actions conform or are contrary to current structural trends.

Whether social structure is naturally or socially constructed, created by powerful elites or economic systems, established by competition or cooperation, transformation of the structure must take place in order for the structure to remain. Regardless of the most precise theory, the significant concept is that agents – the superintendents – are part of a social structure that constrains and enables, shapes and is shaped by their actions. What are those constraints and enablements, and how were the superintendents shaped? What routines have become institutionalized features of the social structure – the school system(s) – via tradition, custom, and/or habit (Giddens, 2010)? What structural actions are sustained by purposeful day-to-day decisions, given that routine social practices are not coincidental, but are purposeful actions by agents within the structure (Stones, 2005, 2012)? What actions within the structure are purposefully maintained (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990)?

Reflexivity.

The ability for an agent to alter his/her place in the social structure is termed reflexivity. This ability is said to have increased with globalization and the 'post-traditional' society, as well as with greater political-, social-, and self-knowledge. In the terms of Anthony Giddens, reflexive monitoring of actions refers to the agent's ability to monitor his/her actions, evaluate

their results, and rationally adjust future actions for optimal benefit to the agent within the structure/organization.

Agentic and communal behavior.

When considering prototypical leadership behaviors, the agentic approach is the approach most highly associated with the superintendent leadership position and CEO business expectations. However, research has found that this is only the case for European American males and African American females. African American males are stereotyped as aggressive and are better received when they are seen as more communal (Associated Press, 2009; Livingston, 2009). Even though the agentic leadership style is most commonly expected, communal leadership behaviors are most often recommended for successful leadership in organizations (Carli & Eagly, 1999). As the lived experiences of African American male superintendents are researched through this study, the superintendents' agency will be discussed along with the hiring structure and reflexivity involved.

Chapter Summary

This literature review presented an introduction and overview of themes, concerns, and former experiences of superintendents and educational scholars that may provide greater understanding to the central research question: What are the lived experiences of African American male superintendents with a particular Midwest state's hiring process? It summarized previous findings concerning the role and responsibilities of a superintendent, the mass firings of African Americans during the Civil Rights Era, and their effect on the current lack of role models, mentors, and the decimation of African American educator professional organizations and networks. It explored the tenets of CRT and identified how African Americans generally, and African American superintendents specifically, have experienced many of those tenets in the

past in Texas, New York, the Southern United States, Virginia, and North Carolina. It reviewed some of the theory regarding psychological, subconscious, implicit, and explicit motivations involving African Americans in the hiring process and employment decisions. This section also highlighted the Rooney Rule and its relationship to superintendent hiring. It reviewed the sociological foundations for examining the relationship of agency, structure, and reflexivity in the superintendent hiring process, and agentic and communal leadership styles. And finally, it provided a baseline that current superintendents, especially those in the Midwest state of this study, can use to compare and contrast with their experiences and present information from which new questions and inquiries can be drawn.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Procedures and Research Strategy

In this study, the entire population of African American male superintendents of a

Midwestern state was invited to share their experiences with the state's hiring practices and

procedures via a qualitative interview process. This study employed qualitative research because

it is the best tool for examining, understanding, and revealing the complexity and nuances of the

lived experiences of these superintendents in the state's hiring practices and processes. Secondly,

the magnitude of the academic and social benefit to public school students and stakeholders is an

issue of moral sense, purpose, and significance, and the qualitative research narrative is best

suited to empower individuals and affect the systems involved.

Characteristics of a Phenomenological Strategy

Phenomenological research has its roots in the early 20th century with philosophers such

as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre (Smith,

2013). Edmund Husserl (1917) proposed that each moment is a moment of "stupendous

happenings" (p. 1) and the employment of phenomenology is to strive to understand every

feeling, desire, and behavior of that moment as experienced by the original participants. The

responsibility of a phenomenological researcher, then, is to:

> …view the belief; … analyze its immanent character; … follow its possible
>
> coherences, especially those of grounding; … study in pure reflection what takes
>
> place in transitions to fulfilling insight, what is preserved of the meant sense in

> such transitions, what the fullness of intuition brings to this sense, what alteration
>
> and enrichment so-called evidence contributes, and whatever advances are made
>
> by what, in this connection, is called 'attaining Objective truth through insight'
>
> (Husserl, 1917, p. 35).

Therefore, phenomenologists have always stood for the importance of examining not only how a phenomenon appears to an individual subject, but also how the phenomenon is present to an intersubjective community (Zahavi, 2001). The phenomenologist transmits experiences of a phenomenon into a thick and rich description of what many call the universal essence, a description consisting not only of what they experienced but also how they experienced it (the experience's structures) to adequately describe the phenomena (Linsenmayer, 2011).

This study employed a phenomenological strategy in order to capture the experiences of the state's African American superintendents as they were involved in, and with, the hiring process (i.e. preparation and application, search agent relationship development, interview process, school board members, etc.). Additionally, phenomenology was used by the author to view the beliefs of the participants, understand their perspectives and professional experience within the phenomena, analyze the make-up of the phenomena, share the phenomena's foundations, and encourage reflection on the practices resulting from the phenomena in order to seek and attain the "objective truth." The phenomena considered are the reasons for the difference between the number of African American superintendents and the demographics of the state, and the experiences of the superintendent hiring processes as viewed by the existing African American superintendents.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is Critical Race Theory. Critical Race

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Theory was selected because it encourages open discussion of race and discrimination as a major element of daily life in the United States. The stories of minority and/or disenfranchised population members can reveal a variety of situations and circumstances that often go unnoticed by the majority and unaddressed by the apathetic or narcissistic. Sharing insights from all vantage points expose unintended consequences, disclose intended inequities, define problems of implementation, and call for the equitable provision of societal benefits, burdens, and opportunities (Rawls, 1971) in order to reach better agreement on defining, attaining, and maintaining equity.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in the study is that of an interviewer and interpreter, with no prior knowledge of or relationship with the study participants. The researcher also has no experience in the hiring practices of a superintendency, but has at times felt similar to 22.1 percent of the superintendents identified in Glass, Bjork, and Brunner's (2000) study – a feeling that a factor hindering advancement was the gatekeepers' perception of one's inability to be a strong leader; a feeling that institutional racism exists. It is therefore acknowledged that an inspirational factor behind this study is the question whether other highly credentialed, experienced, and aspiring African American superintendents have encountered similar barriers to those of the researcher.

Secondly, being a highly educated African American male aspiring to the superintendency, the researcher holds some feelings of insider cultural relationship to the study participants (emic). However, having only media awareness of the study participants and no formal relationship with them, the superintendent network, or superintendent hiring practices, the researcher only has an outsider's knowledge of the phenomenon (etic). Due to the preliminary findings documented in the literature review, the researcher anticipates finding some amount of

public prejudice as a continuation of historic practices (Maznevski, 2013; Morris et al., 1999; Sinkpvics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008; Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013). However, regardless of findings, the researcher will strive to maintain a balanced emic and etic perspective via a broad review of literature, study participant member-checking, and oversight from the researcher's dissertation committee.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

The study's statement of purpose and research question is clear, overt, and unambiguous to both the participants and the researcher. All sponsorship and affiliations are publicized, and no intentions are hidden. In the Procedures Section, all Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines were followed. Neither participants nor their identities were placed at risk. Thoughtfulness was given to interview protocol, and the researcher's ethical code priorities were communicated to all participants.

Furthermore, consideration was used to protect participants' confidentiality, data accuracy and validation, data ownership, and data storage. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the steps taken to insure confidentiality include the purposeful masking of the number of study participants, state involved, and the districts' demographic data, since this data can lead to participant identification and place them at risk professionally. The attribution of quotes and naming locations in participants' pasts has also been veiled to protect participant confidentiality, due to politically sensitive and controversial statements. Honesty, as opposed to suppression, falsification, or the invention of information, was used in the presentation of the study's findings. Complete information, as opposed to partial, was always presented and available to avoid false or deceptive data manipulation. Authorship credit and acknowledgements were conferred on those deserving credit. Duplicate copies were not published, and preview copies of the study

were provided for all study participants.

Interview Protocol

All interviews were held at the participants' offices or in mutually agreed upon locations convenient for the participant. Interviews were held for approximately 60 minutes in length in order not to create an undue burden of time on the participants. Interviews were recorded on a portable digital audio recorder with the participants' knowledge and permission via written and spoken request and instructions. Interviews contained icebreaker questions followed by the main research question, and probing questions, to create a conversational flow of focused information. (See Appendix A for Superintendent Background Questionnaire and interview protocol.) Wait time was provided for contemplation. A sincere expression of gratitude for their time and involvement concluded each interview, per Creswell (2007) and Jacob and Furgerson (2012).

Because of the limited numbers of African American superintendents in each state, and possible repercussions from a multitude of sources, the confidentiality of the state and superintendents was given the highest priority. Identifying the number of superintendents could reveal the state, the participants' districts or personal backgrounds and thus identify the individual superintendent. Therefore, although the findings are from direct interview quotes, they are not attributed to a specific superintendent or number of superintendents.

Data Collection Procedures

Initial data were collected through a review of the participants' resumes, questionnaire responses, and district and community media sources. The primary source of data was a semi-structured interview that began with a focus on specific aspects of the processes and practices and allowed participants to reveal their lived experiences, insights, and views beyond any preconceived expectations of the researcher. The structured portion of the interview was centered

on direct answers toward the research question, while the unstructured portion of the interview focused on any topic-related discussion with the participant. The researcher also recorded and coded all topic-related conversation to locate the participants' themes, interests, and references (Creswell, 2009), confirm participants' words and perspectives, and verify plausibility through member-checking (Carlson, 2010; Harper & Cole, 2012). Follow-up interviews were scheduled to gain clarification and/or more information on areas of concern as well as to confirm understanding of initial data collected. Preview copies of the study were provided to all participants as a further check of accuracy of their statements and intent.

Why Certain Forms of Data Were Used

The type of data collected was spoken answers to interview questions and significant body language and vocal expressions denoting emotional responses. Observations and/or visual depictions of the hiring process were not a part of this study, as these are a reflection of historical phenomena. Any documents made available by the participants (i.e. journal entries, emails, job offer/acceptance letters, job filled/ rejection correspondence, etc.) was accepted and recorded in the study findings.

Protocols for Recording Data

The protocols for recording the data included the use of a handheld digital recorder to record the speech of the participants and handwritten notes taken during the interview to record any body language and non-verbal communication deemed pertinent to the study. Reflective notes of the researcher's personal and speculative understandings, as well as any known demographic data of others involved in the hiring process (i.e. screening and/or interview committee/personnel) are also included in the study findings per guidance from Bogdan and Biklen (1992). All participant identification data and notes will remain confidentially stored for

the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) time period, and then destroyed per IRB requirements.

Data Organization

The researcher used five processes to organize the data collected, per Creswell (2007, 2009) and Rossman and Rallis (1998). The five processes were: 1) data preparation, 2) data analysis – abstraction, 3) data understanding and comprehension, 4) data reporting and representation, and 5) data interpretation.

Data preparation and coding.

During and immediately after the face-to-face, semi structured interviews, the researcher prepared the data for the study. The interviews were transcribed from the audio recording. The transcription lines were numbered, and each topic discussed in the interview was highlighted and color-coded. Topics discussed by multiple study participants were assigned similar color-codes for ease in compilation. All of the topics were categorized based on five categories (1) general *a priori* data, (2) *a priori* data related to CRT tenets, (3) *a priori* data related to CRT themes, (4) emergent themes that could be generalized throughout the field, and (5) emergent themes that may be unique to the particular Midwest state where the study took place. Documents and reference material provided by the participants' school districts were reviewed. Foss and Waters (2003) define and suggest the use of coding in the analysis and interpretation of the data. The coding process classifies emerging categories of information collected from the participant interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The development of codes on the bases of CRT tenets and themes, in addition to emerging themes, was used in order to capture the participants' lived experiences and answer the research question.

Data analysis or abstraction.

After data preparation, the researcher examined the data for pertinent sub-themes, concepts, impressions, beliefs, thoughts, analogies, images and word pictures; further coding and grouping those statements for efficient identification. Various levels of analysis were used as determined by the statements and trends that emerge in the examination of the data gathered from the interviews. Interim analysis, the process of continually gathering, scrutinizing, evaluating, and interpreting data for understanding and meaning during a research study, was employed until an acceptable level of understanding was gained. Memoing, i.e. the documentation and consideration of the researcher's reflective notes during the research process, was employed. Diagramming and mapping was also used to illustrate networks, clarify relationships, and assist visual learners in understanding concepts revealed in the study.

Data understanding, interpretation, and reporting.

The researcher conducted follow-up interviews and telephone conversations, and used other correspondence and communication methods to clarify and confirm the existence of the discovered themes, the participants' meanings and intent, and all information of interest to the research study. The researcher also provided the participants with a pre-release narrative of the findings to allow them to confirm the accuracy of their data – conduct member checking, sanction confidentiality, and suggest any additions, corrections, or clarifications.

Once the data were comfortably understood, the researcher communicated the feelings, desires and intentions of the participants in their language, jargon, and verbiage as clearly and accurately as possible, presenting the data in narrative form with minimal charts, tables, and figures.

The basis for interpreting the analysis was the context presented by four main areas of the study, the literature review, the perceived intention of the participants, the researcher's personal

experiences, and the framework of critical race theory. The literature review established a foundation for interpretation based on previous studies. The perceived intention of the participants was achieved via thorough examination of the statements and report they provided and confirmed, as well as the frequency and prominence of themes coded and credibility of their lived experience to which they attested. The personal experiences of the researcher provided an avenue to establish understanding and any transferability to the general field of educational leadership. Finally, the researcher looked at the findings through the theoretical lens of critical race theory to make meaningful, additional use of the data gathered.

Strategies for Validating Findings

The protocol the researcher used for establishing qualitative reliability included member checking by each participant and the provision of a pre-release, preview copy to each participant. Additionally, the researcher has noted any possibility of personal bias. Furthermore, based on the general impression set by the literature review, both positive and discrepant information from the participants was included in the coding, themes, and findings.

Narrative Structure

Concluding the study is a narrative surmising the lived experiences of the participants, with and in the hiring processes and practices for a public school superintendent position. The narrative presents multiple viewpoints and perspectives, themes, events, and descriptions, with the goals of identifying both particular distinctions and broad generalizable theories and explaining how the distinctions and broad theories coalesce with current theories and the general literature on the topic (Creswell, 2009).

Chapter 4: Findings

This section introduces the findings from the data gathered in the interviews. It is divided into sub-headed categories that identify the themes from study participants' interviews. The *a priori* assumption that African American educational leaders often face unique challenges based on race is reasonably deduced from the literature review. Exploration of this possibility was specifically sought from the interview data. Although there are themes, ideas, and statements that overlap multiple categories, the interview data bears much information concerning many aspects of the research question – What are the lived experiences of the African American male superintendents with a particular Midwest state's superintendent hiring practices? The findings are categorized as follows:

1. Position Preparation and Skill Sets

2. Getting the Job – The Hiring Process

3. Psychological and Sociological Experiences

4. Challenges Within the State

Position Preparation and Skill Sets

Of initial interest is the background and skill set of these superintendents. Do the superintendents feel that they meet the expectations discussed in the industry's professional literature? Do they possess the appropriate standard skill set? Do they have appropriate goals for their students and their districts? Was their training appropriate for them to enter the pipeline to the superintendency, and what are their reasons for seeking the position? These questions were

the first addressed in understanding their experiences as African American superintendent.

Superintendent Backgrounds

School leadership scholars have identified five fluid roles as being necessary for contemporary superintendents. The hiring process involves board members knowing this information and feeling confident that their desired candidate is the best person at fulfilling these roles with a leadership style that is conducive to employees and to the community. On the other side of the coin, prospective superintendent candidates must be able to fulfill the roles and be convinced that the school district organization and community will accept and follow their leadership.

When interviewing superintendents for this study, it was generally brought to the researcher's attention – through both the districts' media and the superintendents themselves – that their preparation for the position enabled them to sufficiently address the five roles of (a) teacher/scholar, (b) manager, (c) democratic leader, (d) applied social scientist, and (e) communicator. To remain fluent in the field, all of the participants indicated continuing professional development through mentoring, professional affiliations, conference attendance, formal education pursuits, and/or similar development activities.

In terms of leadership style and the four elements of transformational leadership – individual care for followers, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation toward the work, and ethical influence – some of the participants related stories indicating aspects of their leadership styles when they were initially seeking the position.

A phrase analysis of the interview transcriptions indicated that one of the most frequent phrases spoken by these gentlemen was "make sure your heart is in the right place," referring to an altruistic reason for seeking the superintendent position. Although superintendent is a

prestigious and lucrative position, virtually all of these gentlemen spoke of care for and dedication to their students and communities as the primary reason to seek the position, rather than prestige, income, or other benefits to themselves. Thus the motivations, goals, achievements, and challenges can all be kept in proper perspective. Other evidence of instructional scholarship, organizational management, democratic leadership, sociological expertise, and communication was presented to the researcher via superintendent interactions and district media, and will be discussed throughout the findings section of this study.

Superintendent Goals, District Needs, and Definitions of Success

Another finding from the study was the goals and purposes of superintendents in their initial and continuing quest to locate, define, publicize, and satisfy the needs of their districts. From the interviews, some of the men in the study suggested that many districts may not think an African American superintendent would relate well to the goals and purposes of a majority European American school district. However, the superintendents believed that some school board members lean toward that decision without knowing what the superintendents' actual goals and purposes are. This section identifies how study participants describe enacting their personal and district goals.

