Get in Where You Fit in: The Career Paths for White and Black Superintendents

Terrell Melvin Hill
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Get in Where You Fit in: The Career Paths for White and Black Superintendents

A Dissertation Presented

by

TERRELL M. HILL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2018

Educational Policy and Leadership College of Education
Get in Where You Fit in: The Career Paths for White and Black Superintendents

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TERRELL M. HILL

Approved as to style and content by:

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Kathryn McDermott, Chair

______________________________
Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, Member

______________________________
Andrew Effrat, Member

______________________________
Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin, Dean
College of Education
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mother, my wife, my children, and family as a whole. A special dedication to my late maternal grandparents, Jimmie and Pearline Mayweather. I also dedicate this to my late grandfather, JB Mitchell who passed two weeks after my defense; and my beautiful, selfless, spoiling grandma, Pearl Mitchell (paternal). Each of you have inspired me to continue on this journey and I am always grateful for the love and encouragement. I pray our family sees many more doctoral degrees earned.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Better is the end of a thing than its beginning...” Ecclesiastes 7:8

First and foremost I thank God for allowing me to see the completion of this project. I would also like to express my gratitude for the many people who pushed, pulled, prodded, and seemingly carried me through this process.

Mom, it is such an understatement to say you have been with me from the beginning. You have always been my role model, and biggest fan. I thank you for every encouraging word and push. I thank you for teaching me to trust God in every situation. We’ve come a long way from the “stoop!” My dad Freddie Hill, and my brothers Tracy and Todd.

Charmaine, you have been the wife and friend I needed to move through this process. You have been patient, accommodating, and encouraging. You were right when you told me to go back and finish, or “I would never be happy with myself.” Thanks for being my Queen!

To Kaiya, Imani, and Adia, Daddy loves you ladies so much, and this work is just another accomplishment I desire each of you to use as motivation to do even greater things. Remember, “you are a Hill!” I thank my many family members for all the encouragement, especially my cousin Stan. I also want to thank my Family Church family for the love and support.

I would like to thank my advisor, Kathryn McDermott for taking me on as an advisee after so many years away from school. Your belief in my work, and constant encouragement have meant the world to me. I also want to thank Dr. Don Tomaskovic-
Devey and Dr. Andy Effrat for serving as committee members, as well as for asking the questions that need answers.

Special thanks goes to Dr. Tuesday Cooper for her editing, questioning, and pushing. I know you played a huge part in me getting back on the road to completion. I am forever grateful.

Thanks to my special encouragers Carolyn Sutton, Bishop Cardell Sutton (my Swansea squad), Russell Sills (now I am Dr. Hill for real), Dr. Santosha Oliver, Danielle Batchelder, Steve Carvalho, Dr. Craig Cooke, Azanda Seymour, Dr. Richard Gonzales, Dr. Preston Green III, Dr. Gina Joseph-Collins, Dr. Kevin Grennan, and the Jay Fishman (late CEO of Travelers Insurance). Thanks to my mentor for over 20 years, Dr. Carlton Pickron. Carlton, thank you for not allowing me give up on my dream.

I want to give a special thanks to my biological father Alex McKoy, for the constant encouragement, as well as the entire Mitchell and McKoy family.

There are so many more to thank and express gratitude to, but I will just say thank you and trust you each know who you are and how you have contributed to my journey.
ABSTRACT

GET IN WHERE YOU FIT IN: THE CAREER PATHS FOR WHITE AND BLACK SUPERINTENDENTS

FEBRUARY 2018

TERRELL M. HILL, B.S., WESTFIELD STATE COLLEGE
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Directed by: Professor Kathryn McDermott

Scholars have not added much to the literature with regards to the small numbers of women and people of color in the superintendent’s role, particularly in New England. Even though women make up the overwhelming majority of teachers, somehow White males continue to hold the majority of superintendencies. This study is significant because it brings greatly needed attention to the career paths that superintendents take, and why White males and females are more successful in obtaining superintendencies.

Through personal and confidential interviews, with semi-structured questions, of 12 White and Black, male and female superintendents, data was collected. The themes that emerged were, “Hookups” “Shot callers,” “Schooling,” “New Jacks” and “Hustling.” These themes spoke to the power of the networks and systems from which Whites continue to benefit. Whites are most likely to be in the position to hire superintendents
(school boards, search firms, etc.) and typically hire Whites for these superintendent
positions.

This information is also valuable to administrators of color, who aspire to become
superintendents. Also, I believe this study is of importance to school boards and search
firms that seek to sincerely hire from a truly diverse field of applicants. Particularly, this
study can help inform potential policy changes to ensure educators who aspire to be
superintendents have real opportunities to pursue and obtain those posts.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” (Barack Obama)

In August of 2002, I obtained my first school administrator position when I was hired as a Vice Principal for a high school in Connecticut. I was excited, relieved, and exhausted all at the same time. My nearly five-year quest to become a school administrator had finally ended. I had so many mixed emotions about obtaining this position due to many rejections for previously applied for administrator positions. During my interview with the school district Superintendent, she asked me to share my professional short and long-term goals. I defined short term as two to five years, and long term was five to ten years. I confidently shared with her that I fully expected to be a Principal in no more than three years and a Superintendent in less than ten years.

Thinking back, I would admit that I was just slightly bothered by her response. She laughingly said “wow that is ambitious of you!” I responded that I am a goal-oriented person and that I learn quickly, so I did not see any reason why I couldn’t accomplish this goal. I was young, naïve, and had no idea what lessons I would learn from my profession over the next decade plus. I would learn that opportunities for career advancement came quicker and more often for White administrators, than for administrators of color.

After serving in the role of Vice Principal for a little over four years, I began to pursue a Principal position. I saw this as the perfect time to start my pursuit, as I had been repeatedly told by veteran administrators, that I had already served a year more than I should have in the Vice Principal role. I was called in for an interview by every district
to which I applied. On four separate occasions, I made it to the finalist round, only to be
disappointed by the words “you are not being selected because the committee felt you
were not a good fit. I did not know what to do with those words, even still how to grow
from them. At this point I began to ask questions of trusted colleagues and mentors
regarding my pursuit of the next levels of school administration. What I consistently
heard was that I would find it increasingly difficult to obtain the more powerful positions
in my field. I also heard from these same educators that my journey would be long in
terms of positions I would need to hold prior to reaching my ultimate goal of school
superintendent. Since I saw others moving through the ranks with relative ease, I did not
want to accept what I was being told. After all, Barack Obama had defied the most
incredible odds and became the 44th President of the United States in 2008. He took over
the single greatest job in our country, how difficult could it be for me to earn just one of
the nearly 15,000 school superintendent positions in the U.S.?

As a Black man, I had already become accustomed to having to do “twice as
much, to get half as much.” This is a commonly held belief throughout Black culture. I
began to have many conversations with every school administrator of color I encountered
at meetings, conferences, and trainings. The more I conversed with them, the more I
realized there was a real problem for administrators of color as far as advanced career
progression was concerned. It also became increasingly clear to me that these
administrators almost exclusively worked in the urban districts or those with large
populations of students of color. In either scenario, they worked in what educators
understand to be the most challenging districts.
Statement of the Problem

Barbara L. Jackson (1995) states that in 1965, the National Education Association’s Educational Policies Commission wrote:

The superintendency of schools is one of the most crucial and perhaps most difficult public positions in American life today. The occupant of this position, more than any other single person in the community, influences the shape of public education. Thus, he has a basic role in determining what will become of the young people of his community, and through them what his community and the nation will become. (p. 1)

Although this statement was made over four decades ago, based on my experience it still accurately describes the position of the superintendency. Unlike other public figures, the superintendent has the entrusted responsibility of educating and caring for the children of the community. These are the same children who are expected to carry on the roles of their parents and other adults in that community.