One superintendent said, "I think I can make universal change and impact student learning," and, "I love being able to impact their growth for the future, and creating systems that I can manage to ensure students' lifelong success. That's where my passion is." Another representative statement was "I'm just doing it to provide opportunity to kids who don't have access to success, who don't have the stability in their homes to overcome all that life is going to throw at them." Even though many of the districts led by these men face financial challenges, a common priority was to work on the finances but keep students first. "My number one goal is to

improve student scores, because that's why we're here. That's our main mission, to make sure that our students are career and college ready." There was no discussion during the interviews concerning test bias or the correlation of test scores with career and college completion. There was talk by multiple superintendents about setting goals and preparing students for life, in ways that are not all academic. "…it's more than just the academics …" "I would be lying if I told you it was all academics." "My work exceeds that of someone who's just focusing on academics…It's how do you respond to the needs of your community. And that's what a superintendent is. If it was just as simple as academics, we could deal with that, but what are those other areas that impact student achievement? So, my job is to minimize or eliminate those so that academics can take place." This was echoed by superintendents in both rural and urban school districts.

Although test scores are not paramount, the superintendents realize that the state and public value test scores; thus they seek to help their students improve in areas of evaluation and state requirements. Speaking of his district's goals both to eliminate a financial crisis and increase student achievement, one superintendent said, "Most of the focus was on our deficit, but our business is educating students – putting them on the pathway for college and a career. So as we were dealing with our deficit we were still working on our academic side."

When it comes to determining district needs, one participant said, both practicing superintendents and candidates examining a district must go deeper than the parents and community businesses that show up at interview sessions, 'Meet & Greets', or parent meetings. If you want to find the district needs, explore the areas where the greatest needs are typically found.

"The parents that we're basing our decisions on are typically the best parents. And

> so, how do you get to those parents who you're not touching? And those are the
> opinions that I want because if you're trying to problem-solve, the people who are
> already present are accounted for. But the issues you're seeking to resolve are for
> people who are absent, if that makes sense. And I'd just ask the question with
> great specificity. I'd be candid about whatever it is."

Additionally, when setting district goals, the study participants advocated defining success in terms of meeting the needs. "Success is relative." The superintendents went on to describe the possible definitions of success as increasing enrollment, reducing or eliminating a deficit, increasing student achievement, creating ownership of the district by the community, maintaining local control by establishing financial stability and growth, and/or other things. Success was whatever the district needed.

> "My community had turned its back on the district. So to be celebrated by the
> community, to me, is a milestone. When they said, 'forget the schools; let them
> close,' prior to my coming. I think every situation is different. I couldn't speak to
> the other districts, because I'm not there. I'm going to determine success by our
> progress in reaching the objectives we've set."

> Therefore, in many districts, counteracting things that detract from learning (i.e. creating

community ownership and partnerships, fiscal management to ensure proper supplies despite a lower per capita student allocation from the state, and developing effective attendance and truancy programs) is an accomplishment even if academic gains are minimal. One key concept here, though, is that the key goal of these men was to benefit the students. The academic progress, financial stability, improved test scores, and other important and necessary concerns all are viewed in relation to students being the chief priority.

In addition to reaching many pre-academic, pre-instructional, or educational preparatory goals, and along with community development and community service-related goals, the superintendents address the entire continuum of district needs. One superintendent conducted a total K-12 curriculum overhaul, developed a Professional Learning Community, implemented a common assessment cultural change, created an alternative grading system/practice within his district, put into operation a major school year calendar change, and established community and university partnerships and a college satellite campus hub. He also organized and offered parent training classes, and ran a victorious community bond approval campaign. Additionally, he built new and improved existing district facilities; he negotiated three open union contracts within his first months of being hired, tripled student scores on a state assessment, raised the educational level of his schools in the state, and increased rigor expectations of the staff and the culture of a district. Other study participants produced similar results toward meeting their districts' goals. When one particular superintendent discussed the benefit he could provide virtually any school district, he replied, "I know my skill set is transferable."

Including some of the items mentioned above, one superintendent reported doubling, and one tripling, enrollment and expanded school choice attendance boundaries. One sought financial expertise and assembled instruction and education leaders to improve academic deficiencies. Many eliminated huge financial deficits, removed ineffective teachers, principals, and programs, and turned community support around – one turnaround was from three defeated millage proposals. Additionally, with very limited community resources and less than desirable initial community involvement, they have maintained local control for districts that were very close to being taken over by the state, and turned the trajectory of student academic progress and community involvement, even though most began their leadership in a negative financial and/or

academic situation.

Each superintendent highlighted his individual district's accomplishments as key points of pride. Each of the superintendents employed his individual leadership and communication styles along with his board and district strengths and talents in accomplishing these points of pride, and downplayed the barriers he had to overcome.

"We focus on families because we talk about helping children but if the families are hurting healing needs to take place. Job fairs that are family friendly, turkey give-aways [we gave away 1,000 turkeys] – for me the work can't clearly be defined…If it was just as simple as academics, we could deal with that, but what are those other areas that impact student achievement?"

Superintendents also thought it was helpful to share the fact that their job, especially in some of the urban districts, far exceeded the work needed just in the school buildings. A collection of quotes and paraphrases illustrating this point include: "I spoke at a church Saturday. Everybody's situation is different." "I'm a dealer in hope." "You must know how to deal with embezzlement, people stealing equipment, I mean, all of the non-academic issues."

"You must be able to work with your local congressmen to make sure that budgets that are proposed work in your favor. You need to know how to lobby those folks to communicate your concerns. You also have to work with the local influencers in your community, because if those people aren't with you then many of your initiatives or ideas just won't come to fruition."

"… no matter what you do, do not deviate from your mission. So, everything that's done, every decision that's made, has to always lead back to the mission." And,

"…have a firm commitment to improving the lives of others – [*whether they're*

> Black, White, poor, affluent]…make sure that your heart is in the right place and
> that you're doing it to help students realize their potential and accomplish their
> dreams and aspirations."

One superintendent said his work exceeds that of someone whose sole focus is on academics, because "…Without strong, vibrant, African American communities, … we will not be able to develop our young men, and now even our young women, to become the leaders, or people, that God intended them to be." Two superintendents spoke specifically of involving themselves not just in the school buildings, property, budgets, and reputation, but in multiple aspects of the community. So much so that the author inquired about a mayoral ambition; this was not a current consideration.

> "Initially, I had a goal, that at 40, I was going to become the superintendent of our
> state's largest school district. At 45, I was going to go to the state capital and
> become the state superintendent. And at 50, I was going to become the U.S.
> Secretary of Education. Working in my previous school district of the state
> changed my outlook….because it's not about the work. It's about you becoming
> the mayor of a district, as opposed to becoming the superintendent."

These tasks are just some of the representative things this group of educational leaders report as having accomplished – not intended to accomplish, but actually accomplished. The superintendents spoke of forging great working relationships with their school boards, support unions, community members, politicians, parents, and others, as well as making a difference in the school districts they lead. One superintendent related a quote from a board member that he "might be the best superintendent we've had since they could remember." Another superintendent related of his community, "They say, 'we have a superintendent who's doing

great things for the school and for the community.'" Some of the superintendents spoke of overcoming challenging relationships with board members and board politics, conflicting viewpoints as to how certain goals could/should be addressed, and learning how and where to market their ideas. Other superintendents voiced their opinion of having a great mutual understanding with their board from the very start.

Referring to the superintendents' mention of political management of the board/ superintendent relationship, nearly 60% of the study participants identified a general way to build communication and relationship-building techniques they use with their boards. They strive to keep all members informed equally, but also work to get to know the interests, strengths, and key concerns of each individual member; and although all members are kept informed, when decisions must be made in a member's key concern area, that member is definitely consulted and satisfied prior to any voting that must take place. Some participants related that they still take time to consult their mentors and/or other advisors to ensure the use of tact and comfort in political endeavors, since understanding and operating within the politics (power of influence) of an organization is a necessary part of leadership. For example, one superintendent planned on retiring from his district. Instead of simply making a public announcement, he consulted his mentors to determine if a certain protocol should be followed – such as informing his board president privately first, or the entire board privately but simultaneously. Should the information be relayed in writing or orally? What should the timeline of the information rollout look like? He was concerned about any political or cultural etiquette that should be followed, and tactfulness in approaching the topic, because business and non-profit public services may have different mores. One superintendent specifically mentioned the benefit he gained by learning to work within the established political structure. On the other hand, some despise looking at their relationships with

their boards like an art or strategic action. One superintendent said, "I'm not in there to play a political game. So, at the end of the day I'm going to make my recommendation. I'm going to defend it. But just trying to get four votes is ludicrous." This superintendent expressed his view that some people look upon their positions more as opportunities to showcase their power and authority rather than opportunities to benefit the students and community. His goal was not to just get four board members to vote his way, but to share the importance of a need and remedy for the district so that all the board members and community see it, understand it, and unify to resolve issues and meet goals. It is also noteworthy that the particular superintendent who made this statement was sought by the district, looks at his role as his personal mission to help his community, is very involved in much more than the academic growth of his students, and has completely turned around the school system. Completely turned around in this case means tripling the district's enrollment and school of choice program, significantly involving the community in the schools, influencing his community to vote to pass a formerly rejected millage, leading his district out of financial jeopardy of state emergency management, and improving his district's academic scores and prominence in the state's post-K-12 educational institutions.

The task, duties, functions, and practices of these superintendents align very well with those described in the literature review. As teacher/scholar and manager, these men have been the instructional leaders of their systems, crafting academic growth through various systems and people, as indicated by district information concerning state standardized test scores. As communicators, collectively these men – although few in number – provide and facilitate accurate, pertinent, and timely information to the continuum of stakeholders within their districts, as evidenced by local media reports and district website information. And as democratic leaders and social scientists, these men continually fashion conflicting agendas, desires, and

means into focused, efficient programs that support the collaborated vision of the district, as evidenced by school board meeting minutes, district reports, and superintendent self-reports.

A demonstration of one superintendent's instructional leadership is the assembling of renowned academic leaders from the state teachers' union, the state's department of education, area university professors, and the school district's instructional staff to address the academic issues of the district very shortly after his employment with the district as superintendent. An academic achievement plan was developed to move the students forward. Another superintendent instituted the district's overhaul, creation, and implementation of a new curriculum, better aligned horizontally, vertically, and with state standards. Other superintendents worked with their school building administrators to improve instructional practices, monitor particular standards to improve academic progress, and address district fiscal needs, allowing quality instruction to take place and improve.

As communicators, one superintendent stressed the importance of actively seeking parents' involvement from those traditionally absent or excluded from the system – parents of at-risk students. His goal was to meet their needs as much as possible for the sake of providing opportunities to the students. Another superintendent has his district's website allow for email concerns to be returned or addressed within a period of three days or sooner. District activities are publicized on their web pages; contact pages provide easy access for community members to ask questions. Local politicians and business owners are frequently contacted to keep them informed of the district's needs and benefits to the community.

As democratic leaders and social scientists, these superintendents often advocate for school district and student concerns, as well as suggestions to shape community and societal understanding toward educational ideals. One superintendent frequently urges state congressmen

and local stakeholders to align their policies and resources with public education and district

needs. A different participant devotes as much time as he can to attending a large variety of

community events, speaking, networking, and building relationships. Though this activity

increases influence, which in turn broadens his resource base, he does it out of simple care for

people and his community. More than one superintendent successfully involved stakeholders and

media resources in promoting acceptance of district bond requests.

When considering their similarities, differences, strengths and weaknesses, one

superintendent actually listed his strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of his term to help

determine where supplemental help was needed. He then assembled a team of advisors to

address the various areas and met with them regularly, as a team and/or individually, as needed.

Multiple superintendents began or continued doctoral, post-graduate, certificate, or academic

programs to strengthen areas of need in their districts and/or to communicate more effectively

with subordinate administrators that specialized in different district departments. Others sought

support/advice from mentors and associate superintendents within their personal networks and/or

various state educational associations. The researcher's observations and views of agency will be

discussed later, however, although a range of differences was visible. A common theme is that

all of these men found individual methods to fulfill their occupational tasks and move their

districts forward according to some definition of success. The exasperating questions they ask

and experiences they face are: will they make the academic and financial progress that both the

state and the community desire prior to state department involvement via any state intervention

(glass cliff edge #1); community disruptions such as economic changes or new board member(s')

directional change (glass cliff edge #2); and/or personal burnout of physical or mental limits

(glass cliff edge #3). In the Midwest state of the study, of the last three African American male

superintendents to leave the field, one retired with his district in very good financial and academic standing and was replaced by a European American superintendent; one moved his district into better, but still financially and academically deficient, standing but felt there was nothing more he could do (according to a study participant); and one retired with medical challenges after greatly improving the district which still also needed academic work and although it had made progress toward a financial plan, was still in a deficit financial situation. This third superintendent was also replaced by a European American superintendent. Two of these three are/were study participants and are reflected in the study's findings.

Acceptance into Superintendent Training Programs

In that admittance into training programs is significant to gaining entry to the superintendency, some interview questions addressed the superintendents' acceptance and participation in training. This state's superintendent training program accepted one of these men as an aspiring superintendent, and another as a novice superintendent. Training officials assisted one participant by presenting his qualifications to a school board as a prospective candidate. "I went through both my state's Superintendent Leadership Program and the state school board association's program. After you go through their programs – they're the ones that do most of the state's searches – if you're a graduate, they'll move you to get an interview. So, *getting an interview* wasn't hard for me."

Approximately thirty percent of the study participants received their doctoral degrees prior to receiving their superintendent position and thus participated in the degree's required formal training. A separate subset of another thirty percent of the study participants went through superintendent training with either the state's superintendent association and/or the state's school board association, and reported feeling supported and respected with no interview comments

mentioning overt discrimination. Those who did not receive doctoral or state training had similarly beneficial experiences in informal training with mentors and/or self-organized courses of study and activity. The formal training programs (academia and state superintendent's association) helped prepare candidates for the position and were said to be beneficial by those who participated in them, but were apparently not necessary for the majority of superintendents, who obtained the position without participation in these trainings. This information is important because it speaks to the necessity of a doctorate for obtaining the superintendency. Although it provides beneficial education, is a doctorate worth the investment for everyone, is it a good supplement, is it part of a tax non-European males must pay to enter the superintendency, or is it a mental pacifier to those who are not elite non-searchers and disconnected from a sufficient network?

Superintendent Pool and Pipeline

One underlying motivation for the research question was why are there so few African American superintendents throughout the entire nation? As this general topic entered the participants' conversation, one participant pointed to the drought/lack/ shortage of African American males in the field of education. One participant commented that, even though he went to school in a fairly large urban district, "I had one African American male teacher; he was my elementary school gym teacher. …When I went to junior high and high school, I did not have another African American male teacher. … Not one in junior high school or high school." A further participant also pointed out that,

> "When you look at the big picture of education, there are not that many African
> American males to begin with. Our school district, as an example, in two of our
> buildings, we do not have one African American male. I mean from the custodian

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to the principal. And I'm talking about an urban school district. To go beyond

that, if you talk about teachers, several buildings don't have one African

American teacher in the building. As far as principals…we did not have an

African American male principal at one of our high schools…We have an African

American male principal and assistant at one of the high schools and two out of

13 at the elementary schools are African American males. So, to begin with in

education, we don't have that many African American males to select from to

become superintendents."

One superintendent felt inspired to be the type of teacher and African American male role

model that could help the community, based on the few caring and involved teacher role models

he had during his school years. Another superintendent commented that, as an assistant principal,

he was the only African American employee in his school. A third superintendent mentioned that

he wanted his students to understand that if he could reach this level of leadership and success,

they could also. A fourth superintendent pointed out that typically there is a higher concentration

of African Americans in the Midwest's urban centers, reducing the superintendent-to-student

ratio found in the suburban and rural districts and further reducing the non-urban superintendent

pool of applicants and candidates cultivated in those areas.

Finally, there is the issue of employment appeal. An urban superintendent went on to say

that his college and graduate-degreed children, nieces and nephews, in discussions with him,

have said, "…for the money a superintendent makes, I can become an electrical engineer or a

mechanical engineer and make a lot more money without the headache. So, you see, our younger

people are moving in other directions, not toward education." None of the participants made

mention of the mass firings of African American teachers and principals after the Brown versus

Topeka Supreme Court case that greatly affected the educational environment for the generation of students that has now reached the average age of today's European American superintendents. Nor was the possible lack of African American role models mentioned due to the "with all deliberate speed" implementation of school segregation, or the change in respect and prestige that occurred when African American educators were removed/replaced/eliminated from admirable community roles via desegregation rulings such as the Moberly Missouri court case.

Why did they want to become a Superintendent?

The motivation for becoming a superintendent played a prominent role in many of the interviews. Multiple superintendents stressed their views and experiences on why the position should be pursued or accepted, and what their presence should convey. A succinct summary of what was found to be the reason these participants pursued the superintendency, their 'Why,' is their dedication to society via their students and communities. "Our promise to the students and community is to prepare the students…that's what our mission is. That's what drives us every day." Others said, "I believe in what's best for kids, not what's best for adults," and "our district's mission is to prepare students…So, when our kids graduate, they can either go to the military, an accredited vocational program, a two-year community college, or a four-year university."