According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Education (2013), females represented 76.3 percent, and males represented 23.7 percent of all public school teachers. The male population of teachers is comprised of 19.4 percent White males, and just 1.6 percent Black males, with the remainder being Hispanic or Asian. Unfortunately, for Black males, women, and other people of color, White males are most likely to occupy the superintendent’s office. While there have been significant gains into teaching, and other educational positions, the superintendency is unique because it has
been the slowest of all K-12 administrative roles to integrate women and people of color (Tallerico, 2000).

African American males, females, and White females are not only underrepresented in the superintendency, they are in the superintendency literature as well. According to Rusch (2004), the literature on all underrepresented groups in the superintendency is scarce. This is not the case for White males, who have been the focus of most of the scholarship in the last 75 years related to the superintendency (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the career path to the superintendency for superintendents in New England; and whether or not there are different paths for men and women, or for White and Black superintendents. There are six states in New England, which means there should be a large number of superintendencies. I specifically chose to conduct this study in New England for a few reasons. First, I learned from the literature that the greatest concentration of Black superintendents exists in the Southern and Western states. Additionally, those states have fewer superintendencies in relation to New England states, mainly due to county systems. Next, I have become concerned with the lack of scholarly discourse on the state of the superintendency in New England. I consider this silence on the issue a travesty of omission. Finally, I have grown up and been educated in New England, I have also established my professional career in these states. I do not believe I should have to move to a southern or western state in order to advance to the superintendency.
There are approximately four hundred and ninety-five superintendencies between the two New England states I have chosen to study. For the purposes of this study I will refer these two states as, States A and B. A closer look at those holding these positions reveals some interesting facts. Black males and females hold only 6 fulltime superintendencies in traditional school districts in States A and B. I chose not to include the superintendents of charter schools, since they are not traditional districts, and those superintendencies are a mix of full and part-time for various charter schools. Women in total hold one hundred and eighty-one of those superintendent posts in States A and B. Similar to the national data, White males by far hold the majority of superintendent positions. Since the teaching ranks do not reflect similar numbers for each of these groups, it is important to learn how the superintendent role continues to be the domain of White males?

Central Research Questions

The purpose of my study is to examine the career paths of White and Black, male and female superintendents, in States A and B, and thus two exploratory research questions are posed:

1. What does the career path to the superintendency look like for superintendents in States A and B; in particular, are there different patterns for men and women, or for White and Black superintendents?

2. To what extent have superintendents encountered the politics of “fit” in their careers, and how have superintendents of different races and genders experienced “fit” differently?
Qualitative research methods, and specifically a phenomenological approach, seem most appropriate to explore the career paths of White and Black, male and female superintendents, in States A and B. The phenomenological approach provided a personal and detailed description of the career paths for White and Black, male and female superintendents, in States A and B. This approach also helped me to gain greater insight into the lived experiences of these superintendents (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The source of primary data collection were in-depth interviews that sought to better understand the career path of White and Black, male and female superintendents in States A and B.

**Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because it brings greatly needed attention to the career paths that superintendents take, and why White males and females are more successful in obtaining this prized office, and often in shorter periods of time. In this study, I hoped to uncover valuable information from the superintendents interviewed. This information is also valuable to administrators of color, who aspire to become superintendents. Also, I believe this study is of importance to school boards and search firms that seek to sincerely hire from a truly diverse field of applicants.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The proposed theoretical perspective for this study draws from the notion of “fit.” Duke and Iwanicki (1992) define “fit” as “the extent to which a leader is perceived to be appropriately matched to a given context” (p. 26). The search firms, school board members, and other community stakeholders get to decide who “fits” and thus become
“gatekeepers” by controlling who gains access to the superintendency (Tallerico, 2000). In this regard, a potential candidate for a superintendency vacancy may possess all of the stated qualifications (i.e., license and experience) but still deemed not a good “fit” due to his or her race. “Critical Race Theory” posits the belief that society has a hierarchy based on race, and thus people of color do not get the same jobs, education, or opportunities as Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It would be fairly difficult for a person of color to cry racism as the subtlety of “institutionalized racism” makes it harder to prove. When the people who are racially prejudiced control the power socially, politically, and economically; those feeling the impact of job discrimination, have nobody to turn to for help (Tatum, 1997). Whites have the “networks” that continue to provide them with access to power to control the discourse around racism, and thus are able to maintain societal control (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Whites do not want to be seen as racists, however, the effects of racism are still felt by people of color, via the lack of equal opportunities and promotions, even though there are apparently no racist people. McIntosh (1989) calls these systemic advantages and societal privileges that Whites enjoy “White Privilege.”

**Overview**

The next chapter provides a literature review that focuses on the history of the public school superintendency, and the career paths to the superintendency. I review the roles race and discrimination on career mobility for people of color. The review drew from the following frameworks “Fit,” Critical Race Theory and the “new racism” to
provide a comprehensive understanding of the career paths of White and Black, males and females to the superintendency in States A and B.

Chapter 3 explores the phenomenological research methodology and design I used for this inquiry. I review the research questions that guided this inquiry and also provided a detailed description of the research plan used to select and recruit participants, and to complete the data analysis. I also address ethical considerations and discuss the potential limitations of the study. Chapter 4 will provide a descriptive summary of each study participant. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 6 concludes the study with a discussion of the implications of the findings, and identifies areas for additional research, as well as suggestions for those in the position to hire superintendents.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the career paths to the superintendency for White and Black, male and female superintendents in States A and B. This review of literature focuses mainly on the following frameworks: “Fit,” Critical Race Theory and the “new racism.” Through these frameworks I examined the roles race and discrimination may play in the career progression of Blacks in the labor market as a whole. This examination took into account the post-Civil Rights labor market. The career mobility of Blacks in corporate America was looked at in order to provide a context for the mobility patterns in educational management. Initially, I review the history of the public school superintendency, including a discussion of the origins, major changes, and challenges facing the position. I also discuss the demographics of the position as they relate to who holds the position and the typical career path to the position.

History of the Superintendency

The superintendency has been in existence for over 150 years (Glass et al., 2000). Originally, the position was that of clerk for the board of education, with the primary responsibility of coordinating the daily operations of a schoolhouse (Glass et al., 2000). The need arose for a single person to be made responsible for the administering the schools (Norton et al., 1996).
In 1837, the Buffalo, New York school district appointed what is believed to be the first superintendent of schools (Jackson, 1995; Norton et al., 1996). By 1860, there were 27 cities in the U.S. that had created a position called the superintendency (Glass et al., 2000). By 1867, only 3 more cities had created superintendent positions (Norton et al., 1996). Eventually, other school districts across the country followed suit and appointed a superintendent.