More than one superintendent echoed the sentiment that you should not pursue this position unless you have a great desire to serve the students and community. One superintendent stated that he developed this attitude toward this mission through his African American mentor superintendent who, "…was relentless in the expectation that children, poor children, would be provided every opportunity that their birthright denied them." Another superintendent followed up on a board member's request to apply for the job "…because this district is home, and if I

work the rest of my life, I could never repay what this city or district has done for me and my family." He wants his neighbors' children to gain the same benefits, life experiences, and outlook opportunities that he had. Still another statement was to be an example and encouragement to those who may not identify themselves with success and/or leadership. He related a story he told an African American high school male in his district. "I want you to know that if I can do it, you can do it too. Because I know your mother's raising you like my mother raised me. I wear a shirt and tie; you can wear a shirt and tie…that's one of the reasons I came back." If the results of the Brown vs. Topeka, the Moberly Missouri, and similar court cases provided equitable opportunity to African American and other people of color, if the thousands of African American teachers and administrators were not fired, this type of statement would have been heard more often by hundreds of males for the past 50 years, increasing the pool of available superintendents and mental pool of problem-solvers in the country and around the world. This goal of bettering the world was a common theme among these African American superintendent study members.

Getting the Job – Hiring Practices

The second category of interview themes revolves around the superintendents getting their jobs. Did referrals, networking, or mentor input play a role in receiving interviews and job offers? How many superintendents worked with search agents, and what were their feelings and impressions of those interactions? Are the leadership styles of the superintendents agentic or communal, and did style make a difference? What were their pre-employment experiences and impressions? These types of data were explored in the interviews, and will be discussed here.

How did these Superintendents get their Jobs?

Another theme explored in this study is how the study participants got their jobs as

superintendents. Did networking help? Were search agents involved? How did they prepare for their interviews? Only one of the study participants received his position by applying cold, and even he had great references from a local, well-known and respected superintendent. The rest of the superintendents were contacted and/or applied through a search agent or board representative and had some sort of network connection – the elite job non-searcher as described in the literature review section of this study.

One superintendent said he got his job via a call from a search agent who said, "…that I'd be the perfect match…they hired me, and five years later, I'm still here." Another participant said, "I was contacted by this district to gauge my interest [*in the upcoming superintendent vacancy]*, so I didn't necessarily seek it. That's how that came about." His advice to aspiring superintendents was,

> "…find a place where your work can actually speak for you, where you'll create
>
> raving fans because of the work you're doing. That's the easiest way to get into a
>
> superintendency. If your good name precedes you, it's a lot easier because you go
>
> in with an advantage. They've heard something about you…You'll have a body
>
> of work that has resonated throughout the metropolitan area. And when they need
>
> to fill a vacancy…[*you'll be considered*]."

One of the superintendents told a story about a colleague who wanted to be superintendent in her local city. "…She had been waiting. She didn't know when that time was going to come. She just made sure that she was prepared for when the opportunity presented itself." When it did, she was ready, and she got it. He concluded with, "…you want to be prepared. The greatest thing you can do is have a name, and when your name comes from the work, they'll come find you." One superintendent said, "…I get contacted, quite often, by search

agents looking for superintendents, but I'm just goanna focus on doing the work, and then the opportunity will present itself and the Lord will move." Two of the superintendents interviewed were contacted by school board representatives and asked to apply.

In preparation for a superintendent interview and/or the interview process, one superintendent said, "I look at the data, the reviews for the schools. I'll talk to people I know…There are six degrees of separation. I'll call people. I try to find out what the issues are. So I have an idea about what I'm speaking to." He continued, "…the data doesn't always tell the story. So, I may ask questions to better understand the data [i.e. Here's what the data said, however,]. It makes you look insightful. But more important, you want to show them that you're a thinker. But for me, the greatest piece of information comes from interviewing people." Interviewing was this superintendent's greatest source of information because people tend to speak more candidly than they write. He could also ask immediate follow-up questions and gain information by non-verbal communication. From interviews, he could learn about situations that occurred, the personnel involved, and the history and circumstances surrounding them. He could also learn the perspective(s) of those interviewed and even generate questions to ask about the people who move the district and the direction in which it's moving.

Another superintendent said he and his peers would, "…research [*superintendent interview*] questions to be asked. We would talk to anybody that we knew who was interviewing for superintendent jobs and jot down any question they could remember and create an item bank of questions. Then we would prep and quiz each other." He continued, "…we would take on extra projects just so that we could learn and say we had some experience doing some of these things," and his superintendent/mentor would coach them, advise them, and established them in his network of peers. Those experiences helped him in interviews, and he is still in contact with

his network of peers and advisors even now.

These are several examples of informal networks that assisted the superintendents to gain their positions. Whether the network is established via an observer's opinion of a prospective candidate's work ethic, production and presentation in other vocational areas, or the network assists in finding meaningful information about the district and its personnel, the network provides added benefit to obtaining professional positions, and every network provides a different perspective and nuance to the position.

Networking within the Superintendent Ranks

The topic of networking is a major theme to be discussed in chapter 5. However, in terms of findings, this study revealed that during training, internships, mentoring, working in preparatory positions, and as practicing superintendents, many superintendents and aspiring superintendents develop professional and social networks that help them accomplish their work. One superintendent related that,

> "In the time that I worked [*under a former superintendent*] there were four of us
>
> who went on to become superintendents. So there's a network of friends I can call
>
> because we were all directors of some sort, in the same district and all shooting
>
> for the same goal, to become superintendent one day…We all stay connected and
>
> contact each other when we're having issues. I am routinely talking to
>
> superintendents, a lot of colleagues in this state, and in others. We've kind of
>
> branched out all over the place. We're always on the phone or text messaging
>
> each other."

Another superintendent pointed out quite clearly that "you have to have a network." A further superintendent commented, "Networking is important, but I'm not a traditional networker. I'm

not going out to deliberately meet people. I'll just go out – and there are these laws of attraction. The universe pushes the right people to you. – I'll just end up meeting people." Even cautions, warnings, and advice come through networks. One superintendent related, "this guy calls me from out of the blue and he said, 'Look, I got an emergency call from your superintendent, and he said to tell you…',", and thus the superintendents encourage other superintendents, "Don't sit there and be quiet, and then all of a sudden, you're on the ropes and you're looking for a job. Network with us now. Tell us what's going on."

Applicable to this study, African American male superintendents have been identified as being generally on the social network periphery of all but the financially and academically challenged school district administrators, and the existing European American male superintendent network system isn't always known by, revealed to, available to, or accessed by African American superintendents.

> "So there's a system that's built. Whereas most of your African American
>
> superintendents that are coming in don't necessarily fit into that system – they
>
> don't have that network. I didn't have that network. I developed that network a
>
> little bit with my superintendent, but that network didn't really exist for me. I
>
> think that's a lot of the difference when you get to that seat. It's what network
>
> brought you to that seat."

In the five comments above, one participant had developed a small network of three African American superintendents who share information, a second participant was an atypical networker allowing the laws of attraction to take place, another participant received information from an unknown member of his European American mentor's network, and another encouraged superintendents to share and gain from the experience, advice, and help from their networks. The

fifth comment adds clarification. The small network, not actively seeking relationships; the network that called with advice; and the one that encouraged participation were all networks that played a major role in getting the participants interviewed, considered, and hired. Perhaps other networks would play a major role in getting their members hired in other districts. That was clearly the understood intent of the fifth comment. But professional networks extend far beyond just providing employment information and recommendations. They provide necessary counsel and services also. The study superintendents were themselves part of multiple networks. The name of one such network that they all share is under consideration for a name change to express more openness and inclusion. It had been a formal network association of African American superintendents, but many have been replaced, and their European American superintendent replacements still need help and support servicing the students, therefore the leading suggestion is currently to change the name to represent urban superintendents.

Another superintendent explained a major role and benefit of networking that concerns employment advocacy.

"…most boards are Caucasian, across the state. So, when they hire, they're hiring similarities, and most superintendents are Caucasian so they already have this network of support that's just innately built into what they do in their system. So, if I'm the superintendent, and I'm hiring an assistant superintendent, and they look like, think like, are similar to me, when the district next door is looking for a superintendent, I'm already advocating for my guy."

Many superintendents interviewed described the power/influence a sitting superintendent has in the selection of a superintendent candidate, both in regard to the mentored experiences obtained and the sitting superintendent's endorsement, especially upon retirement of a

superintendent in good standing with the board. Furthermore, when search agents meet superintendent candidates through the professional network, or have previously worked with the candidate on projects sponsored by professional organizations, that network relationship forges greater confidence from the search agent to recommend the candidate to interested school boards. Many are faced with the stereotype, media branding, and the great unknown factor that unfamiliarity brings. Association with others, through network projects and influences, helps break down that unknown. As one superintendent mentioned, different networks brought people to the superintendent positions in different places.

As stated earlier, only one of the study participants applied for his position cold (without knowing anyone of influence in the district). All of the rest were asked to apply by either a school board member or a search agent (paid or unpaid representative of the school board). It is the search agent's responsibility to expediently find and bring highly qualified job candidates to the board. Since the window for finding and hiring top leadership candidates to work intimately within the organization is very short and very competitive, a benefit goes to the prospective candidate whose work, leadership capabilities, and leadership style speak for them quite clearly, well before the position is publicized. That happens through the network, peers informing each other that they're going to retire or move on, mentors informing protégés that a position is opening, established colleagues suggesting their associates be considered for the position, and respected superintendents recommending coworkers for advancement. If a network of professionals were committed to diversity, its leadership and members would cultivate access and inclusion of minorities. Hence the difference between mentoring and networking is that mentoring is the assistance and training for a less knowledgeable protégé by a more informed mentor with whom there is a single relationship/tie, while networking is an individual

getting/sharing information through a sometimes complex chain of relationships that may extend far beyond people known to the individual. The shared information from both networking and mentoring extends well beyond the mere acquisition of employment. It can encompass any area of concern to the participants such as strategic planning and concepts, resource acquisition and use, policy development and implementation, and management issues; however, the larger the network, the more network information sources one has, whereas a mentor not connected to a network has a reduced number of information sources.

Participation in local, county, state, and even national associations and organizations is essential. It allows others to formulate recommendations based on their work experience with prospective candidates. It strengthens familiarity and lessens the fear of the unknown. Participation in informal networks and associations such as those formed in country clubs, bridge and tennis groups, sporting associations and interests, children's activities, churches, synagogues, and other similar social settings all allow people to get to know the personalities, interests, and communication styles of others. Much of the *Good-ole'-boy* communication occurs because of informal conversations that take place at these gatherings, both planned and unplanned and sometimes purposely exclusive. When a study participant mentioned that it's common for a superintendent to advocate for his deputy superintendent especially if the deputy looks like, acts like, works like, and plays like him, he was referring to this aspect of networking. The referring superintendent feels that he knows his deputy intimately – what he would do, how he would respond in any situation – and that he would not regret, or be embarrassed after, recommending him. Also, when a study participant spoke of conversations taking place to which he was not privy, he denoted a network separate from the county meetings he attended.

One study participant hesitated to apply for a position because, based on the search agent,

he felt a candidate who was already known through the network was assured the position. This reaction was similar to African Americans not accepting invitations to interview per the NFL Rooney Rule, when a head coach is already selected prior to the interview currently being arranged. Though the Rooney Rule can be a promoter of meritocracy, it can also be camouflage for a cursory interview and a waste of time and resources for superficial displays of inclusion. One superintendent identified candidate advocacy as also occurring through the network of "who you know, who knows you, and what they think about you."

How do these search agents determine who to ask to apply? The network. One superintendent suggested arranging personal, informal meetings with prominent search agents to reduce barriers of the unknown. Why did the school boards have confidence in their references? Many of those providing a reference were known through their reputation in the network. Why were multiple conversations held among county superintendents excluding the African American superintendent? The network. Professional networks have in the past, and can continue to be tools of exclusivity that purposely maintain overt and covert institutional racism. Leaders of such organizations and gatherings have the power to influence positive or negative morality and equity. CRT's themes of the ordinariness of racism, the social construction of race, interest convergence, and the critique of camouflage programs all find their roots within each person's power to act and influence equity or inequity, and their actions can take place via networks.

Feelings of Differing Hiring Requirements

Findings in this study point out that all of the superintendents interviewed felt that there were differing requirements for superintendent applicants of color than for those of European descent, and the difference is not just in the applicants' credentials. Their feelings of difference also entailed acceptance by the school board. One participant revealed that a lack of experience

was the reason given for not advancing in the interview process, yet the candidate receiving the position had much less experience than the study participant. Another participant stated that it all comes down to board members' perspective. "A lot of it is just people's personal preference. So, I don't argue, I don't get stressed out about it anymore." Yet another said, "…you don't look at the children in the district, you look at the make-up of the school board," implying that a predominantly white school board would be less likely to hire an African American male. These and similar statements point not only to feelings of differing requirements, but ultimately to leadership categorization theory, the implicit qualifications that a board may have in mind for their leaders prior to interviewing candidates – a standard that they justify presenting to their prototype and withholding from their non-prototype.

In the same vein, two of the study's superintendents said, "They can do a cursory interview so they can check you off the list, but are they really going to give you serious consideration" and "we get a cursory look." The views and experiences of the study participants asserted the need for extra work, time, and/or credentials. One superintendent stated plainly, "I worked in two other states, and, I think just being African American, you're always conscious of the issue of race and that 'double tax'; you've got to work twice as hard to be considered half as good." Concerning credentials, a different superintendent said, "In my former (larger) district, it was almost a given that you had to have your doctorate to become a superintendent…But having moved to my current (smaller) district and getting to see what the rest of the state does, I was – wow – you don't need much of anything," noting that 71% of the African American superintendents in that state had, or were currently working on, their doctorates. Still another superintendent said, "We can't be average. We have to be A+. We have to be A+." A fourth statement was, "You still have to do the same job, but how you approach it can be the difference

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between survival and non-survival, in an expedited fashion, as compared to our non-African American colleagues." These statements do not confirm any facts that differing requirements exist, but they do show the participants' unanimous feeling that there are differing requirements for African Americans. This finding agrees with leadership categorization theory and CRT's Ordinariness of Racism tenet. It reveals that these superintendents believe that the necessary skill set supplied by a non-prototypical candidate is often trumped by the board's implicit viewpoint of a prototypical leader. It also suggests a PSP tax assessed on the non-prototypical candidates.

Mentoring and Mentor Relationships

Relationships and interactions with mentors during ascension to the superintendent position was an extremely important aspect of all of the superintendent's experiences. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, each superintendent mentioned his adoption, selection, favor, and/or encouragement from his educational leadership superiors. The best summary of the data was a superintendent saying, "You don't make it to this level by yourself." You need people to advise and guide you on "what not to do, and what to do, where to go, and where not to go." More than one of the study participants originally did not plan on seeking the superintendency until they were encouraged to do so by their mentors. "I became a principal and wasn't going to go any further than that, but I just had great mentors who continually exposed me to different leadership opportunities."

One superintendent concluded with, "I want to acknowledge a previous mentor superintendent, who I thought was instrumental in my development. She was extremely tough, but she would talk to us as assistant superintendents and say that she was preparing us to become superintendents in our own districts. It was like a pledge process, quite frankly. I appreciated the experience." Another superintendent revealed that his mentor cautioned him about accepting the

first superintendent position he was offered. Both superintendents spoke in detail of their

mentors giving them opportunities, experiences, and debriefing them on many aspects of

instructional accountability, budget and finance planning, staff development and training,

community relations and development, as well as ensuring they addressed any educational

leadership area that they could anticipate encountering in the future. The latter superintendent

also received extensive counsel on responding to his first superintendent job offer, including

counsel from others through his mentor's network contacts.

Pre-employment and Initial Employment Experiences

While sharing experiences of their pre-employment and initial conception and pursuit of

the superintendent position, these superintendents shared that they observed no overt

discrimination[1] during their training, mentoring, and/or drive toward the superintendency, from

within their circles of associates. In fact, all of the superintendent participants said that they felt

supported and encouraged to advance toward the superintendency by their circle of associates.

Statements such as "…people who were in administrative positions saw something in me and

told me I should go forward and pursue educational leadership" and "…as long as you're loyal

and let me know, I'm going to help you become a superintendent," strengthen this supposition.

Data indicated that the study participants' circle of associates were genuinely encouraging and

wholeheartedly supported and fostered the participants' advancement. None of the

superintendents indicated that their mentors or support group said anything about institutional or

systemic racism – neither its existence nor working against it.

Statements quoted such as, "you can't get to this position by yourself" suggest that

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[1] Overt discrimination being defined here as openly intentional prejudicial words or actions expressed to the subject(s) of the discrimination.

personal connections and networking are paramount in granting access to becoming a superintendent. Another superintendent said that his hiring was in addition to "…hard work, and dedication, and all of those other things that everybody has, but a lot of it is luck – being in the right place at the right time, and attaching myself to the right people who had the right vision." As district employees, the superintendents found favor with their principals, assistant superintendents, and/or superintendents in that they were selected or accepted by mentors, promoted because of their quality work and work ethic, courted by other districts, and encouraged to move into advanced positions even if it meant leaving their mentor's district. More about this theme will be discussed in future sections.

One reoccurring theme, however, is that the study participants indicated caution and apprehension in where (what districts) an African American may be welcomed, valued, and/or considered for the superintendent position in spite of qualifications, equal opportunity laws, district statements, and job postings. In each interview, statements appeared such as: "you have to know where you can work – where they will be accepting of you," and "I'm going to go where I'm valued, and where I find value, as opposed to just wanting that position." Also, "there are so many districts that, yeah, they might have a job posted, but you and I both know that, as soon as they figure out that you're African American, you really don't have a chance to get that job," and "why put yourself through something that you don't have a true shot on your merits to get?" Eighty-three percent (83%) of the participants expressed this idea in one form or another. None of the remaining 17% said anything to contradict this perspective.