Superintendents were now considered master teachers and educators (Carter and Cunningham, 1997). As the superintendents proved their competence the boards became smaller, and the responsibilities of the superintendent continued to grow. The role of the superintendent has continued to evolve due societal needs and pressures. According to Norton et al. (1996), these growth periods can be broken down into four “Eras”:

1. Scientific Management Era
2. Human Relations Era
3. Civil Rights and Social Change Era
4. Era of Reform (1980s to Present)

**Characteristics of Superintendents**

It was important to gain a foundational understanding of the history of the superintendency. This underscores a need for understanding not only the complex organizational and political issues facing superintendents, but also the personal characteristics of those who serve in these positions. The most current data related to the superintendency, is in the 2010 Decennial Study of the American Association of School Administrators (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010).
The study was conducted via survey and there were 1,867 superintendents who responded. Some of the significant findings were:

**Table 2.1 Demographics of the 2010 Superintendent Survey Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Superintendents in sample</td>
<td>1867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent White</td>
<td>96 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent American Indian</td>
<td>1.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Asian/other</td>
<td>0.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Male</td>
<td>75.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Female</td>
<td>24.1 %</td>
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Table 2.1 shows a small sample size; however, the percentages are consistent nationally. What is important for readers to note is that the percentage of female respondents almost doubled since the 2000 study. This is a positive trend but these numbers still pale in comparison to their teacher numbers. According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Education (2013), females represented 76.3 percent, and males represented 23.7 percent of all public-school teachers. The male population is comprised of 19.4 percent White males, 1.6 percent Black males, and 1.8 percent Hispanic males. White males are most likely to hold the superintendent position, over all other groups.
Table 2.2 Comparison of White and Minority Superintendents by School and Community Racial Composition

<table>
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<tr>
<th>District Demographics</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents of color exceed fifty percent</td>
<td>43.4 %</td>
<td>55.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents of color less than five percent</td>
<td>96.3 %</td>
<td>3.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of color exceed fifty percent</td>
<td>37.3 %</td>
<td>61.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of color less than five percent</td>
<td>95.3 %</td>
<td>4.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age When First Hired</td>
<td>Superman by the age of 46</td>
<td>50 %</td>
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In Table 2.2, one can see that there is a correlation between the percentage of residents and students of color and the number of superintendents of color. Wherever there are large populations of color there is a greater likelihood a minority can be hired to be superintendent. The Council of Great City Schools (2008-2009) shared that 52% of its member superintendents were people of color, 42% Black and 10% Hispanic. These figures were much higher than the 23% of superintendents for districts with more than 25,000 students reported in Glass et al. (2000). White superintendents still hold a significant percentage of the superintendencies overall, even for the majority minority districts. In the non-minority districts, the White superintendents hold almost all the posts. Whites also obtain their first superintendency at an earlier age than minorities. Males on average obtain their first superintendency at an earlier age than females as well.

It is interesting to note the racial differences in how survey respondents viewed the characteristics that were most pertinent to their hiring. Minority superintendents believed their ability to be a change agent and instructional leader were the reasons they were hired. They rated personal characteristics least important. On the other hand White superintendents believed they were hired because of their personal characteristics and
ability to be a change agent. They felt being an instructional leader was the least important characteristic. One has to wonder why the Minority superintendents believed being an instructional leader was more important than possessing the personal characteristics that White superintendents feel were so valued by the hiring parties? Since more Whites are hired as superintendents, does that mean Minorities are focused on the wrong qualities and is it possible for them to ever possess the personal characteristics of their White counterparts? What exactly are those characteristics?

The last data shared speaks to the opportunities White superintendents have to stay in their roles. Since they are more likely to be in districts with fewer students of color, this would mean they are leading other than urban districts for the most part. The turnover in non-urban communities is much less than the average of 3.6 years for urban superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2010).

**History and Future of African American Superintendents**

School boards became more representative of people of color during the late 1960s and early 1970s of the “Civil Rights and Social Change Era,” and with this increased representation came demands for superintendents who represented this population, and could be role models for it (Jackson, 1995). It was not until the 1970s that African Americans were appointed to the position of superintendent, albeit only in urban districts in any significant numbers (Glass et al., 2000; Jackson, 1995). It should be noted that there were no reliable records kept of these early superintendents. This
would also include records of the superintendencies held by Blacks in segregated districts throughout the South prior to Brown v. Board, 1954.

Superintendents of different racial backgrounds typically serve in areas where persons of the same race are in the majority (Scott, 1980; Glass, 1992; Tallerico, 2000). African American superintendents in large cities, were viewed by many constituents, as representatives of their entire race, and incredible expectations were placed on them by the community (Jackson, 1995). What compounded these issues was the fact that these African American superintendents did not take over these districts until the problems facing the districts were almost impossible to remedy (Moody, 1971; Scott, 1980). Many of their school boards were still majority White, and these boards were unwilling to make substantive changes (Jackson, 1995). The challenges faced by the African American superintendents were, and continue to be great. Charles Moody (1971), concluded in his dissertation that;

Black superintendents are chief school officers of districts that are largely Black and in effect are not an integral part of the larger educational systems. They find themselves isolated in the segregated sector of American society where Blacks and other non-whites are in the majority. These Black superintendents have been forced into the unenviable position of survival by proving they are supermen. They are not allowed in terms of their responsibility and pressing needs to concentrate on the instructional aspects of the school systems. The Black superintendent finds himself on the platform constantly trying to communicate to the community that he has inherited a district beset with problems. He is
expected to be a miracle man who can undo in a few days, conditions that years of neglect, and in some cases mismanagement have created (p. 22-23).

There were 16,700 school districts in 1974, yet there were only 43 African American superintendents or 0.25% leading those districts (Scott, 1980). In 2003, there were 14,600 superintendents in the United States, of these only 248 or 1.7% were African American. In 2011, African Americans represented a mere 3% of the 15,000 superintendencies in the entire United States. It is easy to see just how far African Americans have “not” come in the realm of the superintendency. In the pool of African American superintendents, males made up approximately 70 percent (Robinson, Gault, and Lloyd, 2004). Similar to their White female counterparts, Black females represent a much smaller percentage of the superintendency ranks in relation to their teacher population.

African American superintendents lead school districts in 32 different states. The greatest proportion of African American superintendents is located in the southeastern parts of the United States (Robinson et al., 2004). It should be noted that the sources of information regarding African American superintendents is limited and thus, some of the sources may be somewhat aged. The types of districts lead by African Americans vary in size and location, but the majority of African American superintendents lead urban districts. In fact, 133 out of 248 African American led districts were urban, while 74 were rural, and 43 were in small and large towns (Robinson et al., 2004). African American superintendents are responsible for over 3 million students nationwide. African American students made up 54% or 1.7 million of the total student population in
these districts led by African American superintendents. This number represents nearly 25% of the 7.7 million African American public school students in the U.S. Of the remaining students in African-American led districts, there were 789,227 White students, and 481,699 Latino students enrolled. Students of color make up 74% of the total enrollment in African American led districts. However, students of color make up only 50% of the total U.S. public school enrollment (Fast Facts, 2015). These demographics suggest that school boards act as if they believe Black superintendents can only lead majority-minority districts.

**Career Path**

Superintendents are staying longer in the career field as there are fewer young professional educators who aspire to the superintendency (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The typical career track to the superintendency has changed little over the years. Most superintendents follow the typical career path of teacher then building level administrator before becoming a superintendent. Superintendents usually spend six to ten years teaching in the classroom prior to earning their first administrator position. A high percentage obtained their first superintendency less than one year after they first applied (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

**Gender**

The story for female superintendents looks more positive than that of Black male superintendents, but greater scrutiny reveals something much less celebratory. In 1910, females accounted for 8.9 percent of all superintendents then dropped to 1.2 percent in 1982 (Blount, 1998); their numbers rebounded in 2000 to 13.2 percent (Glass, et. al.,
(Grogan & Brunner, 2005). The latest figures show that their numbers have increased significantly, as they represent 24.1 percent of superintendents (Kowalski, et. al., 2010). Due to the limitations of the available data, it is not clear as to whether or not Black female superintendents have also seen gains in their numbers as with their White counterparts.