Search Agents: Guides and Gatekeepers

Conversations with the study participants yielded a multi-faceted view of search agents and revealed another hiring detail to consider. One aspect of search agents is that they can

provide important information concerning the community's interest in, and acceptance of, diversity in the superintendency. Ascertaining this information will avoid wasted time in preparation for, and participation in, exhibitionist interviews. One superintendent pointed out that search agents also tend to know what the school board is looking for, and if an applicant would be seriously considered for the position based on his merit and skill set. This superintendent said, "…ask the search consultant, 'is this really an open interview?' That's the first thing you should ask him. 'Is there an internal candidate?' And, 'is this a really open interview – are they really accepting of a minority candidate?' And if they say yes to those things then you can decide if you want to move forward. If they answer two out of three, then you don't need to waste your time."

Another superintendent related his story of not being hired for one district but then a search agent "called me and said that I'd be the perfect match" for a different district he knew of. That superintendent has now served there for three years. That search agent was intimately aware of what the district was looking for. Study participants recommended asking the search agents prior to applying for a district in order not to waste time or negatively affect the applicant's reputation, as well as estimating their fit for the district, since search agents are familiar enough with the board and district to provide guidance regardless of what the posting indicates. "I've had some consultants just kind of mention 'you don't want to apply for that district,'" said one superintendent. And, "…some of these Black search consultants, they – they give you a real conversation (i.e. 'I don't know if that district is open') but if there's a chance, they'll let you know." One of the superintendents applauded a search agent saying,

> "I give credit to the consultant who called, because I asked, 'is that an all White
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> district?' And she said, 'Yes,' but she said, 'it's not one of those places that's

funny. They're actually open to diversity. They don't have any, but they're open

to it.' And I remember, telling the consultant, 'if they will seriously look at me – I

don't want to get to the finals and find out that they're too afraid to pull the

trigger – but if they're serious, I don't have a race problem. I'll apply.' She said,

'I believe they're serious.'"

Another aspect of the search agent's role is the ability to act as gatekeeper to the

superintendency for the districts they represent. One study participant who has worked in other

states shared that, in this particular Midwest state, "…there's a mindset that African Americans

can only apply to certain districts. I think that mindset is really born out of a lot of discussions

you hear with the recruiters. Ironically, it's more so this state's search firms that seem to carry

that mindset, to me." A participant also said,

"…it's the *Good-ole'-boy* club. Partly because they're going to school boards that

look like them and not like us. And the ones that look like us, I don't think they

get into whether it's a Black or White search consultant. They just call the state

school board association and say 'we want to do a search.' When you look at the

state school board association, the state superintendent association, or the other

agency in the state whose name escapes me, none of them have a Black search

agent, not one."

Another superintendent stated that, "I thought it was racist, to be quite honest, that some of these

guys, especially these guys [*in the more rural and outstate districts*] the way they got in their

position as superintendent I found to be quite interesting…I've heard some stories. (*Laughs*)"

One study participant relates a story of speaking to a search agent who extolled the

benefits of a district's superintendent position and the person he recommends and/or endorses to

get the position, seemingly unaware that the participant was also interested in the position. When the participant approached the search agent asking about the superintendent opening in a certain district, the search agent replied, "It's a peach of a job. It's just an absolute dream job. It's a peach of a job. They just have all the things going for them. It's just wonderful, yada, yada, yada, and this person's going to get it…, ole' such and such is a good guy. I think he's going to get it hands down…" After someone who knew the study participant and overheard the conversation spoke to the search agent, the search agent contacted the study participant and encouraged him to apply, but said, "In all honesty, I'm not sure if they'd be ready to make a move – they're not a very diverse community." The search agent also suggested that he apply for a different position that would have resulted in a demotion and pay cut from his existing position in order to appear more appealing to the board of the position about which he originally inquired. The participant felt it was futile to apply considering the previously expressed support, knowledge, and influence of the search agent with the school board, but applied anyway, interviewed, and did not receive the position.

Search agents are hired to play an important and influential role in the screening and presentation of desirable candidates to the board within a very tight time frame, quite frequently 30 to 60 days. Within that time several highly qualified candidates should be informed, attracted, and vetted, preferably in secret in order to avoid stirring any resentment from the district in which they presently serve. In most cases, search agents can promote or constrain discussions of race, gender, and diversity in leadership, as well as presenting positive or negative profiles of candidates to boards and boards to candidates. Among the study participants who were contacted by professional and informal search agents, there was a consensus that most of the agents were genuine and forthright. The participants expressed that the search agents honestly knew the

community's general current willingness to consider a candidate of color for their superintendent position. However, none of the study participants addressed the possible willingness of a search agent to market/sell a school board on the attributes and contributions of a candidate who is African American or the benefits of diversity. It would be accurate to say that the data reveal that search agents appear to be brokers helping both boards and candidates understand and perpetuate the status quo. However, the power of their position does allow them to better fulfill their job by seeking, presenting, and marketing the best candidates to the boards they represent, even if it means challenging institutional racism by promoting diversity.

Interviews and Reciprocity

Correlating with the experiences and advice the study participants shared (i.e. be careful because African American superintendents do not get second chances and there are very few places that will hire African American superintendents in this particular Midwest state), the district leaders also conveyed that superintendent interviews should be reciprocal. One superintendent said that, prospective superintendents should simultaneously be interviewing the school board and community for fit in the relationship because "it is a marriage."

> "I would think about only applying, and interviewing, in a district where you
> really see yourself making a difference. And, it's better to never have held the
> position than to take a position you're not going to be successful in…I'd first like
> to make sure that the district is really desirable. Because the worst thing that can
> happen to you is to get the job, and you realize that you don't want it, or it's not
> the best fit for you, or get the woman and realize that I don't even like her. It's a
> relationship, and it's symbiotic. The two feed off of each other."

This symbiotic relationship statement is supported by person-organization fit theory, which is

identified in the literature review and deliberated in the discussion section.

One statement was, "I know where I wouldn't want to work and the population I wouldn't want to serve." Other indicators included, "my preference is working in high need areas, because it's just part of a greater purpose and mission. When vacancies come open, I'm not even looking at a lot of the districts…that's not to presume that everyone wants to be in urban education." Continuing in that vein was the comment, "I often tell people that the quickest way to get fired from a position is to take one that you're not ready for."

This superintendent identified, prepared, sought, and found his appropriate person-environment (PE) fit – urban education. He knew his desired location, population, type of organization (PO) fit, and the general situations he preferred to address, person-job (PJ) fit, and had no interest in considering other interested districts or job postings. Though his work hours per week were extensive, he later stated, drawing on previous experience in a different district, "I would be bored out of my mind in other places." A second superintendent applied for and received a job in a district that was very similar to a district in which he was previously employed as a high school principal. He, too, sought and found fit in many dimensions of the district, although he indicated that he had, and there will always be a need for, time for adjustments and getting to know each other, because no one fits perfectly in every area initially and relationships take time to develop.

Cursory Interview Experiences, Questions, and Reactions

Cursory interviews, serious consideration interviews, and the question of which kind of interview will occur are matters with which African American superintendent candidates must cope. This study found that all of the superintendents shared the concern of not being considered seriously for the superintendency. One participant said, "…they might give you the cursory stuff

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to say they have non-discriminatory practices, but you're not going to be seriously considered." Another said, "…but the reality of it is, we get a cursory look." Yet a third superintendent related, "They can do a cursory interview so they can check you off the list, but are they really going to give you serious consideration?" One superintendent stated that, in many well-known cases, the interviews were held just to keep up appearances. Another said, why waste time interviewing for a position that has already been decided? "It's like the Rooney Rule." In the NFL, some candidates declined interview offers after the desired candidate was announced because they felt they were just showcases for artificial interest. However, all of the superintendents maintained a broad-based professionalism and were devoted to their purpose and mission of student academic, social, and emotional growth and community impact, making statements like, "my number one goal is to improve student scores, because that's why we're here. That's our main mission, to make sure that our students are career and college ready," and, "I love being able to impact their growth for the future, and creating systems that I can manage to ensure their lifelong success. That's where my passion is."

Even when they feel they've not received equitable consideration, their focus is exhibited through statements such as, "…anything I see that's getting in the way of educating kids, I will get in the way of adults to make sure those kids benefit," made by one superintendent, and "I'm an urban educator. I know my skill set is transferable, but my preference is working in high need areas, because it's just part of a greater purpose and mission," made by another participant. Another statement was, "No one wants to go to a place where they can't have influence or impact the culture." The universally held perspective was that even being granted an interview does not provide equity in superintendent hiring, because they are frequently cursory and isometric. In spite of such cursory/unprofessional interview actions, these men remain

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professional, dedicated, educational leaders focused on kids and not on secondary social issues.

One superintendent presented a current situation. "…a fairly local school district needs a superintendent. That job is coming up. I'm not going to apply for that district. I wouldn't get it. I wouldn't be the superintendent, because I'm an African American male, and that's a traditionally very homogeneous population. So, I wouldn't put myself through the process like that." All of the study participants have had questionable experiences. They all know of the local district's opening, and some have said it would be pointless to apply because that community would not seriously consider them for the position. Yet it does not deter their focus on their current work, their dedication, or their attitude.

Psychological and Sociological Experiences

The psychological and sociological aspects of agency, structure, and reflexivity, leadership styles, society's historical treatment, and self-selection actions will be shared in this section. This section will also disclose the study participants' experiences and perceptions of various types and uses of employment fit. Finally, it will explore the perceived effect of implicit social cognition, leadership categorization, and system justification theory on these Midwest superintendents.

Agency, Structure, and Reflexivity

Do these external experiences of control (structure) affect these superintendents' individual action (agency)? If so, how and in what manner will they respond after contemplation of their situation (reflexivity)? Are these men responding with a high or low sense of agency, the recognition of themselves as controller of their own actions (high) as opposed to feelings of external actions being forced upon them by the social structure (low)? Furthermore, are their leadership styles more agentic (i.e. assertive, competitive, ambitious, confident, dominant,

controlling), or are they more communal (i.e. collaborative, friendly, cooperative, cautious, unselfish, subordinate, timid)?

Upon interviewing the superintendents, the researcher found a high level of agency and reflexivity within the male African American superintendent ranks in the state. All of the superintendents knew and declared that there are places within the state where they would not be able to secure a superintendent position regardless of their skills, knowledge, and experience. All felt that there were definite inequities and racial barriers within the superintendent hiring structure. However, none of the superintendents indicated any feelings of personal defeat or personal subordination. Their agency was high because, regardless of the structure, they felt that they had a comfortable level of control over the ultimate circumstances of their lives. Some proverbial doors will not open for them, but that just meant there were other paths they should follow. There was the general, universal indication that the societal viewpoint was not always the most racially equitable viewpoint, or the most knowledgeable of the benefits and capabilities of African American male leadership.

There were several additional factors contributing to the superintendents' individual feelings of agency. One such factor is the frequent contacts one superintendent says he receives from search agents in other states, one of which was shown to the researcher. Two of the superintendents state that they are able (prepared financially and occupationally satisfied) to end their educational careers at any point of their choosing, and remain active for altruistic reasons. Other factors include superintendent self-reported board and community support, the additional teaching and leadership activities one superintendent has at a local campus of a state university, and another's position with the national superintendent association's mentoring program. Most importantly, these superintendents express self-confidence, and in some cases a spiritual

confidence, that their skills, preparation, contributions and motivation will make room for them wherever they can best serve society.

Indications of high reflexivity, as well as individual, proxy, and collective agency, included multiple superintendents participating in both national and state superintendent associations, and multiple superintendents participating in both national and state African American superintendent associations. High reflexivity and high agency was also indicated by one superintendent teaching in a national training program, one superintendent teaching graduate educational leadership courses at a state university, one superintendent's development of an educational administration satellite partnership between a university and his school district, and two superintendents' initial goals to eventually lead a larger urban district. One superintendent was open to considering a mayoral office, and two superintendents had goals of leading a regional county school district and being the state superintendent and the United States Secretary of Education. All except one superintendent had, was in the process of obtaining, or expressed plans to earn a doctoral degree in education or educational philosophy. And none expressed a current desire to be in another district, or regrets for not being hired in any previous districts in which they had interest, although future options included the possibility of change. Only one had applied recently, or planned to apply for different employment, and that was to a regional county superintendent position.

Superintendent imprinting on the structure, the effect a superintendent has on the field, included multiple superintendents indicating movement toward more openness and inclusion via current contemplation of a name change in the state African American superintendents' association, participation in the national organization's minority recruitment and training programs, and some mentoring and networking led by the superintendents.

Agentic versus Communal Leadership Styles

Both agentic and communal leadership and personality styles were present within the superintendents interviewed, with all of the superintendents self-reporting very good relationships with their school boards. A pattern in the study data revealed that the collective subset of African American superintendents employed by majority European American school boards were more communal than the subset employed by majority African American boards. Though still very professional in appearance and action, this European American school board superintendent subset gave the impression of being much more timid, introverted, collaborative, alliance-focused, and people-centered. They also seemed more aware of a dependence on the community and others for the overall success of the district, but less assertive, less competitive, and less direct than the other subset. Statements such as "I'm an introvert, but I believe that my leadership style has led to many positive changes in this school district." "We collaborate on a lot of things, we have come to a lot of consensus, and do a lot of shared services together as well." And my community likes, "working with someone who likes to collaborate. Who likes to work together and get things done," suggested this pattern. The superintendents employed by majority African American boards appeared to the researcher as more assertive, self-sufficient, confident, domineering and controlling than the other subset. Characteristic comments that led to this initial sentiment included, "I don't operate like that," "I have never been the most union-friendly person," and,

> "It took me a while, a couple of collisions with a few Board members to
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> understand how to get my message across and be strong without being
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> overbearing, because, I have a strong personality. I think I begged them – at the
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> second or third meeting – I told them they should fire me because either they want

me to do the job or they don't."

Though all of the superintendents talked freely of their experiences; spoke candidly, diplomatically, and professionally about sensitive situations; dressed professionally, were clean-shaven, and carried themselves as would be expected of any CEO, some had less physically threatening stature, soft-spoken voices, and more patient/calming natures than others. With their median age being early 40s and their mean age being high 40s, both the young (under 40) and old (high 60s) superintendents of majority European American boards appeared to seek consensus more often and collaborate with district influencers. Statements and actions such as assembling financial consultants, gathering academic and curricular specialists, and being explicitly collaborative with stakeholders and district program developers provided examples of the communal leadership traits, as opposed to the agentic superintendents who were also communicative but more directive or encouraging collaboration toward activity implementation rather than activity creation. Statements included "my local union representative, he goes around and tells everyone that I'm his favorite superintendent…" as opposed to "I have never been the most union-friendly person...I was the president of my former school district's administrators' union, but I think unions sometimes protect the wrong people," and "I called them together and said, 'Okay, what's the best way to do this?'" as opposed to "I have a strong personality…Either they want me to do the job or they don't," were peppered throughout the interviews with both the agentic and communal leaders. Throughout the data collection interviews, however, both the communal, European American board employed subset of African American superintendents and the agentic, African American board employed subset of superintendents found a way to move their districts toward goal accomplishment.

Societal Treatment and Interaction Based on Historic Cultural/Racial Prejudice

One superintendent spoke rather positively of his community, stating that, "…there's some racial stuff here. The Board knows it, I know it, some people in the community have openly talked about it, but it's the minority not the majority." But speaking of the state, he and other superintendents made statements similar to, "…there are many more districts that will not consider an African American for their superintendent than there are places that will not consider hiring a European American for their superintendent," "…the opportunity is sometimes more limited than people think." "I think, quite honestly, Caucasian males still can apply and be interviewed for places that African Americans [can't]," and, "I think for maybe one of my White colleagues, there are 500 districts, they have 500 opportunities for a job. For my Black colleagues, we have about 15 – 20 places that will seriously look at us to hire us." "Where you want to work and where you can work are two totally different things." One participant said, "If you have a school board that out of those seven members there are five or more Caucasian school board members, then you're going to have a Caucasian superintendent."

Self-selecting, Low Agency, Avoiding Futility, and/or Politically Astute Pragmatism

There was a constant undertone, a pervasive certitude among the study participants indicating the feeling of an additional proof of capability – a societal doubt of capability that one superintendent coined the "double-tax" – which African American males have to pay before receiving acknowledgment of their leadership competence. The historical record of racial discrimination in America, and specifically employment discrimination, causes many African American males to always consider the possibility of racial prejudice to be a factor in their employment decisions. One superintendent likened the interview process to a "root canal" and said why put yourself through that if racial prejudice is going to ultimately hinder you from getting the position regardless of anything you can do? "I wouldn't put myself through the

process like that." Another superintendent told the inquiring search agent that he would not want to begin the process if the board would ultimately be afraid to hire him. Complicating the process is the questions raised when you are repeatedly interviewed and denied. After a certain number of interviews, even legitimately interested employers begin to wonder if there are candidate inadequacies they are missing given that the candidate has been interviewed so often yet not hired. "…You're exposed. Everybody knows. If you don't get it, everybody knows you didn't get it." Thus the study participants had to be judicious in determining where they applied.

Each year, as school districts publicized their opening superintendent positions, these African American superintendents had to weigh the potential of being seriously considered for a position for which they felt they were qualified against the potential of damaging their record, reputation, and future opportunities by being constantly passed over by districts that would use them for cursory interviews and tokenism. How can the superintendents determine the true intent of equality of the boards? They cannot. Therefore value judgments are made based on the information at hand. Each superintendent realized that there is an attraction and fit involved regardless of experiences and training, yet these men faced an additional barrier of race in light of historic prejudices and mass media's cultural character assassinations.