It should be noted that female superintendents, along with superintendents of color, are also concentrated in large urban districts. In 2010, the Council of Great City Schools, which is a coalition of 65 of the largest urban districts in the country, populated by 14 percent of the nation’s 487 million K-12 students, reported that 34 percent of its superintendents were women, 20 percent African American, 12 percent White, and 2 percent Hispanic (Kowalski, et. al., 2010).

**Superintendents of Color**

The characteristics of White superintendents discussed earlier are for the most part the same for superintendents of color. However, I think it is important to discuss the characteristics of superintendents of color separately, as there are some significant differences to note that will help to give a context for later discussion in this paper. Early reports on people of color in the superintendency between the 1930s and 1950s shows their numbers were sparse, and they were mainly employed in African American districts in the south (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Presently, they would most likely serve in districts located in the Southwest, Far West, and Southeast. Superintendents of different
racial backgrounds tend to serve in areas where persons of the same race live in
significant numbers (see Table 2.1).

According to Kowalski, et al (2010), superintendents of color is that they earn
more Ed.D.’s and Ph.D.’s, than their White counterparts. One sobering fact is that
African-American and Hispanic men do not benefit financially from their higher levels of
education as much as their White counterparts (Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas, and
Johnson, 2005). Superintendents of color also belong to more professional organizations,
such as, American Association of School Administrators (AASA), National Alliance of
Black School Educators (NABSE), and Association for Supervision and Curriculum
Development (ASCD). The belief is that participation in these professional associations
will provide opportunities for information sharing and in-service training, but more
importantly the chance to network (Kowalski, et. al., 2010).

During the decade of the 1990s, the number of superintendents of color grew by
31 percent; however, there are concerns that this growth will either plateau or decline
precipitously as the number of superintendents of color entering the hiring pipeline
decline (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). The number of teachers, principals, and
central office staff of color need to be increased in order to more equitably fill the
pipeline (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Filling the increased need for people of
color in education will not happen easily, as alternative opportunities in other, better
paying fields have become more readily available for those people of color with better
educational attainment.
Superintendents of color historically have served in districts in which students of color were the majority, and this is still the case. Of these superintendents of color in majority minority districts, 23.7 percent serve in large cities. Let us be reminded that large urban districts represent less than ten percent of the over 15,000 school districts in the United States. White superintendents on the other hand are found in all types of districts around the entire country, only 5.6 percent are serving in large urban districts.

White superintendents also serve in districts with smaller populations than do superintendents of color. In districts with fewer than 3,000 students, 72.5 percent are led by White superintendents, versus the 51.4 percent of superintendents of color who are serving in districts with more than 3,000 students. In fact, a majority of the largest school districts have superintendents of color (Kowalski, et. al., 2010). This distinction as to where superintendents serve is important for a number of reasons. Most importantly, urban school districts are riddled with a number of issues such as high rates of poverty, poor academic performance, increased bureaucracy, low expectations for students, and high superintendent turnover.

In terms of moving along a career path to the superintendency, superintendents of color and White superintendents tend to follow similar patterns. However, superintendents of color were almost twice as likely (22.2 percent) as White superintendents (13.3 percent) to start their administrative career as a coordinator of some type, which most typically is a district level position. Important to note is the point that these coordinator positions are very often created from some type of grant or funding, and focused on students of color. As stated earlier, most superintendents in route to the
superintendency move from teacher to either assistant principal or principal (Tallerico, 2000). This route is true for 80 percent of the White superintendents, but only 65 percent of the superintendents of color (Kowalski, et. al., 2010). As for the next step to the superintendent’s office, about 10 percent more White superintendents than those of color take this route. Superintendents of color more often obtain a central office position prior to gaining the superintendency. With a longer route and more positions to hold en route to the superintendency, it is feasible to believe that many prospective superintendents of color never make it to the superintendency.

Gatekeepers

The route to the superintendency is not just longer due to the extra positions superintendents of color have to endure, but they must also deal with the headhunters and consultants hired by school boards to find potential superintendent candidates. It is commonly accepted among superintendents of color that the hiring practices of these consultants and subsequently the school boards that hire them, are inherently discriminatory (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski, et. al., 2010; Moody, 1983; Tallerico, 2000). Over the years school boards have relied more and more on consultants. This growing reliance on headhunters is due to the declining number of applicants for the superintendent openings. These consultants or headhunters are usually White and from the ranks of former superintendents, college/university based headhunters, national search firms, or individual entrepreneurs (Tallerico, 2000). The costs to school boards for these services range from a low of $2,000 to a high of $40,000, depending on the experience and level of service being provided. School boards are willing to spend this
money for the consultants because of the convenience, expertise, and access to potential candidate pools (Moody, 1983; Tallerico, 2000). Also, school boards realize that these headhunters can “take the heat” for issues arising from the search and leave without lasting consequences (Tallerico, 2000). School boards hire the consultant or headhunter that best “fits”. What makes the fit a good fit, is when the consultant knows what the board wants and brings that to the board (Tallerico, 2000).

Once the school board selects a consultant to conduct the superintendent search, the consultant is given his or her hiring instructions. Sometimes these instructions are clear and deliberate, other times they are implied, but understood nonetheless (Tallerico, 2000). This quote from a search consultant was anything but implied, “I have been told, do not bring a minority or a woman to the board” (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003, p. 13). Superintendent hiring brochures typically contain the expected terminology related to the qualifications and abilities desired in candidates such as, shared decision making, high academic standards, leadership vision, student-centeredness, a focus on excellence, school-community partnerships, strategic planning, and community involvement. Some of the personal traits or affective characteristics sought in prospective superintendents are, courage, ethical, energetic, dedicated, organized, accessible, innovative, knowledgeable, etcetera (Tallerico, 2000). Appropriately, none of the listed characteristics or traits, speak to gender or race.

Now that the consultant knows what the board is looking for in a candidate, the job is advertised and the applications begin to arrive. At this point the power of the consultant is first evident. The consultant reads and screens all of the applications, then
conducts the first round of interviews. After the first round of interviews most candidates of color and women had been eliminated from the search pool (Moody, 1983; Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003; Tallerico, 2000). The elimination of candidates of color is particularly prevalent for searches by districts with predominantly White student populations. It is only reasonable to believe these candidates were never going to be seriously considered for the positions, and only served to quell any negative reaction to people of color not getting an opportunity to be interviewed. As far as the application process goes, White and African American candidates apply to districts in which their respective race is in the majority for students. Accordingly, only about 30 percent on average from each group applies to districts with student populations opposite of their race (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003). While consultants and headhunters may have the opportunity to diversify the candidate pool presented to boards of education they do not. Shakeshaft & Jackson (2003), stated “search consultants cannot afford to do something radical that might jeopardize future employment opportunities” (p. 13).

Do not expect consultants or headhunters to alter their practices as long as they believe they have an “obligation to bring a slate of finalist to the board that [is] representative of the community” (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003). It should not be surprising that boards do not get to interview candidates of color; what should be surprising is the fact that boards do not see this absence of African American candidates as “unusual or worthy of thought” (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003).

While it still does not make the situation right, this racial belief has been beneficial to African American superintendents in that they are afforded opportunities,
albeit limited, to be superintendents in majority minority districts (Moody, 1983; Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003). In the event that an African American candidate actually makes it to the finalist round of a superintendent search in a predominantly White district, he or she will not typically be offered the job. On the other hand, more than half the White superintendents who apply to districts in which students of color are the majority can expect to be offered a position (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003). While there are those who would seek to lead major city school districts, such as a Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York; I would guess their reasons would be the higher pay, and potential for other career opportunities. The example that comes to mind is former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who was tapped for the position after serving as the Chicago superintendent. One could also assert, he had a “network” in his favor too, as a Harvard graduate. It is important to keep in mind that these districts represent a fraction of the 15,000 districts across the nation.

The dilemma for candidates of color seeking a superintendency, can be summed up by a comment made by a consultant to a Black candidate, “you are a good guy and I think that you could do a wonderful job here… you know the community and you have the experience…” (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003), needless to say the candidate was not moved forward as a finalist. Why do these “good guys” continually get kept from leading “good districts?” I will discuss this issue shortly, as I explore the racism that is at the heart of the problem through the perspective of critical race theory. The districts that African American superintendents are most often allowed to lead, are typically urban, typically hot spots, or problem districts (Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980).
Table 2.3 Race and Perceptions of Factors Restricting Access to the Superintendency for Persons of Color (Kowalski, et. al., 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Restrictions</th>
<th>% Minority</th>
<th>% White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of mentors who are district or school administrators</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of mentors who are professors of school administration</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice (i.e., hostile feelings, opinions, or attitudes of a racial, religious, or national group)</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic discrimination (i.e., treatment of a person based on race/ethnicity rather than on individual merit)</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited role models (people of color who are superintendents)</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3 shows the difference of perceptions between White and Minority candidates as to what restricts their access to the superintendency. A few particular points that should be noted in comparison to Whites, twice as many Minorities perceive that prejudice, discrimination, and the absence of mentors impede their progress to the superintendency.
The Urban Superintendency

When an African American male educator approached a trusted professor about his desire to become a superintendent in 1970, he received a telling response:

Frankly speaking, you might as well forget about being appointed a school superintendent. As far as I know outside of eleven southern states, there is one Negro superintendent of schools in the United States. He is in Lincoln Heights, an Ohio community of about 8,000 persons of whom 98 percent are Negro. You can consider yourself lucky if you get a principalship in a large city. Yes, I would say your best opportunities are in the large cities, if they are any place. I am sure you do understand there is no doubt in my mind about you being highly qualified and commended internationally, you are academically well prepared, and you are a successful teacher, but you are a Negro! (Moody, 1971)

One way or another African American males have come to understand that their desires to become superintendents are long-shots, and if they desire a predominantly White district, then it is most often a dream.

Scott (1980) stated that all types of school systems present difficulties to superintendents, but the urban systems present the most challenges. Moody (1973) noted, “the superintendent of a ‘model’ district faces mammoth tasks; the superintendent of a ‘problem’ district, insurmountable ones” (p. 377). African American superintendents are forced to prove they are “supermen” in these problem districts. The African American male superintendent is “expected to be a miracle man, who can undo in a few days, conditions that years of neglect, and in some cases, mismanagement have created”
Some of the issues faced by these superintendents of urban districts are; poor financial conditions, poor academic performance, high rates of poverty, increased bureaucracy, teacher unions, and a lack of confidence in the ability of the students. Thus far, the data clearly shows that White males continue to hold the majority of superintendent positions, while females have made some impressive gains over the past decade. Unfortunately, Black male superintendents have not increased their already small numbers. Overall, the representation of people of color in the superintendency remains troublesome, when one considers the total population and student enrollment data. I will now look at some of the major theoretical ideas that may help shed light on the reasons why superintendency data looks as it does.

Critical Race Theory

Earlier I shared my belief that racism plays a big role in the hiring process of school superintendents. I stated that I would discuss racism via the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT came about in the 1970s when a group of lawyers, activists and legal scholars realized that the Civil Rights movement could no longer press forward for equality without new theories and strategies to battle forms of racism (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995). CRT is an outgrowth of an earlier movement called Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CLS is a legal study that was started by a leftist legal movement that challenged the notion that “the civil rights struggle represents a long, steady march toward social transformation” (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CLS is dedicated to legal discourse in its analysis of legitimating structures in the society. CLS scholars critiqued mainstream legal ideology
for its portrayal of U.S. society as a meritocracy, but they failed to include racism in the critique. CRT is now used in other disciplines, such as education, which “use CRT ideas to understand tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and I.Q. and achievement testing” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT offers the following possible explanation for the limited representation of African American males in the superintendency.

Critical race theorists define racism as “a means by which society allocates privilege and status [and] racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people’s homes” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT is grounded in the realities of the lived experiences of racism. Thus the common experiences of African-American male superintendents, who have had a difficult time obtaining a position as a school superintendent, can be helpful in ending discriminatory policies and practices against other African Americans (Gregory, 2006).

W.E.B. DuBois stated in 1903, “the problem of the twentieth century is the color line” (DuBois, 1968). DuBois could just as well make that pronouncement today in the twenty-first century. There are those in society who believe racism is non-existent or at least declining. I would submit racism is alive and well in the U.S. When one tries to secure a mortgage for a home, walk through a mall, or try to secure a superintendency, race will be a factor. The scholar, Cornel West appropriately titled his (1993) book, Race Matters. Hilliard (2001) asserted that the relationship between race and education reflects how deeply issues of race are embedded in current structures. He further stated,
“Race shows how power is at the center of beliefs and behaviors” (p.8). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) believe that despite the scientific refutation of race as a legitimate biological concept and attempts to marginalize race in much of the public (political) discourse, race continues to be a powerful social construct and signifier.

Previously, I documented that consultants and headhunters rarely send African American male candidates forward to the finalist round of superintendent searches. I reported that these consultants are merely responding to the requests and expectations of the boards that hire them. CRT scholars would suggest consultants, will never change this pattern of hiring due to “interest convergence” and “racial nepotism.” Interest convergence, maintains that “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accomplished only when it converges with the interests of Whites” (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Since racism advances the interests of both elite whites, and working class whites, these two groups, which by the way make up a significant portion of society, have little incentive to eradicate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A possible educational scenario in which the interests of Whites and Blacks might converge, would be when a predominantly White suburban school district begins to realize a population shift in the community and schools towards increased numbers of blacks or another minority group. The White power base in that community may decide that a person of color would be better suited to “handle” the school system that is full of students of color. Again, it should be noted that these districts are less desirable to White candidates. This is just a scenario that comes to mind but in truth, Whites would have to relinquish their racism-
granted privileges in order for African Americans to realize true equality (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Another way Whites ensure their racism-granted privileges remain is via what Bell (1992) calls “racial nepotism.” Racial nepotism explains why Whites will always show preference to other Whites when they are looking to hire, rent to, sell to, or do any kind of deal, if the other option is a person of color. In order to explain why a person of color gets passed over for a job for instance, easily manipulated terms like “best qualified” and “merit” are used by Whites to explain why they hired a “family member” instead (Bell, 1992). Bell (1992) very honestly summed up the racism dilemma and the need to defy racism when he wrote:

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary “peaks of progress,” short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.
**Racism without Racists**

In 2008, Americans elected Senator Barack Hussein Obama to the office of President of the United States. This was a historic event, since Barack Obama is a Black man. What has been even more interesting, has been the dialogue around America having moved to a post-racial nation. In fact, many Whites assert that they no longer see color, just people. This sentiment and those similar, have been growing since the end of the Civil Rights Movement. Bonilla-Silva (2006) suggests even though these are the publicly expressed sentiments by Whites, racism is alive and well in America, and continues to impact the quality of life and life experiences of racial and ethnic minorities.