The superintendents self-selected where they would apply for their positions based on the information they had at hand, not out of low agency or self-elimination. Search agents were encountered that said particular districts were "funny" – not open to racial diversity. Additionally, all of the study participants declared that there are many districts that they believe will still create some reason not to hire an African American as their superintendent. With self-selection, they are limiting where they apply to those districts in which they believe they desire to work and where they believe they will seriously be considered, judging this a prudent path

within the process. At least 40% of the study participants questioned knowledgeable parties about a district's level of serious consideration before they submitted their applications, and almost 60% of the remaining superintendents had connections close enough to be well-informed of, and/or were sought by, the board to apply. Less than 20% of the superintendents applied cold.

Superintendents made many comments such as, "you have to understand – racially there may be places you don't even want to apply for because it's just a waste of time…You're not going to be seriously considered because of the nature of the community. So, you have to know that before you go apply for somewhere you're not going to really even get a chance," "you have to look at the history of the place," and "I think there're definitely limits to the places where I can serve as superintendent."

Fit Perceptions: Board and Superintendent

To determine whether it is worth applying to a particular district, many of the superintendents have asked search agents and board members directly if the district is open to leadership by an African American superintendent. The reason they gave, stated once again, was that search agents know the district well enough that they can shed light on a district's openness toward diversity; one hopes that the search agent himself/herself is not prejudiced and is open to suggesting qualified candidates regardless of their race. The question tests the parameters of the school board, asking, will the board seriously consider the presented skill set and personal attributes as their representative, or will they find any available reason to say there is not a fit with this superintendent and his job requirements (PJ fit), board president (PS fit), or school board and administrative team (PG fit)? The inquiry also investigates the superintendent's congruence with school district values (PO fit), the community's social norms and acceptable tolerances (cultural fit), and the goals and values of the assemblage of stakeholders (Person-

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Organization Environment – POE fit).

To explore these questions reciprocally, the superintendents have also used their informal

networks and investigative skills to speak with employees and key district personnel stating that,

> "… For me, the greatest piece of information comes from interviewing people.
>
> Because when I interview them, and these are people who work there – I want to
>
> talk to the custodians, the secretaries, students, parents…"

It is also common practice to look at the district's website, board member information,

read at least one year of board meeting minutes, talk with the search agent if applicable, network

to communicate with district individuals, and synthesize grapevine information, along with

conducting a media search of the community and district, when considering applying for a

school district leadership position. All these steps are designed to gather data about the district

and understand those data. For example,

> "…I'll call people. I try to find out what the issues are, so I have an idea about
>
> what I'm speaking to. But then again, at the end of the day, data can be
>
> misleading. You can manipulate data. Student achievement data may say your
>
> school is achieving in the bottom 5%, and you look at enrollment numbers, and
>
> they may be consistent. But because there's a transient population, you find out
>
> that 25% of the kids have come in and out, and you have 25% new issues that you
>
> then have to try to resolve. And by the time you get them figured out, they're
>
> gone. So the data doesn't always tell the story. So I may ask questions to better
>
> understand the data."

This superintendent interviewed personnel from a perspective district to gather any data

he could that concerns the district, its issues, and its needs. He has a particular interest and skill

set in working with urban schools, which frequently have issues with finances, transience, test scores, and staffing, to name a few. By asking these questions, he can both improve his understanding about the district and speak well about these issues and his strengths at an interview. If he was not interested or able to effectively benefit the district, then he can prepare a plan to gain the requisite knowledge and skills or decide not to apply. Either way, he can better determine and address how he, and/or the board, may want to discuss fit with the job (PJ) fit, administration (PG fit), or district and its circumstances (PO) fit.

There's always someone who knows something helpful about the district. One superintendent mentor used his network connections to find a previous superintendent of the district for which his protégé was offered a position in order to find out any underlying issues prior to acceptance. Another superintendent mentioned that there are only six degrees of separation to find out anything about anything.

The board and community looking for fit.

Some of these superintendents were invited and have spoken to local church gatherings and services and community groups in order to reciprocally explore person-organization fit. Prospective superintendents have even been taken to dinner as a pre-interview activity. One study participant mentioned that, for one position to which he was not hired, the three votes that were for him were by the three board members with whom he had eaten dinner prior to the hiring decision. Apparently, those who knew him best liked him most. His definition of "the right thing" to do was to hire the best candidate regardless of race, gender, or other factors that do not impact educational leadership. He went on to say,

> "Boards are made up of seven individuals. And we tend to paint them all with a
>
> broad brush. There're some people in some places who absolutely want to do the

right thing, but they may not have the influence in order to make that

happen…There are some people that want to get the best candidate regardless of

race, gender or ethnicity, but they may not have the influence to convince the

others."

A seemingly informal dinner or gathering allows for more personable interaction than the

business setting; then more is learned during the more intense interview processes from multi-

round employment interviews, visits by board members to the candidate's current district, day-

long public interviews with community leaders, and open school board meetings. These types of

informal interview settings were not surprising. They give both parties in the relationship an

opportunity to get to know each other – assess their fit concerns – before the working

relationship began. In fact, they undoubtedly gave them each a chance to ask interview questions

and formulate newer, more detailed ones for the formal interview. Meeting informally helped

them address the unknown, overcome fears and concerns, and determine some level of Person-

Group fit with the working relationship.

Furthermore, this type of setting allows many stakeholders to determine the nuance in

Person-Organization fit that is present. For example, though all of the superintendents expressed

an admirable passion for student success, nearly 50% of the interviewees appeared to hold a

more academic, quantitative state department-type definition of school district success based

upon standardized test scores. Nearly 30% appeared to give more credence to preparation for life

via career readiness, as well as community and personal problem-solving skills. Though many

districts were in or emerging from financial difficulty, less than 20% expressed the need to focus

initially on district financial and economic issues. One superintendent stated that, "…My first

priority at that time was the financial solvency of the district. It was the main concern," because

if that was not addressed the district would have been dissolved. Now, after fulfilling the deficit elimination plan, his priority is the physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of the students. It is noteworthy that this district's standardized test scores have risen each year since he assumed the superintendency, despite him not identifying test scores as his first priority. Nearly 60% appear to fulfill their jobs from a more technical influence – looking for and applying business principles, consulting outside experts, and being more removed from students and the classroom. One-third of the superintendents appear to get into the classrooms and work closely with their principals on student, teacher, and building issues. Though they are all employed by their boards and are professionals and experts in their fields, 40% appear to be respected enough by their boards to lead their boards due to their expertise and daily involvement, while 60% appear to be respected and led by their boards in the employee/employer relationship. In other words, 40% of the school boards recognize that the superintendent is well-versed in educational leadership and can inform them properly as to the best educational practices and steps to enact. The board's power and authority has the final determination, but they tend to recognize and follow the superintendent's educational leadership specialty. Alternatively, yet still complimentary, 60% of the superintendents in this study, although also recognized for their professionalism and respected by their boards, are positioned differently. They and their boards realize that as employees of the district they are temporary; they are charged to provide daily leadership of the district and expert advice to the board, then receive and fulfill the wishes of the local control authority – the permanent board, with its ever-changing members. These factors all converge to help establish a Person-Group fit (board – superintendent, marriage relationship with boards and leaders seeking complimentary others). In all the relationships, the superintendents have implementation skills, leadership styles, and interests that complement the school board's

management skills, administrative styles, and goals. If a single-minded, inflexible superintendent felt that his/her goal or method of achievement was the only right way to proceed, and it differed from a school board with the same mindset but opposing methods, a misfit has occurred in that (PG) area. One or both parties must have the temperament to move and be flexible to establish fit in that area of the relationship.

Employment fit – striving for acceptance.

In preparation for the superintendency and its preceding interviews, one superintendent mentioned how he and a peer created an interview question bank, attempted to answer the questions, and requested opportunities and experiences concerning the questions to gain practical insight, prepare wise responses, and seek advice and understanding from his mentor. Another superintendent had the mentored experience of making district-level decisions while he was a high school principal, and was able to share his experiences during his superintendent interview. Their evidence-based responses helped them both illustrate their competence for the position and share their views, allowing the boards to envision a fit with their goals and leadership style. Other superintendents stressed that even though an applicant may meet and/or surpass the stated qualifications, striving for acceptance from a community, school board, or employer that doesn't value you is futile and not worth the trouble; thus aspiring leaders who find themselves in a situation lacking a supportive structure should leave and find a supporting district or employment situation. "It's not about you. It's about them and if they want you or not."

"In each community there is a fit for that position. And so, again – with no favor

given toward gender or race – the question becomes, who is the best person to

lead that community? And there are some communities that, even though my skill

set translates, I may not be the best person to lead that school district [*because of*

their perspective of race or gender]."

A different superintendent very pragmatically echoed the same sentiment saying, "One thing you have to deal with on superintendent interviews, it's not about you, it's about the best fit for their organization."

Two separate issues utilizing the term fit arose from the participant interviews. One issue centered on the mutual perceptions of the school board and the superintendent as to whether they could work well together. "…at the end of the day, there's an expectation of what I'm going to be able to do, and do I fit that profile becomes the question." This concern focused on areas such as mutually-agreed-upon philosophy, district goals, and similar methods of goal attainment, leadership and communication styles, compatible personalities, and so forth. "So, I'm not trying to force myself on anybody." And, "…you can get a job that is on paper an excellent job, but when you get there, the culture has not accepted that change is necessary…when you get there, they're going to have to change, but the question is, can you move the pieces on the chessboard to advance the organizational goals?" The culture change spoken of by this superintendent was that of reflexivity. The mere presence of a new leader in the organization meant that some things were going to be different; even if he tried to maintain the status quo, his method of keeping it would be different. However, this superintendent realized that his presence would cause multiple things to change due to his desire to address the things in the district that could be improved, such as a greater emphasis on community involvement, academic accountability on behalf of the adults, and an introspective look at district functions. He mentioned that it would be his responsibility to influence people, the "pieces on the chessboard," to move on behalf of organizational advancement, and that could mean dealing with varying amounts and valuing of White privilege, racism, system justification and more, both implicit and explicit.

Examples of mutual goals are increasing district average academic achievement, increasing attendance and graduation rates while reducing dropout rate, creating specialized academic opportunities across the district, and greater community involvement. Examples of mutually-agreed-upon methods of goal attainment would include increasing average academic achievement by raising top students' scores versus raising bottom student scores or raising all student averages. Another example would be using finances to increase attendance by employing more truancy officers, versus creating programs that are more attractive to at-risk attending students. This cooperative professional relationship has occurred in many existing worthwhile companies and fields. "I'm going to determine success by our progress in reaching the objectives we've set." "One of the [*interview*] questions that they asked was, 'what would be my number one goal?' They thought that since I knew that the district was in financial trouble that I would say get the budget straightened out and set. My number one goal is to improve student scores, because that's why we're here." "…our main mission, to make sure that our students are career and college ready." "…we've proven we have the road map for our students. We have the pathway for our students. We've produced Gates scholars; we've produced Rhodes scholars. What we have to do is to get more students on that pathway to college and a career." "Success is relative…we're going to define success differently. So, what are the most pressing challenges in your situation? How successful were you in either eliminating or mitigating those barriers to student learning…It just depends."

In the interview data, though the word fit is used several times in several quotes and by multiple study participants, it carries different definitions. There is no argument that a significant level of fit is necessary in key areas of leadership, and determining the right combination and priority levels presents a sizable filtering task. Some areas such as curriculum (student-centered

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versus scholar academic) and the purpose of education (preparation for employment versus civic engagement) are legitimate and responsible fit concerns. However, when the skills and values are in alignment and the school board still "doesn't value you," the clearly understood definition was racial bias. There are times when it is clear that the issue being referred to is race, and the term fit was used to camouflage racism. This bias is often undetectable at the outset, as in the case of the superintendent who was not hired due to "not enough experience" until it became clear that the hired superintendent had less experience. Often the superintendents had no way to authenticate which issue was being used to deny them the job, and the issue itself suggests a diversion of their focus from educating students. One statement to this effect was "…the work is hard enough. I'm not going to be anywhere where the challenges are so great just for social and racial acceptance that I can't even focus on the work because I'm having a totally separate battle on my hands." Another example statement was, "Just because there's a skill set doesn't necessarily mean there's the right fit – for that demographic. And for me, I like who likes me." There were times when fit was an actual concern and times when fit was used as camouflage, and the superintendents realized it. A third superintendent summarized the sentiment by saying, "You know, if you say something about it, then it's a problem, right? But it's so obvious. Those are just subtle things you gotta pay attention to."

Self-ascribed fit and board-perceived (mis)fit.

In this study, the study participants did not hold fully to the lack-of-fit model because they did not internalize the stereotypes held by the in-group. However, it may be argued that they did engage in some self-limiting behavior by not applying or believing it was worth applying to some districts due to perceived stereotype-based and prejudice-based rejection. This study postulates similar results in that competent aspiring and existing African American male

superintendents do not believe they receive the equivalent employment opportunities and advancements as equally competent European American males, and that stereotype-based expectations are inconsistent with the leadership attributes, especially leadership of European American males and community organizations.

Self-ascribed misfit is based on individuals' perception of their inability to accomplish the tasks involved with a job. While these men are confident they can fulfill all aspects of the job, they doubt that all school boards will provide them the opportunity to do so. In fact, many of them believe that they can complete the job more successfully than their current job – believing their current situation of financial and academic lack is more challenging than typical. These men do not see themselves as misfits – unsuitable or less suitable for the role. The boards' perceptions of misfit appears, to the study participants and current research literature, to be based on historical stereotypes of incompetence: CRT's tenets – The Ordinariness of Racism, and CRT's property right themes – The Right to Reputation and Status. School boards may not believe that African American males can lead a European American majority school district to academic success and high achievement; and that even if they could, a district associated with African American leadership may not appear as credible and valued as a district led by a European American.

Implicit Social Cognition, Leadership Categorization and System Justification Theories

Within the study data, one of the superintendent participants spoke openly of his view of this state's school boards and said "candidly, I think race is always an underlying issue. And gender in some instances. I believe that there is a stigma associated with the African American male, in general." Thus, race becomes an issue that African American males must raise and

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discuss with board members in order to address and clarify any questions or misconceptions.

Statements that support leadership categorization, and system justification theories specifically, stood out at the interviews with the superintendents. One statement supporting leadership categorization theory was, "…Where you want to work and where you can work are two totally different things." The superintendent alluded to his feeling/opinion that no matter how qualified, he would never be hired in certain districts because he didn't match the board's prototype. His and others' statements also made it clear that the leadership categorization prototype, although vastly pertaining to European American males, sometimes applied to a predetermined choice of race, gender, and other considerations as well. "But at the end of the day, there's an expectation of what I'm going to be able to do, and do I fit that profile becomes the question."

Other statements include "…I think, quite honestly, Caucasian males still can apply and be interviewed for places that African American males [cannot]," and

> "…A White person can come interview for a Black job before a Black person can
> interview for a White job. And, quite honestly, in some instances, a Black board
> might be more willing to give a White person a chance than an experienced Black
> person. I don't have any empirical research behind it, but I think it's true. I know
> it's true. This is a 90% African American community – a White person can
> interview just as easily as I could, but I couldn't just as easily interview in a 90%
> White community – and get the same equal shot."

The second statement espouses the difficulty in overcoming out-group status as well as an implicit leader prototype, while the third reflects system justification. In system justification, leader prototype compliance supersedes in-group status so that the leader prototype (i.e.

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European American male) is hired as leader irrespective of the racial group electorate. Whether an African American male is denied serious consideration for the superintendency due to factors of out-group resistance, leadership categorization, or system justification, the issue of implicit social cognition needs to be addressed if seeking the "best candidate" is the board's goal. Furthermore, African American male candidates should be aware that these theories must be considered and addressed at some point in the interview process or they may very well impede or overcome the opportunity for equitable consideration.

Challenges within the State

Specific challenges within the particular state being studied may separate it from other Midwest states. One of the superintendents, who worked in multiple parts of the country, identified three particular issues that may or may not be isolated to the state being studied. These issues – the lack of a second superintendent employment opportunity regardless of a high quality first superintendent experience, denial or obliviousness to the possibility of the existence of intellectualized racism or institutional racism, and a poor educational finance policy – will be reviewed here.

No Second Chances

The superintendents also stressed their observations that, in this particular state, African American superintendents do not get second chances as do many European American superintendents. They advise aspiring African American superintendents not to seek or accept a position in a district wherein they feel they cannot attain their determined goals, or from which they are not willing to retire, because they may only get one chance at the attempt and have nowhere to go after that district. According to interview data, nearly 75% of the African American superintendents in this particular Midwest state are in their first superintendency with

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an average tenure of 3.5 years in their position, veteran superintendents have received offers and

better reception in some, but not all other states. (2013 data show only Mississippi and Louisiana

close to population equity.)

The lack of available second chances in this Midwest state refers both to no other district

wanting a superintendent that did not lead a district to absolute greatness, and to the dearth of

districts willing to hire an African American leader. Study participants felt this was definitely not

the case for their European American peers.

"… I just watch superintendent after superintendent, after superintendent, there's

nowhere to go. So, I'm watching one that I thought he was a phenomenal

superintendent. He did a great job with nothing. (*There was*) not much of an

opportunity outside of the district that he had here in this state, and even people

from the Department of Education and the state superintendents' association, have

said nothing but good things about him as an individual, in terms of how they feel

about him as an African American leader. And, whether he's Black or not, it's

just that this is a good sharp leader. Well, his district still – he's done as much as

he can, but – there's no place to go, so he left the state."