There would be those who would argue that he is wrong and point to the passage of the following landmark pieces of legislation: Civil Rights Act of 1964; Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Bonilla-Silva (2006) counters that despite the passage of these laws, racism still exists but in a more covert form. He calls this new form of racism as “color blind racism,” which he sees as subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial. Prior to the 1960s, “Jim Crow” racism was a very open and cruel practice. Racial epithets, systemic discrimination in hiring, housing, voting, and even education were the norm. This new color-blind racism came about as a result of all the legal changes in society.
Outside of White supremacists, one would find it difficult to find a White American who would admit to having discriminatory ideas against an entire race, but they endorse a system that promotes color-blind racism through their daily acts. Bonilla-Silva (2006) believes that racism is a structural problem, rather than a problem of internalized belief. He asserts that Whites view racism as prejudice, while people of color see it as part of a system. He further posits that this system of inequality benefits the dominant White race, and therefore Whites have created their own explanations for this inequality. These explanations allow Whites to justify the structure and yet hold no responsibility for the inequality. Bonilla-Silva (2006) has narrowed these color-blind racial ideologies into four distinct frames; abstract liberalism; naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. These frames create a solid, yet flexible, wall that permits the current racial reality to go unseen. They make the current inequality hard to challenge, but easily justifiable if the subject is broached. The frames are used in combinations and are thus, more subtle than what many would consider racism.

1. Abstract Liberalism-- is based on the assumption that we live in a society of equal opportunity.

2. Naturalization-- allows Whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences.

3. Cultural Racism-- is the belief that cultural differences rather than biological markers are determinants of racial superiority or inferiority.

4. Minimization of Racism-- suggests that discrimination no longer plays a hindering role for non-whites and that it just isn’t a big deal.
As the racial structure has changed, so has the style by which we approach and discuss the topic. There now exists a style of color-blind racism. A certain language has been created in our color-blind society, a language which serves to mask true beliefs and thoughts. It allows Whites to protect themselves from being judged as racists (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). His frames are key points from which the discussion on social inequality can continue. They cannot be accepted as the final explanation as to why the inequalities in the superintendency persist. This researcher believes that the frames act as a diversionary mechanism for Whites. As long as their explanations do not depend on one frame, they will always be able to make those making an argument to the contrary appear as mere malcontents and people who need to try harder.

**Power of Networks**

If there are no “racists” or very few, in our country, then why does racial inequality persist, and particularly in the workplace? When a friend or family member is looking for a job, there is nothing racist or illegal about offering support. However, according to Nancy DiTomaso (2013), when Whites do it for other Whites, Blacks lose. Most Black people still lack the networks that can provide them with the types of good jobs that Whites often take for granted. Jackson (2006) brings some context via a survey of 67 school administrators in New York (53 white, 14 African American); some results showed the power of a network. Half of the White administrators and none of the African Americans surveyed received offers or invitations to apply for superintendent positions in predominantly White districts. African American candidates applied to advertised position postings; but none were hired to lead these non-minority districts. It
is not beyond reason to assume that the White candidates received these personal invitations as a result of their networks. Conversely, seventy percent of the African American candidates received invitations to apply for openings in predominantly minority districts (Jackson, 2006). Here again, one can see the limitation of the networks of people of color.

While DiTomaso (2013) addresses the “new” racism, symbolic racism, modern racism, or racial resentment, she brings a more focused perspective, by stating that the majority of the social science literature on race is organized around a framework of discrimination; so the focus is on the negative things Whites have done to blacks and other minorities. She believes the racial inequalities are more a function of the advantages Whites provide each other rather than what they do to minorities: “Framing racial issues through a lens of racism, equal opportunity, and individualism contributes to the inability of most whites to see the nature of their own participation in the creation and reproduction of racial inequality. Whites assume that other people are racists, but not them. They assume that equal opportunity embodies fairness, but they live lives of advantage; that is, of unequal opportunity” (DiTomaso, 2013).
Most Whites would readily argue that they do not enjoy any special treatment or privileges in society, and most importantly not in the area of employment. However, many continue to benefit from these advantages. While it is hard to believe any White person could hold these views, it is not impossible. Many Whites do in fact hold these views simply because these advantages are so much a part of our societal fabric. Many Whites do not believe they possess any privileges. They simply think it is their hard work and merit that allows them to advance to the highest seats of power in society. The foundation for their privilege was laid so long ago, and so well that they do not have to acknowledge them. McIntosh (1989) believes these privileges not only constitute an invisible knapsack filled with institutional social resources to use whenever necessary. These privileges also provide a cognitive experience of goodwill and affective preference that allows Whites to feel confident, secure, and capable as they make decisions and encounter choices throughout their lives (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch, 1972; Jost and Elsbach, 2001; Ridgeway, 2001). This scenario prevents the recognition of a moral crisis that would move Whites to take steps, political or otherwise to change the status quo. Instead, Whites feel morally comfortable and justified with regard to racial issues (DiTomaso, 2013).

DiTomaso (2013), has developed a process that explains how the inequality persists and makes possible the “opportunity hoarding” that enables Whites to receive advantages or privileges without being racists:
1. White Explanations for Racial Inequality: Prejudiced (racist) people; discrimination (by racist people); Lack of effort, responsibility, or hope among blacks

2. Whites’ Views of Themselves: Committed to color-blindness; Committed to equal opportunity; belief in their own individual effort, hard work, and talent

3. Hidden Dynamics Behind the Reproduction of Racial Inequality: Segregated neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces; lives of unequal opportunity or advantage; group basis of social, cultural, and financial resources that provide unearned advantages

Each of these processes helps to explain how the inequalities persists, and more importantly, where to begin looking for the inequalities.

**Employment Discrimination**

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 there has been a steady, albeit slow increase in the number of minorities in managerial positions in the workplace. This has allowed some scholars to claim that racial discrimination in the labor market is a vestige of the past (Brown, et al., 2003). Less optimistic scholars argue that minority managers are concentrated in lower-paying service industries, and most likely manage other minorities (Elliott and Smith, 2001; Reskin and Ross, 1992; Smith and Elliott, 2002). The number of white male managers declined between 1966 and 2000, while the number of African American managers increased over the same period (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2009). On its face this information would be promising, what Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey (2009) revealed was that white men held on to the more powerful
positions in the more established and desirable sectors of the economy; while African Americans and white women made their managerial gains in the growing (but lower-paying) personal and social service industries. The positions of authority in the economy are still dominated by White males (Jacobs, 1992; Maume, 1999; McGuire and Reskin, 1993; Smith, 1999; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993).

A positive that can be taken from the political and legal pressures on firms, was the diversification of its managerial ranks. Edelman (1990) showed that in response to EEOC lawsuits and affirmative action regulations, firms created human resource departments to ensure compliance with anti-discrimination legislation. These managerial roles were primarily filled by African Americans (Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly, 2006).

Sharon Collins (1997) brought a human perspective to these findings by interviewing Black corporate executives for her research. Many of those she interviewed were the highest ranking Black executives in their respective Fortune 500 firms. Most of the executives interviewed had been hired to work in human relations to ensure EEOC compliance, or community and public relations to act as liaisons to African American communities for product development or recruitment. It should be noted that many of these “new” management positions created, had previously been classified as clerical and administrative jobs (Jacobs, 1992). According to Collins (1997) her interviewees earned good salaries but knew that they were in “racialized jobs.” These were jobs that focused on the concerns of African Americans, unlike their White counterparts who held positions reaching greater constituencies (i.e., sales, operations, marketing, and financing). In fact, many of these black executives realized that their jobs were in
precarious positions, since they would be the first to be eliminated for cost-cutting measures if the EEOC oversight was ever relaxed. The interviewees also learned that these roles provided them with limited mobility within the firm. They knew they were not being groomed to be the CEO’s of their respective firms (Collins, 1997).

Some mobility studies show that Blacks lag behind Whites for promotions to top managerial jobs (Maume, 1999). The best chances for promotion into management positions for Blacks, is in government (Wilson, Sakura-Lemessy, and West, 1999). While these “tracks” look promising, it should be noted that these are not positions of real power, such as Director or Executive Director, and there are still multiple layers of leadership above these positions. It is possible to see this phenomenon in education. Educators of color can be relatively confident that they can obtain school level positions such as assistant principal, principal, coordinator, and director however, when they attempt to access the more powerful positions in central office, they are not as successful and find less opportunities for advancement. This is especially true for the superintendency. In education, the superintendency is a very powerful and well paid position. The superintendent answers only to an elected or appointed board, and his or her decisions have a direct impact on the employing community.

**Notion of “Fit” and Educational Administration**

As an African American male I have had the personal experience of applying and interviewing for school administrative positions and the reason provided to me when I did not get the position was that I wasn’t a good “fit.” This response, despite the number of times shared, was never helpful. The comment did not provide me with any clear or
specific insight as to what I needed to improve upon, as far as skills and experiences. For a word that is used so often, “fit” is “understood and yet indescribable” (Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch, 2010).

**Definition**

When one thinks of the word “fit” visions of a physically conditioned individual come to mind. We see someone who is prepared for the rigors of battle, sport, or some other event that requires a particular level of physical fitness. The “fit” to which this researcher is alluding, deals with how desirable a particular candidate is for the role of Superintendent; whether it be in a particular district or for the position in general. When a candidate is considered a good “fit” for a superintendent position, the school board is sharing its opinion, which is often taken as fact that the selected candidate is a “good” leader because he or she has behaved in a way that is suitable for the position in the sight of those doing the hiring (Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch, 2010). Duke and Iwanicki (1992) define “fit” as a “perception or attribution when all other qualifications are considered equal” (p. 98).

Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010) state “the decision of who fits and does not fit in school leadership is contingent on the intersection of following two theories and a socio-political concept”:

1. **Social constructionism**: A sociological theory that explains how we construct and perceive reality through our interactions with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)

2. **Identity theory**: The examination of how we see ourselves and others
based in Psychology and Sociology (Stryker & Burke, 2000)

3. Hegemony: A sociopolitical concept explaining how groups of people are subjugated by other groups of people through metamessages of what is normal (Gramsci, 1971)

Social Constructionism and “Fit”

Superintendents are hired by Boards of Education that are comprised of members of that particular community. In selecting their desired candidate, they inevitably select the candidate that reflect the traits of that community:

   Social constructionism is a key component of “fit” because it recognizes reality as a huge umbrella encompassing the social parameters of tolerance, roles, identities, and responsibilities. Those selecting new administrators from a pool of equally qualified candidates rely on constructed values of leadership that have little to do with skill set and more to do with selecting what is desirable along the lines of ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and age (G. Anderson, 1990; Capper, 1999; Ortiz, 1982; Sherman, 2005).

Depending on the community and what is desirable at the time of hiring, the candidates applying for the position could find themselves not being a good “fit” before they even get to the first interview.

Identity Theory and “Fit”

Identity can hold any of three meanings for sociologists and psychologists (Stryker & Burke, 2000). First, identity can refer to a group’s shared culture, these could be groups comprised of: a racial group, ethnic group, feminists, or LGBT folks (Tooms,
et. al., 2010). Secondly, it can be a reference to a common culture that connects people
(Snow & Oliver, 1995; Tajfel, 1982). A good example would be a “Dallas Cowboys
fan;” these fans root for the team, watch the games, buy the team paraphernalia, as well
as ride the emotional highs and lows of the team’s efforts. So in spite of the various
racial, ethnic, gender, and age differences of these fans, they have a common identity.

The third reference for identity, and the focus of this paper, deals with the roles
and the meaning of the roles we each play in society (Tooms, et. al., 2010). So for
example, an African American, male, principal, is also father, husband, doctoral student,
Republican, golf fan, and Minister. His primary identity will be determined by the
present interaction, so his children will see him as “Dad” versus “Principal” or “golf fan.”
The reference from his fellow church congregants would not recognize “doctoral student”
or “husband.” Thus our identity can change from one audience to the next based on the
role we play with that audience.

Condensation symbols (Gee, 1999) are those “words, phrases, or maxims that will
formulate impressions and ignite a listener’s most basic values” (Tooms, et. al., 2010).
When those seeking to hire a candidate for a school leadership position toss the word
“fit” out in a conversation, the decision makers are not seeing the candidate “as is”, but
rather as they need to see him. The involuntary internal justification is, “he fits one set of
our expectations regarding identity and role we assume he meets others” (Tooms, et. al.,
2010).

According to the law, no applicant for any job in the United States can be refused
a job on the basis of (race, gender, creed, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, etc.). Every
employer has to place this declaration on all job postings, websites, pamphlets, and any other communications with the public concerning hiring. But somehow, people of color are not seeing this as they seek school leadership positions (Blount & Tallerico, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1999; Tooms, 2007b).

**Hegemony and “Fit”**

The power to decide as a hiring committee, school board, or community who fits as a leader is hegemony. Hegemony can be explained as the maintaining of dominance over others in society through socially constructed persuasions and coercions (Gramsci, 1971). Kusmashiro (2004) says that dominance is achieved through convincing members of subordinated groups to accept, adopt, and internalize the dominant group’s definition of what is normal. Mass media and mass schooling are used to inculcate and reinforce the views and power of the dominant class (Apple, 2001; Derrida, 1982; Edelman, 1988; Foucault, 1975). Members of the subordinate class are rarely aware of this indoctrination and domination (Tooms, et. al., 2010).

In terms of school leadership, hegemonic constructions serve to blur the role of a leader with understandings of what a leader looks and acts like. Foucault (1975) states that all schools teach and reinforce what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for society. This allows the dominant group to continue to control access to all levels of employments in schools, as those who do not demonstrate or believed to possess the socially acceptable behaviors will not be hired.
“Fit” politics

Historically, school administrators have been White, Protestant, heterosexual, and male (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Blount, 1998; Hargreaves, 2005; Lugg 2003; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This means any person lacking these traits, seeking to gain one of these positions most likely will be labeled as not a good “fit” (Carlson, 1998; Hacking, 1999). “Fit” and its relationship to identity politics and hegemony become even more apparent when we consider how people are selected for leadership positions in public school districts. Although all postings and advertisements will clearly state what the responsibilities and credentials necessary for the job, they will never share those “preferred unspoken qualifications” (Blount & Tallerico, 2004; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hernandez, 2007; Newton, 2006; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1999; Tooms, 2006, 2007). Candidates can be labeled a good or bad “fit” based on some part of their identity (Turoczy, 1996; Valverde, 1980; Young & Fox, 2002). When a candidate is deemed to be the best “fit” for a position in educational administration, the community is saying they believe that administrator looks like its conception of a leader, and therefore must be able to behave as accordingly (Tooms et al., 2010).