"I think, for African American superintendents, there're a lot of warning signs, or subtle death

signs, for your career, and if you don't have strong mentorship around you, or a support system,

or people who've been through some of the fire, you can burn out in this state really fast." This

was what one superintendent said about not knowing that each district, or even contract, can be a

sudden-death decision. Without having clearly-defined and board-acknowledged goals and

benchmarks, views of success will differ – allowing competency controversies to enter career-

affecting decisions. Caution zones, in addition to this lack of goals and benchmarks, included

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tactfulness in conducting school district business, especially when it involved board members' relatives employed by the district or board members' areas of interest, expertise, and industry.

After reaching personal and board-consensus levels of success, many of these superintendents are not overly concerned with their professional trajectory. They're receiving job interest inquiries, calls, and invitations from other states; but this particular state is losing great leadership talent. In one of the interviews, a study participant shared an email message from a search agent from another state informing him of a superintendent position that will soon be open, marketing the district and asking him to consider applying. The study participant said he gets emails like this weekly because others recognize his achievements in his district. However, these inquiries and requests for application come from outside the state. "… So, if you do good work they'll find you."

Concerning time for growth and advancement, one superintendent said, "we don't get second chances. If you're not successful the first time, whether you're male or female, and success is relative, often you're not given another opportunity to show your mettle." This superintendent's statement "success is relative" referred to the achievement goals he, and/or the board, may have for the district and students. It is an aspect of the employment fit mentioned earlier by so many of the superintendents. Whereas some districts may consider success the student reception of X$ in scholarships, X% of students continuing to 4 year colleges, or an X% increase in standardized test scores, other measures of success may include fulfilling a debt elimination plan, increasing the student attendance rate, or a measured increase in parent involvement and community support. One superintendent said that, when he accepted the position, "my first priority at that time was the financial solvency of the district. It was the main concern. Now if you asked me that…it would be student safety…physically, but also, spiritually

and emotionally…" because this is another area that must be improved in order for greater student and academic success to occur. He explained that during the time of the interview the district was very near dissolution due to financial debt, and 80% of the interview questions revolved around his financial management ability. Now, after having emerged from near financial ruin, while increasing student academic achievement, he is able to redefine success as the accomplishment of his next goal. Another superintendent pointed out that success may be measured by accomplishing goals such as increasing enrollment, reducing or eliminating a deficit, increasing student achievement, creating ownership of the district by the community, or maintaining local control by establishing financial stability and growth. "It just depends." Other statements were, "It's how do you respond to the needs of your community," and "If we're not successful, it's really tough for us to get a second job." Though employment success spoken of here is attainment of board- and superintendent-defined goals, success for these men is defined both by themselves (i.e. their personal benchmarks and standards) and by the board and stakeholders (i.e. district leadership benchmarks and standards), which is sometimes dependent upon the board/superintendent relationship.

One superintendent's words encouraged new superintendents to determine, define, and perhaps publicize their goals, at least to the board, based on what can be accomplished in a reasonable time frame in that particular district. He clarified that all "success" may not be the same, and what you or the district value the most may not be 100% academic. "…We all would like to believe that we can go in and immediately transform the landscape, and the reality of it is that the work is more challenging than you would assume. Once you get there, you realize that this may not be fixable. So, how do you determine success?"

Defining success to and with the board will help establish a baseline and measurement

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standard for the individual superintendent's success. But more importantly, stressed by this superintendent, was the influence and leadership stance it provides. The board, district employees, and all observers can align themselves with a common goal. The short-term mission is established; everyone can then rally under the superintendent's leadership through the accomplishment of that short-term mission, while keeping the long-term vision in mind.

Intellectualized and Institutionalized Racism

According to one of the study participants, the possibility that any discriminatory thought, culturally oriented motivation, or White Privilege might exist is rationalized and intellectualized away, dismissed and forgotten as quickly as possible before anything can become of it; therefore the practice continues in many places. When responding to a different question, this superintendent said the self-deception of racially restrictive hiring practices and African American superintendents only being hired in financially troubled districts is, "…more of this state's issue. I think it's partially funding. I think it's partially intellectualized racism, more so than what I experienced in a different part of the country." He went on to say that, although institutional racism occurs in other states, in those states everyone realizes it and calls it what it is. "I think their level of – there was definitely some – racist is a little strong, but there was definitely some issues with culture, no matter where you are. But it seemed to be more direct when I worked in other states." However, in the particular Midwest state being studied, few acknowledge it candidly.

"When I came to the Midwest, a lot of the cultural racial issues seem to be intellectualized away. 'No, I can't be racist,' or 'the system can't be racist. This is just our policy and our procedure.' We can't read through that? Elsewhere, they just let you know. It was pretty easy to tell. 'No, we don't want you here. We

don't care what the policy says.' Here, *in this state*, it's more intellectualized and hidden. Now, that's not everyplace, there are some pockets everywhere, good and bad."

It is possible that this superintendent may very well be referring to implicit social cognition, in which people – in this case search agents and/or school boards – may be unaware of or simply deny a desire not to hire African American superintendents. A misfit or lack of cultural fit is declared; spiraling occurs, and search agents/ school boards can state that they desire a candidate who meets a different criterion. But the underlying cause, whether explicit or implicit, is the candidate's race.

State Financing is Problematic

Regarding the state's educational finance policy, a straightforward and concerned superintendent said, "I think a lot of [*the troubled districts' financial challenges*] are driven by this particular state's finances being so bad, and some of the policies around public education." Districts,

"… are on the watch list from the state for being towards the bottom of the rankings; and when you look at the finances, they're pretty much in the same area. … you have that pressure, to get your test scores up. But at the same time, you have that opposite pressure to get the budget in line, because they're going to take over. Those two things are diametrically opposed. They don't work. And even the state is starting to slowly signal and acquiesce…even when we send in emergency managers, they can't do any better, even though they have the power of the state behind them. You can't serve two masters."

That particular dynamic is more prevalent in this state than in other states known to the study

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participant.

A phrase analysis of the interview transcriptions indicated that the second most frequently used phrases mentioned by these gentlemen focused on the poor condition of the state's educational finance policy(ies). This state's educational finance situation is so intriguing that it caused another superintendent to specifically explore it as a topic for his dissertation. "Something happened when a particular educational finance law was passed. It created more accountability, more consequences, and more structures that forced schools to address their funding policies differently." His goal is to identify "how that law changed the priorities at the district level…I think there was an era in time where the chief academic officers were the superintendents and that was the path…now, a lot of your superintendents are financially skilled, more so than academically." He predicts that future superintendents will need a much stronger financial background than those of the past.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the findings from the data gathering interviews. It was divided into four sub-headed sections that shared study participants' experiences and viewpoints relating to their backgrounds and preparation for the superintendency, acquiring the position, psychological and sociological experiences, and issues that may be unique to the particular Midwest state of employment. Findings indicated that 1) the African American male superintendents were able to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of the job and did so because of a desire and commitment to benefit the students; 2) these particular superintendents were elite job non-searchers, most being asked to apply for the superintendency by district board representatives or search agents, and most had mentors. Yet they all feel/felt that hiring requirements, as well as network inclusion and information sharing desires, are different for

African American male superintendents than European American male superintendents due to racial concerns; and 3) they represent both agentic and communal leadership styles; all display evidence of high agency; and all look for fit in their relationships with the school boards throughout the application, interview, and entire hiring process. This section concluded by detailing the data for three issues that may be state-specific, since some study participants did not find them in three other settings. One issue is that only a miniscule number of African American male superintendents employed in the state's known recent history has ever received a second employment position within the state[2] (only 1 superintendent in at least the past 7 years), although some have accepted offers in other states. The second issue is the negated possibility of institutional racism, although there exists a declared superintendent shortage and ample interest and application by qualified African American candidates; African American male superintendents are highly under-represented; and racism is understood to exist in other areas of society. Finally, the participants' experiences and viewpoints on the state's educational finance policies were shared.

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[2] Note: Neither the state's superintendents' association, nor the state's school board association, tracks superintendent ethnicity data. This statement was brought to light by one of the study participants and corroborated by multiple others.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Throughout the data collection phase of this research, many topics relating to superintendent hiring were found and warrant much discussion. Those topics include superintendent mentoring, networking, search agent influence, discerning employment fit by both school boards and aspiring superintendents, and theories on implicit views of a leader. This chapter will discuss these topics and observations from the data through the lens of critical race theory. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research.

Mentoring, Mentor Relationships, and Networking

The topic of mentoring was a major theme found in the data. The analyses highlighted the importance and multiple benefits of a mentor as well as the necessity of a quality mentor relationship. Mentors of the study participants encouraged them to pursue higher degrees of school district leadership, provided opportunities for them to shadow and experience hands-on district problem-solving, drilled them on important district issues, and provided them expertise from a network that would typically be unavailable to them. Their mentors guided them in exploratory techniques, required them to question existing circumstances, held them accountable for developing and implementing satisfactory results, and finally provided them with a stamp of approval that, in some cases, paved the way for their entrance into the superintendency. In short, most of the study participants did not become superintendents without the encouragement and support of mentors, and all of the protégés attest to gaining very high-quality experiences

through their mentors.

The study participants credit their work ethic, interest in quality advancement, emotional dedication, timing, chance, and the quality of their mentors' characters as reasons why their mentors accepted them as protégés. Another important aspect is that 60% of the superintendents with mentors were unexpectedly "selected" by their mentors for training, while the remaining 40% sought the relationships and found interested, willing, and positive mentors.

When applying the CRT tenets of Ordinariness of Racism and the Social Construction of Race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), both the literature and study participants confirm findings that there are perceptions, feelings, and assumptions people have about others based on descriptors such as skin color, physical attributes, and generational histories. Although biologists, geneticists, and many others in the scientific field agree that race – as we call it – is a social creation, the reality is that the social power of that descriptor is used to create significant disparities in the circumstances and opportunities people face. The literature and participants both support claims that racial determinant factors play a significant role in mental images and mindsets of screeners as they select or accept protégés for mentoring, review applications and resumes of superintendent candidates, and/or welcome them into networks. All of the superintendents had interested, willing, and positive mentors, which may have been a determining factor in their becoming superintendents; however, their mentoring relationships did not appear to provide them access to the greater European American superintendent network, nor access to a second superintendent position thus far.

The CRT tenet of Intersectionality and Anti-essentialism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) also suggests that people tend to group others into limited and individual categories as opposed to considering the multitude of characteristics that influence them. Therefore, a mentor may not

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provide the best quality of mentoring if s/he assumes that only certain types of assistance or information are needed because only a limited number of categories are being considered.

In regard to intersectionality, these men do not get to choose between being considered a highly-qualified superintendent candidate or an African American male. Society's view of their race has intersectionalized them, i.e. locked them into only one category – African American; and essentialized them, i.e. described that category as unsuitable to educate European American communities. The circumstance of being an African American seemingly prohibits many from becoming a superintendent due to implicit social cognition, system justification, and other race-based paradigms. All of the study participants attested that there are places within the state where they would not be able to secure a superintendent position regardless of their skills, knowledge, and experience. With rare exception, the only districts that consider African American males for their superintendents are those districts in which issues of race are a primary concern. The superintendent leadership areas of student enrollment, community relations, academic achievement, curriculum development, etc. in which these men have reported acumen do not attract employment interest even after they have successfully served a first district, according to participant testimony and this study's literature. This finding is evidenced by statements from study participants such as: "Just because there's a skill set doesn't necessarily mean there's the right fit – for that demographic," "I think that we have an incredible skill set, but the skill set may not match the demographics that particular districts are looking for," and "I think that with our skill set, we can go into another district but what are the districts where you can find these superintendents?" Statements from the research literature that also support these findings include: "consultants do not pursue Black male candidates as actively as they do White male candidates" (Taylor, 2011, p. 6); the achievements of Black superintendents must be recognized

and supported (Parker, 2009); and all of the participants in Wright (2011) felt that the playing field is not level for African American candidates, that being better prepared is the only remedy to this problem, and that "some candidates never get a chance because of skin color, no matter how prepared they are" (p. 82).

Differential Racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and the Black/ White Binary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) reveal that the hierarchy of European American leadership (the superintendency) and relegation of African Americans to subordinate positions are maintained. Current mass media and job promotional media still depict an inequality of leadership favoring European American males. Interest Convergence may also play a large part in why aspiring African American male superintendents have difficulty obtaining mentors, because the European American power structure may not see compelling benefit either to devoting time to mentoring African American superintendent aspirants, or to surrendering some portion of the power and privilege of this prestigious field and position.

All of the study participants talked about the importance of finding a mentor who was willing to provide guidance, support, and help them navigate the process of securing a position as a successful superintendent. None reported negative mentoring or rejection from requested mentors. This acceptance by mentors and receipt of quality mentoring experience is in direct contrast to some of the cross-cultural mentoring literature, which indicates that African Americans encounter great difficulty to receive even a single quality mentoring experience (Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Thomas, 2001); quality mentoring may be a significant factor in obtaining superintendent positions. CRT suggests that other African American men who aspire to the superintendency struggle to obtain quality mentoring experiences. The implications from this analysis include: 1) aspiring African American superintendents, traditionally less likely

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to obtain mentors for leadership positions, should be encouraged to implement and demonstrate strategies that will attract and cultivate mentors and seek quality mentors as early in their careers as possible if none readily present themselves; and 2) school districts desirous of quality leadership should encourage mentorship initiatives.

Superintendent Networking

Related to mentoring, the topic of networking also was a major theme discussed by the study participants. Networking connects people in order to share resources of some type, and there are many networks within the educational leadership structure. Superintendents, school boards, search agents and agencies, community leaders, and central office personnel all share information and resources via networks formed through their professional associations, develop varying levels of interest-based connectedness within and among the associations overlapping educational leadership groups, and simply meet and build networking relationships as they find and welcome commonality with others. In this study, one superintendent said, "You can't get to the superintendent position by yourself," while another said, "Different networks bring different people to the superintendency."

People share resources with whom they choose, most often with people they feel similarities with and consider a member of their in-group. When viewing race, networks racialize themselves by saving prime information for their primary friends and network members. In the same manner, Stainback (2008) found that same-race European American job-seeking network members receive more prime job information and recommendations from their same-race network contacts while cross-race contacts receive secondary, less actionable information producing lower-level supervisory jobs for African Americans and Hispanics (Stainback, 2008). Given the historical tenor of race relations in the United States, and the fact that the vast majority

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of these educational leaders are European American, it is easy to extrapolate Waldinger's (1995)

findings that "networks themselves are racialized [thus producing] labor market disadvantages

by virtue of segregated networks (p. 92)".

Given Krackhardt & Kilduff's (1990) findings that "people's attributions are to some

extent controlled by the need to be in harmony with others in their friendship networks" (p. 151),

and Tuitt, Sagaria, and Turner's (2007) revelation that search chairs and committees can and

have devalued and rejected job information provided by out-group and non-network members,

the possibility for racialization clearly exists. In this study, one superintendent said that if a

superintendent has an assistant superintendent who looks like him and plays like him, he will

probably advocate for that assistant.

Network theory stresses the importance of centrality in network location because the

quantity of information that passes through that position increases its value, influence, and

power. The theory says that new network members typically enter on the network's periphery

and have less influential power because they have less to offer the network; and that they gain

more power as they fill the network's structural holes (betweenness), connecting different

clusters. In this study, one superintendent said "different networks bring you to the

superintendency," meaning that not only do superintendents learn of job openings through the

networks and search agents learn of elite non-job seekers through the network, but that

references, recommendations, and results of quality mentoring and training (e.g. knowledge,

experience, interview practice, and confidence) are fostered by network associations. This

superintendent also said that he didn't really have a network that provided all that he would have

liked, so he started developing a network (cluster). He was really on the periphery of the majority

power structure.

The African American superintendents in the state have developed a network forming somewhat strong ties, sharing deeply valued information, friendship, and psychosocial support among themselves. One superintendent urged his peers and newcomers to network with this group and share any questions, situations, and needs they had so the veterans could help them not only to keep their jobs, but to thrive. This particular African American superintendent association is currently considering a name change to reflect inclusion and focus on service to the urban community, especially since many African American superintendents are being replaced by European American superintendents and those districts, students, and superintendents still need guidance and support. (The name change topic was planned to be early on the year's agenda, which leads to the question of whether the African American superintendent organization exists to support the professional development and employment value of African American superintendents, or to support the urban students which, in this state, were predominantly minority and/or economically disadvantaged.)

In this study, some participants also had established both strong and weaker ties with networks from other states from which they received more general and superficial information. One study member shared that he was receiving frequent, almost weekly, requests and invitations to explore and apply for superintendent positions.

Holland and Leinhardt (1976) expressed that inviting noticeably different newcomers to the network creates tension – raising uneasy questions of cognitive consistency. This study supports consideration of this finding because even the African American superintendents who are in the closest relationships with various European American superintendent associations and networks still appear to be on the very periphery of the informal, yet more influential European American superintendents' network.

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In this study, less than half of the African American superintendents mentioned having strong enough ties with any European American superintendent network to benefit professionally. This finding raises the question: how does relationship-building interact with issues of race in relation to Thomas' (2001) findings that top African American business executives developed many high-quality relationships and strong ties – both inside and outside their organizations and across racial lines and descriptors – prior to and as they reached their top positions? Thomas (2001), Sims (2002), and Moss (2013) all state that cross-race mentoring is more difficult, or at least has different challenges, than same-race mentoring. They also revealed that tensions erupt when network members introduce dissimilar newcomers to the network (cognitive consistency). However, none of the study members discussed any differences in cross-race networking. In this study, the African American superintendents are not physically limited to the number of networks they can develop, the people with whom they can make contact, collaborate and build relationships; nor are they unwilling to step out of their communities or comfort zones. More than half of them have done so. However, the willingness of others to collaborate and build relationships with them, to welcome gestures of professional rapport, and to foster bonds that can overcome "protective hesitation" (Thomas, 2001, p. 105) is limited by many factors including time and the desire of others involved. The "tax" spoken of by Thomas and Gabarro (1999) and also mentioned by a participating study superintendent and implicated in various places throughout this study (i.e. the PSP tax), can absorb a huge amount of time to acquire and pay. Thomas and Gabarro (1999) further suggest that many aspiring candidates simply run out of career development time and cease their top-level leadership pursuits out of frustration prior to fulfilling the tax's payment (if, indeed, it could ever be fulfilled). Furthermore, many align with comments made by participating study superintendents such as

"I'm not going to be anywhere where the challenges are so great just for social and racial acceptance," and "I like who likes me." In the first statement, the study participant indicated that the tax represented the work toward social and racial acceptance in a somewhat hostile environment.

Although network theory was not the study's focus, certain network theory claims appear to be supported. The claim of centrality being important to network location as opposed to being on the periphery, for example, appears to hold true. Because the African American superintendents remain on the periphery of the European American superintendents' network, they receive little benefit from their network involvement. Portrayed visually, the African American superintendents are a cluster among themselves with a very weak tie to the European American superintendents' network; they do not fill any European American network holes, thus their value to that network is insubstantial. From that vantage point, neither group can capitalize on job vacancies and other information in the approximate 500 European American and the approximate 10 African American racially entrenched districts; the remaining 20-25 districts are open to considering leadership by either group. Wingfield's (2014) and DiTomaso's (2013) consideration of cognitive consistency theory also appears supported in that lip service is paid to equal opportunity statements (Wingfield, 2014) while information that would allow equal opportunity is only provided to friends or those with preferred privilege.

Network theory also aligns somewhat with CRT's interest convergence in that African Americans are only given access to privilege (the European American network resources) when granting access is in the best interest of the dominant culture (European American needs can be supplied by African Americans gaining limited access to European American resources). CRT posits that any access made available to African Americans was due to the European power

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structure receiving benefit by making that access available. The PSP tax illustrates the point that

if an African American (e.g. President Obama, a famous celebrity, or a person with the needed

talents and abilities) can provide or further the interests of the dominant social group, he/she has

a greater opportunity of being at least temporarily accepted than someone who cannot provide or

further their interests. It is in the dominant group's reception of desired provision where the

interests converge. This is evidenced in this study by statements in past literature (e.g. Thomas &

Gabarro, 1999) and statements from study participants such as "double tax," "have to work twice

as hard to be considered half as good," and doctorate required for African Americans versus

doctorate preferred for European Americans.

Search Agents

Search agents play a substantive role as gatekeepers in determining in-group access and

out-group status to a school district. With the constant turnover of both superintendents, whose

publicized average tenure is less than four years, and school board members, whose elected term

of service is often four to six years, the guidance a professional search agent can provide a school

board is invaluable in regard to quality fulfillment of their state directive. In guiding and

instructing a board on the benefits of legitimate and substantive contributions candidates may

bring to the table, introducing candidates who may be racially different but similar in goals and

methods, and capable in skills and abilities, is imperative. Alternatively, allowing access to an

incompatible, unsuited, discordant leader, even if he aligns with the White male leader prototype,

can cause substantial damage to a school district or organization.

It is possible that search agents view themselves simply as employees of the school

district or their employer's company, providing the desired prototypical candidates regardless of

the moral or racial ramifications and thus maintaining the status quo. Indeed, this has happened

according to study participants. Search agents have admitted that the community isn't open to diversity, and search agents have suggested that individual African American superintendents seek lower positions in order to get experience at higher levels of leadership. In either occurrence, with the racial and educational accountability climate in the United States, educational stakeholders and minority candidates may wonder in whose interest the agent is working. Is it in the district's best interest for the search agent to market, promote, and fight for a superior quality candidate that can lead the district into greater academic and organizational success if it means that the board may reject both the candidate and the search agent for aggressively advocating an emotionally charged social/racial issue? Or is the district's interest better served when the agent acquiesces to a lesser quality candidate whom the board will accept, while the agent preserves his/her occupational endorsement? Is it in the best interest of a quality African American superintendent candidate to apply and interview in several districts where the search agent knows there are too few racially accepting school board members to hire him/her, possibly damaging his/her professional appearance and/or self-esteem? Or should the agent inform him/her of the district's lack of openness and suggest alternative options? It is also possible that search agents see themselves as advocates for the district's and applicants' best interests, and challenge the lack of diversity when an African American applicant provides the best leadership available. Advocating for wisdom in the selection of a quality candidate, marketing the benefits of diversity in leadership, and exposing and exploring implicit bias may produce great benefits toward both a district's organizational success and system reform. However, as Treitler (2015) makes known quite emphatically, decided prejudice, bias, and bigotry is not swayed by facts, logic, or reason. Study literature purports that "there remain companies in which no amount of individual effort, preparation, or performance is likely to

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propel a person of color into an executive position" (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, p. 6). Study

participants have also accepted this as current reality, as evidenced by statements such as, "I

think there're definitely limits to the places where I can serve as superintendent," and "Caucasian

males still can apply and be interviewed for places that African Americans [can't]."

This study recognizes that the African American superintendents in this state see search

agents as gatekeepers to the superintendency. These search agents can share community

perceptions with aspiring superintendent candidates, assisting them in identifying districts open

to their leadership. They are also able to share superintendent candidates' possible skills, talents,

and capabilities with districts that would be open to benefit from their leadership. Most

importantly to school boards and society as a whole, search agents are in the best position to help

boards examine and address implicit biases as they plan candidate profiles and searches, and as

they follow through with interviews and hiring deliberations. Depending on their aware of their

own personal implicit biases, their commitment to morality, their social skills and skills in

communication and persuasion, search agents are also positioned to use their judgment as to how

far they can move school board members from positions of bias to considerations of social

justice in their superintendent selection. Based on their moral compass, search agents can work

toward increasing stereotypic beliefs of prejudice, maintain the existing systemic racism, or

challenge the status quo and defend the selection of a candidate who can best serve the district,

even if he/she is of a different racial heritage than expected. They are in the best position to

stress to a school board that an applicant's contributive potential must not be discounted due to

race or other individually- or socially-determined characteristics that do not impede their

leadership ability. The superintendents in this study felt that search agents are generally as moral

as most in society; would expose African American candidates to districts that would consider

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interviewing them; and if asked, would honestly inform them if they thought the district would

not seriously consider their leadership.

The stories and activities of search agents referenced by the study participants run the

gamut of CRT tenets and themes. For example, the ordinariness of racism is evident in the

statement by one superintendent who said, "…there's a mindset that African Americans can only

apply to certain districts. I think that mindset is really born out of a lot of discussions you hear

with the recruiters (search agents), and ironically, it's more so this state's search firms that seem

to carry that mindset, to me." And, "I think the biggest thing we have to let the search

consultants know is that we're not African American superintendents, we're superintendents. So,

I can be the superintendent of a Caucasian district as much as a minority or inner city district.

And sometimes you don't want to be pigeonholed as just a minority superintendent." A third

statement was, "I will say, in the Midwest though, I think there are some racial constructs that

are hidden in terms of minority leadership. So in other words, I think there's opportunity. But the

opportunity is sometimes more limited than people think. I've had some consultants just kind of

mention, 'you don't want to apply for that district.'" The first two statements illustrate the fact

that some search agents' paradigm maintains the historic viewpoint that Whites would not want

Blacks leading/teaching their children, according to the study participant. The third statement

was in regard to the search agent's perception that the European American majority school

district would not value/accept/hire an African American

superintendent.

CRT and Current Hiring Practices

The current situation wherein most African American superintendents are only hired to

lead school districts that are financially and/or academically troubled can suggest the presence of

CRT's interest convergence (Delgado **&** Stefancic, 2012), differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), the right of disposition (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It suggests interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) because it is in the interest of the European American power structure to have others work there "…because a lot of our counterparts don't want to deal with it. We deal with it because those kids look like us. They come from communities that we came from. So, we don't run from it, but on the flip side, it's pretty scary." It suggests differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) because the leadership of the troubled school districts is undesired by most European American superintendents, and the African American superintendents are leaders undesired by most European American school boards, providing the appearance of racially subordinated inclusion to care for districts by racially subordinated people. It refers to intersectionality and essentialism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) by focusing only on one aspect – the race – of African American superintendents and assigning them to lead only African American schools. All their knowledge, skills, talents, creativity, and abilities are ignored and overlooked. It essentializes them by assuming that, simply because they are African American, they have a background that allows them to lead predominantly African American schools. Not only is the leadership of the few African Americans who do lead predominantly European American school districts received as a great surprise and anomaly, but their knowledge, skills, talents, creativity, and abilities continue to be ignored, overlooked, and kept out of the mainstream narrative – thus reinforcing and maintaining the essentialized view. This intersectionality fails to acknowledge that African American superintendents were trained just like European American superintendents, had to learn how to communicate with their communities just like European American superintendents,

and had to be skilled in curriculum and staff development just like European American superintendents. Intersectionality again holds up European Americans as the necessary standard of comparison in order to be understood. It also fuels the belief of the study participants that African American superintendent candidates have the sufficient skill sets to implement an inquiry curriculum, develop magnet schools around the arts, sciences, and other areas, and be fiscally responsible, and that they should be considered viable leadership candidates; yet they are not considered. The current situation, where most African American superintendents are only hired to lead school districts that are financially and/or academically troubled, reflects the right of disposition (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) because it appears to expose observance of equal employment opportunity commission principles and posted qualifications, but adjusts those qualifications to meet particularly desired individuals. It suggests the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) by prohibiting African Americans from leading financially and academically healthy districts.

Fit Used as Camouflage

Every responsible board should undertake the important and appropriate discussion of superintendent fit. However, there is an inappropriate, camouflaged usage of fit that some may apply to cover implicit racist practices. Exploring Person-Job fit (can this person satisfactorily do the job), Person-Organization (can this person lead well within the goals and values of the organization), Person-Group (can this person work with the current school board and administrators), and Person-Supervisor (can a working relationship be established between this superintendent candidate and the board president) is a necessary obligation of the board. Person-Environment (can this candidate lead the district in goal accomplishment within this community's conditions and circumstances) and even Person-Cultural (can this candidate lead

the district in light of this community's traditions, values, and background) also are legitimate considerations.

The participating African American superintendents also have used and encourage the legitimate consideration of fit. In the data gathering interviews, it was suggested that aspiring candidates consider the districts' and boards' goals and values, history and climate, and community and culture when calculating their estimation of fit. One superintendent even equated the district-superintendent relationship to a marriage, a symbiotic relationship in which both parties grow. The value judgments superintendents make determine whether they will apply, accept an invitation to interview, or accept a job offer from an advertising district. The judgments eliminate districts where the superintendents feel that any challenges, such as but not limited to racism, will hinder the mutual growth and development of the district or themselves. One superintendent specifically mentioned that "the work is hard enough" and he didn't want to expend energy addressing racism that could be better used to complete the legitimate work of the school district.

However, there are many references to fit as a camouflage term for board members' implicit or explicit concern, discomfort, fear, and perhaps even disdain for working with an African American, as evidenced by the literature (Andersen, 2015) and superintendent statements like, "(I couldn't be the superintendent there) because I'm an African American male," and "they just let you know. It was pretty easy to tell. 'No, we don't want you here. We don't care what the policy says.'" In these instances, fit is being used as a cover-up for racial bias, supporting CRT's Centrality of Racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as well as CRT's Absolute Right to Exclude (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Additionally, there are instances when person-job fit is disingenuously given as a reason for not hiring an African American, when the

apparent reason was perceptions of person-environment fit or simply board members' personal preference. Simply stated, for a significant number of school boards, the relationship between an African American male superintendent and a predominantly European American school board is a scenario where the superintendents have heard "not the best fit" or "a lack of fit" as the rationale for not being hired. Although they believe they have proven themselves capable in all aspects of fit, "a lack of fit" has been falsely used in lieu of the more accurate phrase – the board's lack of desire to accept that candidate's leadership. This far-too-frequent scenario presents an awkward complexity, in that constant rejection using dishonest rationale does not allow opportunity for improvement – since an area where one might improve is not the real reason for rejection. This situation eventually breeds self-doubt, discouragement, and/or contempt for the dishonesty.

This is not an indictment of European American school board members exclusively, because CRT's Centrality of Racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) tenet applies to our entire society. System Justification theory (Jost & Andrews, 2011) also supports CRT's Centrality of Racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) tenet and System Justification Theory (Jost & Andrews, 2011) in that it states people of color also tend to lean toward hiring European American males to maintain the familiar, comfortable status quo of oppression; hence the superintendent's statement,

"… A White person can come interview for a Black job before a Black person can interview for a White job. And, quite honestly, in some instances, a Black board might be more willing to give a White person a chance than an experienced Black person. I don't have any empirical research behind it, but I think it's true. I know it's true. This is a 90% African American community – a White person can

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> interview just as easily as I could, but I couldn't just as easily interview in a 90%
>
> White community – and get the same equal shot."

Empirical research that supports this statement from the literature review is Pager's 2003 study

revealing that it was easier for a White ex-felon to receive a job offer than a Black man with

better credentials and no criminal past. This relates to both White Privilege (McIntosh, 1988) and

CRT's Centrality of Racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

CRT's Centrality of Racism tenet is societal, and so is CRT's Differential Racialization

tenet. What, really, do people possibly think an African American superintendent would do?

> "… There are so many districts that, yeah, they might have a job posted, but you
>
> and I both know that, as soon as they figure out that you're African American,
>
> you really don't have a chance to get that job,"

and "candidly, I think race is always an underlying issue. … I believe that there is a stigma

associated with the African American male, in general," were statements made by different

superintendents that demonstrate the participants' views of society's paradigm. Literature in this

study (Burrell, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Treitler, 2015) explains how and why this

stigma was created and propagated to maintain White Privilege, CRT's Differential Racialization

tenet, and the Right of Disposition theme. As long as stigma portrays African American male

leaders as less competent, and the European American power structure maintains the status quo,

school boards will view people of color as less competent leaders and undermine their progress

into the superintendency.

CRT Themes

By the time this dissertation is culminated and published, two of the African American

superintendents in the study state have been replaced, both by European American

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superintendents. This event not only reduces the number of African American male

superintendents in the state by two, but also reinforces two points made in the literature review

and by the study participants. First, the glass cliff pattern: now that the districts have improved,

the positions are more appealing to European American superintendents and the European

American school boards exercised their CRT's themed Rights of Disposition and Rights to

Reputation and Status. Both districts are in better financial and academic situations than when

the superintendents began. One study participant humorously ridiculed, "Once it's really been

messed up, that's when they're ready for us to come in and really show leadership (*chuckles*

sarcastically), because a lot of our counterparts don't want to deal with it." Another said,

> "When things are not looking too rosy then we have a better shot. But depending
>
> on the dynamics, that can be very – it can be viewed as very negative. The
>
> question will always remain, is it because you are not an effective leader? The
>
> public perception is that ten years ago, there was a White guy there and they
>
> didn't have those problems. Truthfully, ten years ago the community had money."

A further statement made by one of the former superintendents was, "If we follow the

educational plan, and follow the DEP (Deficit Elimination Plan)…and if things continue the way

they are, this year we'll have a surplus for the first time in a number of years." After the

departing African American superintendent waded through troubled waters, the new

superintendent will receive credit for the repair work he orchestrated. This holds with Wright's

(2011) study which yielded the same result – African American superintendents were replaced

with European American superintendents. No other district in this study's state hired an African

American superintendent out of at least 20 positions advertised by the state superintendents'

organization. Secondly, neither of the two superintendents took another superintendency position

– both retired from their districts and from the position. This occurrence supports the study participants' claim and advice that an African American superintendent should consider only applying for districts from which you wouldn't mind retiring, because there are no second chances for African American superintendents within that particular state.

Like the 1953 letter to Darla Buchanan, stating the Board will proceed on the assumption that the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ Negros to educate White children (Tillman, 2004), this study's participants suggest that institutionalized racism continues in conscious actions, possible subconscious actions, and state governmental systemic actions. Conscious board and search agent actions include declarations that "the board is not very open to diversity," circumventing experienced African American candidates – claiming they lack experience yet hiring less experienced European American males; and cursory interviews with no intention to seriously consider African American applicants. These conscious actions point to CRT's Ordinariness of Racism and the widespread range of implementation throughout the state and field. This finding is supported not only by this study's participants but also by the reviewed literature in the field: Johnson (2005) in Texas, Parker (2009) in New York, Odum (2011) in the Southern United States, Taylor (2011) in Virginia, and Wright (2011) in North Carolina. Explicit and/or implicit actions by board members include misuse of the employment fit paradigms that can be camouflage for racism. Additional possible subconscious actions that continue racism are societies' adherence to system justification and leadership categorization theories via mental prototypes of a superintendent being a European American male, as opposed to the superintendent job accomplishment being achieved by persons of any race or gender.

Implicit Leadership Views

Implicit Social Cognition (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), Leadership Categorization (Lord,

Foti, & De Vader, 1984), and System Justification Theory (Jost & Andrews, 2011; van der Toorn & Jost, 2014) are other implicit leadership themes that warrant further discussion in this chapter. From the participants' references concerning the lack of serious employment consideration and employment opportunities within the state, the participating superintendents, while content with their employment, districts, and service, believe(d) that the state's school boards are reluctant to hire African Americans – possibly because board members don't know the benefits, purposes, and analogous goals they share; possibly because of implicit, stereotypical, prejudicial, or even racist views. This reluctance supports CRT's Centrality/Ordinariness of Racism tenet. Without conscious forethought, a person who fulfills all the credentials, experiential requirements, and personal qualities most desired in the literature (Boring, 2003) is determined unacceptable for the job by board members solely because of the color of his skin. The goal of quality education for all is overshadowed by the "stigma," as one superintendent called it, that society places on African American men.

Within the study data, one of the superintendent participants spoke openly of his view of this state's school boards and said, "I believe that there is a stigma associated with the African American male, in general." Thus this is another area in which race becomes an issue that African American superintendent candidates must raise and discuss with board members in order to address and clarify any questions or misconceptions. European American superintendent candidates, being the mainstream leader prototype, need less – and therefore take less – care to concern themselves with clarifying and/or rectifying others' conceptions, whereas African American males, who are sometimes viewed as the quintessential minority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), risk encountering a wide range of purposely-created misconceptions (Treitler, 2015) at each encounter. This problem is magnified by the continuous propagation and

maintenance of both the European American leadership and the quintessential minority misconceptions (Burrell, 2010). These men must actually and subtly ask and address the same question Wright (2011) pondered: what do people think an African American leader will do? Often essentialized, many pigeonhole these superintendents as being unable to lead an affluent European American school district to greater status and view their ability as subordinate to European American superintendents' ability to lead a poor urban minority district. Society generally does not evaluate each individual's leadership strengths. One study participant stated,

"…judgments that may be passed on you, may be so far from the truth, your

ability may be off the charts, but because of something small, you might not have

the opportunity to show it in a different context than the district you're in either as

the superintendent or working as a teacher. So, be very mindful all the time of

how you conduct yourself."

Another said,

"I think the biggest thing we have to let the search consultants know is that we're

not African American superintendents, we're superintendents. So, I can be the

superintendent of a Caucasian district as much as a minority or inner city district.

And sometimes you don't want to be pigeonholed as just a minority

superintendent."

A third statement made was, "We typically have been viewed as, and I think we're still viewed largely as African American superintendents, as either incompetent, we're not politically savvy, and all we want to do is whine."

Based on participant data and this study's literature (Oreopoulos & Dechief, 2012; Rödin and Özcan, 2011; Trichas & Schyns, 2012), school boards don't always base their hiring

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decisions solely on pre-defined district needs or on a clearly agreed-upon vision and mission. Board members don't base their decisions on the wisdom of the candidate's work quality (Rooth, 2010), equal employment opportunity regulations (Åslund & Skans, 2012), or even on a superintendent profile suggested by the typical search agent (Quinn et. al, 2012). School board members frequently default to implicit beliefs regarding attributes a leader should have that are unrelated to a person's leadership ability or that have nothing to do with district leadership at all. Reasons provided in this study's previous literature include gut feelings, gossip, rumors, and perceptions about the candidate and the candidate's spouse, the candidate's name, nationality, and/or physical attributes. Reasons provided from the data include study participants' perceptions of board members' personal preferences, community rejection of racial differences, stereotypes and degradations concerning African American males, and perceptions of controllability desires. Reasons identified in implicit social cognition research include mass media depictions and stereotypes, unidentified or inaccurately identified traces of past memories and experiences, and extrapolations of actions to same-group members (Baron & Banaji, 2009; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Nosek, Hawkins & Frazier, 2011; Rooth, 2010). All these reasoning sources converge during the hiring process, thus leaving aspiring African American superintendents with an ocean of misconceptions to wade through, address, and overcome prior to even addressing the actual job skills. Board members may intend to make hiring decisions based on the district's pre-determined needs, but default to subconscious implicit comfort levels. The case of the African American superintendent who was told that he lacked experience while a less experienced European American candidate was hired, or the African American superintendent who received good reviews from the state's department of education yet had to leave the state for continued employment, raise questions as to why these men were not sought

by districts with vacancies. Is it possible that, as in Rooth (2010), even though hiring authorities found no discrepancy in quality work, they still implicitly preferred not to hire the qualified minority candidate? The superintendents in this study feel the answer to this question is a resounding "yes." Is it possible that, as in Baron and Banaji (2009), school boards harbor a "robust implicit preference" (p. 920) for European American superintendents, or that Leadership Categorization subconsciously shrouds the benefits that these experienced superintendents can provide? Study participants again resoundingly answer "yes." The convergence between the literature and the beliefs and experiences of the participating superintendents highlight why they feel they are limited in places where their job applications will be considered equitably and what they must address in interviews. These experiences and beliefs also suggest that the CRT tenet, the Centrality/Ordinariness of Racism – i.e. racism is part of American societal life – can be found in implicit social cognition. What the school board members think of candidates, and what the candidates think of board members and the community, can influence their every decision, especially initial decisions to recruit, apply, screen, interview, hire, and/or accept each other. Without having at least some understanding of the ordinariness of racism, white privilege, and their own implicit biases, school boards will not, and cannot compare candidates equitably. Without an understanding the ordinariness of racism, White Privilege, and their own implicit biases, school board members will have more doubts, mistrust, and questions of even the African American superintendents they do hire because an implicit cloud of racism – and racist practices systemic to the maintenance of racialization – exists (Burrell, 2010; Treitler, 2015).

Through unwillingness to acknowledge White Privilege, its proponents continue to teach their children/students a fallacy of universal White supremacy, positing that all "White" people are better than any person of color in every situation in the world. Restating Pager's (2003)

findings, it is easier for a White male with a felony conviction to get a job than a Black male with no criminal record and better credentials. There may be historically caused and still unresolved disadvantages that some African Americans must overcome to reach parity in the current inequitably measured society; but as Wright (2011) stated, "More African Americans are qualified to be superintendent than the 12 or 13 of us that are holding positions now, that's for sure (p. 71)." As stated by the study participants, "Everybody can say we are equal opportunity people until we have to live it…Caucasian males still can apply and be interviewed for places that African American males [can't]." Another statement was, "you have to understand racially, there may be places you don't even want to apply for because it's just a waste of time…you're not going to be seriously considered because it's just the nature of the community." Due to White Privilege and implicit biases, these men not only are limited in the places where they will be seriously considered for employment and compelled to address historically-seeded psychological misconceptions at every interview opportunity, but must endure purposely wasted time spent in cursory interviews. Furthermore, if hired for the position after the interviews, they must dedicate a certain amount of their time addressing issues of race and inequity versus focusing on the educational and organizational issues they were hired to handle, thus making their jobs more challenging.

Through unwillingness to acknowledge White Privilege, supporters deny social justice. Justice, fairness, and equity of opportunity to acquire wealth and social capital are undermined because White Privilege denies equal access. As stated by McIntosh (1988), White Privilege provides benefits due to skin color – not merit, but skin color. Pertinent to this study, the "knapsack of special provisions, maps, codebooks, tools, blank checks" that McIntosh delineated (p. 165) allows unequal and greater access for white superintendent aspirants to the initial same-

race supportive educational experiences and career formation, increases their percentage of chance to attend and succeed in college, and increases their chances to find ongoing career mentors. Added to those factors are the basic lifestyle advantages offered by White Privilege mentioned by Ladson-Billings (2010), Lyubansky (2013), and Williams (1999) that cause the achievement gap, employment gap, parental economic and income gap, non-academic experiential learning gap, inheritance gap, cultural norms and expectations gap, health gap, health care quality gap, and nutrition gap. Furthermore, this study puts forth that White Privilege and the Ordinariness of Racism generally place African American males at a disadvantage compared to European American males in superintendent resume screening, interview procedures, and job procurement. It requires a locally- or individually-determined non-Power Structure Prototype (PSP) tax of personnel review time, talent, ability, credentials, social capital, and/or whatever interest/benefit is desired by the organization to obtain the job, as mentioned by several study participants and authors and researchers in this study's literature review (Rooth, 2010; Squires & Kubrin, 2005; Thomas, 2001; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999; Wright, 2011).

The PSP tax is a fictitious term that refers to the payment amount necessary for a person to be compared equitably to someone with prototypical European American male attributes. Many researchers speak indirectly of this tax. Pager (2003) found that it was easier for a White male with a felony conviction to get a job than an African American male with no criminal record and better credentials (p. 54), illustrating that the PSP tax necessary for a job exceeded credentials and good-standing citizenship, in that instance. When Thomas and Gabarro (1999) stated, "there remain companies in which no amount of individual effort, preparation, or performance is likely to propel a person of color into an executive position" (p. 6), their statement indicated the PSP tax equaled total assimilation along with cultural, heritage, and skin

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color change. This statement is similar to Wright (2011), who said that "some candidates never get a chance because of skin color, no matter how prepared they are" (p. 82). For the districts open to considering African Americans as their superintendent, the PSP tax is the necessity of being more prepared than other more prototypical contenders; as one study participant said, "[you] have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good."

Future Study

Future research should explore several areas of focus that confirm and branch out from this study's level of accomplishment. Namely,

1. What are the hiring experiences of African American superintendents in other states and regions of the United States?

2. What are the hiring experiences of aspiring African American teachers, principals, central office administrators, and assistant superintendents, especially those who have applied to but been denied the superintendent position?

3. What are the explicit concerns of school board members when interviewing, considering, and comparing an African American superintendent candidate to a European American superintendent candidate?

4. What are search agents' explicit self-reports on White Privilege and institutional racism, and what are search agents doing to combat White Privilege and institutional racism, if anything?

5. What are the reactions of school board members when exposed to implicit leadership research and theories, such as Implicit Social Cognition, Leadership Categorization, and System Justification Theory? Are school boards and search agents open to an Implicit Association Test (IAT) and discussions prior to beginning the superintendent

hiring process? Do school board members' and search agents' explicit self-reports concerning hiring African American superintendents align with their IAT results?

6. How many European American, versus African American, superintendents move from one district to another or are in the second+ superintendency? Also, how many have a doctorate and how comparable are their credentials to those who serve only once?

Recommendations

Four sets of recommendations proceed from this study in light of the experiences of the African American superintendents and the literature reviewed.

Recommendations for Policy Groups

It is recommended that policy groups publicize information concerning implicit biases in the hiring process and that they publicize and promote information concerning mentoring programs, especially cross-race/cross-cultural/cross-gender instruction to both mentors and protégés including training in diversity and equity.

Recommendations for School Boards and Search Agents/Agencies

It is also recommended that school boards and search agents/agencies devote substantial attention to addressing implicit biases in the hiring process, familiarize themselves with diverse superintendent networks and individual candidates from those networks, and invest in mentoring programs, especially cross-race/cross-cultural/cross-gender instruction to both mentors and protégés.

Recommendations for Superintendent Development Programs

Furthermore, superintendent development programs (formal, academic, and informal) should devote substantial attention to addressing implicit biases in the hiring process, both

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familiarizing themselves with and promoting a wider range of superintendent networks and creating, instructing, and employing mentoring programs, especially cross-race/cross-cultural/cross-gender instruction to both mentors and protégés which include training in diversity and equity throughout their preparation.

Recommendations for Aspiring and Practicing Superintendents

Finally, individual superintendents and superintendent aspirants should first dedicate themselves to preparation of the highest level of competency they can attain throughout their careers. They should also devote substantial attention to addressing implicit biases in the hiring process, preparing to strategically initiate implicit racial understanding during the interview, and managing implicit social cognition during their employment. Additionally, superintendents and aspirants should seek participation in mentoring programs and networks in which they can develop good reputations and relationships that will allow for guidance and psychosocial development.

Recommendation Rationale

Implicit biases carry great weight in achieving positive employment decisions. The recommended actions ultimately will benefit all stakeholders, including the approximate 500 districts entrenched in hiring European Americans, the approximate 10 entrenched in hiring African Americans, and the remaining school districts within the state. By revealing and learning how to examine and address implicit biases, everyone can communicate more honestly about decisions with others and more importantly with themselves. Until biases are addressed no program, process, or suggestions for improvement will succeed, because biases will subvert the efforts. Included in these conversations and training should be the theories of White Privilege (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994; McIntosh, 1988), Implicit Social Cognition (Greenwald & Banaji,

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1995) and Leadership Categorization (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984). For those who do not intentionally harbor racist views, these activities will help provide a more accurate consideration of what each candidate can offer a district and may greatly assist board members to understand benefits they may be missing and harm they may be incurring due to homogenized administrations. This idea aligns with Gollwitzer's (1999) implementation theory and guidance that intentionality must be applied, and implicit stereotypes must be dismantled, in order for needs to be clearly defined and optimally attained.

The promotion of more diverse networks will theoretically give people of color more avenues to connect with others and give everyone more opportunities to work together and learn to understand individuals' strengths, weaknesses, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences, forging improvement in the educational field and in society. The increased familiarization by school districts and search agents will again increase the pool of superintendent candidates and knowledge of each applicant's leadership abilities. The combination of more diversity in the creation, promotion, and familiarization of networks should also result in a greater network pool from which better-equipped, more capable mentors can proceed.

The creation, promotion, and instruction of mentoring programs, especially cross-race/cross-cultural/cross-gender instruction to both mentors and protégés with training in diversity and equity, should assist in learning to overcome "protective hesitation" (Thomas, 2001, p. 105). This newly-acquired and implemented knowledge and subsequent communication may ultimately improve the quality of both the organizations and the superintendent applicants by providing greater understanding and a richer heterogenic perspective.

Conclusion

This study undertook to investigate the experiences of African American male

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superintendents with the hiring practices of a particular Midwest state. It found that these superintendents experienced high levels of agency, were comfortable with support from their boards and community, and increased fulfillment of their district's improvement. It also found that the superintendents felt that no overt racism or discrimination was directed toward them personally during their training or application procedures; however, there are definite structural racism practices and overtones within the state's superintendent employment process. (Apparently, the superintendent's definition of overt racism did not include the general practice of withholding information from them or camouflaged reasons for not hiring them.) Those practices include a limited number and demography of districts that were open to African American superintendent leadership, implicit rationale for not hiring African Americans, the feeling of manipulated requirements to avoid hiring anyone undesired, and European American superintendent networks withholding information from and excluding African Americans.

A notable point of interest is that previous research indicates that acquiring a mentor (or mentors) is difficult for African Americans within the majority European American male superintendent network. None of the study participants had experienced any difficulty acquiring a mentor. Early in their careers, their mentors selected them, instead of the typical reverse where the mentor is solicited by the protégé. The fact that all the superintendents had mentors may be a significant reason why they succeeded to attain the superintendent position.

Search agents are responsible to find the best candidate available for the district. As a positive point of interest, the study participants strongly encouraged speaking with the representative search agent before job application to understand the district's openness to hiring an African American as their CEO. In order to avoid reinscribing racism, the aspiring superintendent is still encouraged to apply if the district remains appealing to the candidate and

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knowing the district's stance will help the candidate prepare for any possible interview. However, it is acknowledged that a risk of wasted time and/or a damaging number of application rejections is a possibility. Study participants acknowledged that there are districts where, regardless of one's qualifications, if the district isn't open to hiring a person due to race (or any other signifier such as gender) the district will most likely find a way around hiring (such as using camouflaged reasons like fit or perceived lack of experience). Some search agents, regardless of the agent's personal feelings, will relate the district's position honestly. A negative point of interest, however, is that some search agents and districts will encourage the superintendent's application in order to appear unbiased, although they have a pre-determined intent not to hire them due to race.

Network access, especially concerning connections and trustworthy recommendations to available positions, brings up another negative point of interest. Due to the value of social, friendship, and occupational influence, a lack of access can negate employment consideration in many districts. African American males have not historically been, and still currently are not fully connected to the majority European American male superintendent social, friendship, and occupational networks that provide the necessary job recommendations and much district leadership information.

The United States' leader prototype is generally the European American male. Historical media and propaganda has placed all others, including African American males, in subordinate hierarchal positions and constructed the majority of international social systems to continually reinforce the hierarchy and European American male prototype. In order to overturn the system on an individual basis for a particular superintendent position, study participants suggest being able to portray a benefit to the district that is significant enough to them to out-value the

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hierarchal difference – a non-Power Structure Prototype (PSP) tax, while still realizing that there

are some places in which nothing will be significant enough.

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Appendix

Superintendent Basic Background Questionnaire

The research question, "*what are your lived experiences as an African American male superintendent with your state's superintendent hiring practices*", will begin our live, one-on-one, 90-minute, interview. Any information provided below will assist in improving the quality and depth of our interview. Please provide any information requested below that is not included in your accompanying resume or vitae. Feel free to answer in only one or two sentences, for greater discussion at the interview. Thank you.

1. How long have you been a superintendent, and where, if multiple positions were held (if not indicated on your resume)?

2. Have you applied for more than one superintendent position? If so, how many, and for how long have you been applying for superintendencies?

3. Do you feel that you've ever been passed over for a less qualified candidate?

4. What pre-superintendent jobs did you have and for how long (if not indicated on your resume)?

5. What was the most beneficial activity that prepared you for the superintendency?

6. What, if any, is the most memorable supportive experience you have had in your pursuit of the superintendency?

7. What, if any, is the most memorable dissuasive experience you have had in your pursuit of the superintendency?

8. In only a few words, what is your greatest achievement as a superintendent?

9. In only a few words, what has been your toughest challenge as a superintendent?

10. What are your thoughts concerning the ratio of African American male superintendents in your state (53 to 1)?