The beauty of “fit” is that it “has the potential to unleash growth, diversity, and change in schools and therefore society” (Tooms et al., 2010). Unfortunately, “fit” has been used as a tool for keeping schools looking and operating in such a way, that power continues to be in the hands of the dominant culture. To begin seeing positive change around “fit,” all communities must begin to dismantle the archetypes of leadership that currently exist (Dyson, 2008). Communities, school boards, search consultants, and all
others in position to hire for school systems, must believe leaders come in all colors.

There are many “Barack Obama’s” for looking to be superintendent.

**Summary**

The literature review for this study included a discussion of the history of the superintendency, the major changes for the superintendency, and the present day challenges of the superintendency. CRT, “racism without racists,” “power of networks,” and the notion of “fit” were all discussed.

The literature review revealed that White males hold the majority of leadership roles with power, including the public school superintendency. White males are most likely to be in more desirable leadership roles in non-educational workplaces. This holds true for the superintendency, as they most often hold the position of superintendent for the more desirable suburban districts that have predominantly White student populations. The literature review also revealed that the number of female and minority superintendents has grown over the past forty years. However, the growth in the number of African American male superintendents has leveled in the past fifteen years. According to the literature, African American males aspiring to the superintendency can expect (if offered a position at all) to be offered positions in the less desirable urban districts, that have been under-performing, lacking resources, and most notably these districts will have a majority minority student population.

The literature review provided some insight into the major theories regarding race and social mobility. It is important to look at how they intersect and diverge from each other. At the core, they each make race a central factor. It is understandable that humans
will look to explain their state of being, we want to know why things are as they are. Each of the discussed theories addresses the subtlety of racism and its power to impact opportunity for people of color in this present “post racial” society.

CRT attributes the lack of social mobility or advancement strictly to racism on the part of Whites. It presents the most negative and straightforward view of racism on the part of Whites. Whites have held political, social, and economic power for a long period of time. They have explained and justified their status by pointing out the difference in color and the inferiority of intellect of non-whites. As time, the legal system, and the accomplishments of people of color have systematically chipped away at that reasoning, Whites have had to continually develop new strategies for maintaining their power and privilege.

Bonilla-Silva’s position is that Whites have become subtle with their racist tendencies and thus have made the argument against racism less potent, with arguments based in reason and undeniable facts. This strategy has been quite effective, as those who argue that racism still impacts opportunity and access are thwarted by the facts that there are people of color who have achieved so much in this same society. The argument is made, that the people complaining are simply not working hard enough and are looking for handouts. The exceptions are used to prove the rule.

DiTomaso goes a step beyond the “racism without racists” argument, and speaks to the power that Whites possess and retain by ensuring it is passed on to other Whites only through specific social practices. The privileges Whites take for granted are so intertwined in the fabric of society that they do not even have to acknowledge them.
Opportunity hoarding, and the powerful networks Whites have access to, continue to provide them with opportunities not available to non-whites in all workplaces. Their network of family, friends, and other Whites ensures they will always have access to opportunities, as well as the protection of these opportunities for their offspring. The latest manifestation of racism is probably the most ingenious. This would be the notion of “fit.” So even when the law has put measures in place to ensure equal access and opportunity for all citizens, “fit” can be used ambiguously and summarily to explain away all the reasons why a person of color was not hired or afforded an opportunity.

Using this strategy, a position opening can be posted, candidates screened, and offers to hire made without any hint of racism or discrimination. The candidates not selected simply were not a good “fit” for the position. The whole process appears above board and the best person came out on top, who can argue against that situation?

There are many challenges that a Black who aspire to the superintendency must overcome in route to that position. They know there will be little competition from other Blacks due to their low numbers in the field of education. They know that they will most likely be competing with female candidates for any of the limited number of urban superintendencies. Although there will be White males in the pool for these same positions, they have the option to pursue more attractive and plentiful positions in less troublesome, as well as whiter districts. If a Black candidates want to obtain a superintendent position in the more desirable communities, they will have to find a way to make themselves a more attractive “fit” to those communities.
I believe a study of current White male and female superintendents, as well as Black male and female superintendents would help add to the body of research in this area. I would be particularly interested in conducting open-ended interviews with the subjects. I would look to have them speak to their respective career paths to the superintendency. I would hope to learn if the literature aligns with the career path experiences of these subjects as they sought to obtain the superintendency.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Of the 495 public school systems between States A and B, only 6, or (1%) of them are presently led by superintendents who are African American, 3 males and 3 females (reminder charter schools superintendents were not part of this study). There are 259, or (7%) Black administrators below superintendent, in State A, and 284, or (6%) in State B. There are 471 White superintendents, (33%) female and (65%) male. For administrators below superintendent, Whites account for 3,029, or (87%) in State A, and 4,105, or (88%) in State B. It should be noted that Black teachers in States A and B combined, represent 6.5% of all teachers, while Whites represent 92% of all teachers in each state.

The purpose of this study was to examine the career paths of both White and Black male and female superintendents in States A and B. This chapter will describe the methodology used to answer the research questions. The first section will review the questions and assumptions of this study. The next section will provide the rationale for the use of qualitative research, in particular the use of the phenomenological approach. The third section will provide an overview of the design for the study. The last section will discuss the ethical issues of the study and its limitations.
Research Questions and Assumptions

According to Berg and Lune (2012), we do not conduct research only to amass data, but to discover answers to questions. I have questions that I wish to have answered through this study and they are as follows:

1. What does the career path to the superintendency look like for superintendents in States A and B; in particular, are there different patterns for men and women, or for White and Black superintendents?
2. To what extent have superintendents encountered the politics of “fit” in their careers, and how have superintendents of different races and genders experienced “fit” differently?

My personal assumptions about the career paths for White and Black male and female superintendents were:

- White males face fewer obstacles on their career paths to the superintendency.
- White males and females have more options when it comes to the types of districts they apply to for superintendencies.
- Black male and female superintendents do not apply to non-urban or majority White school districts.
- Black males, females, and White females hold more positions en route to becoming a superintendent.

The reason for my assumptions relate to the theories cited in the previous chapter. White males particularly, but even the females will be a better “fit” for the hiring consultants or school board. Although, race will never be mentioned in the job posting, along with all
the stated desired qualifications, the most prized qualification is going to be the color of
the candidate’s skin, along with all the other traits of Whiteness (Blount & Tallerico,
2004; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hernandez, 2007; Newton, 2006; Ortiz, 1982;
Shakeshaft, 1999; Tooms, 2006, 2007). Black candidates will continue to seek greater
degree levels, and the work experiences they believe will give them greater leverage for
obtaining a superintendent position, but they will never “fit” the mold of a leader in the
eyes of the Whites who are hiring. Since the Black candidates know they will never be
given a real opportunity in school districts that are predominantly White, they will not
even apply for openings in those districts. They will focus on districts that are populated
by mostly students of color. Even then, they may still compete with White candidates
who apply for the position (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003; Kowalski, et. al., 2010).

I had the misfortune of experiencing this firsthand. I was a candidate for an urban
district in Massachusetts, and after the first round of interviews it was made clear to me
that I had done very well and should expect to move forward in the process. While
waiting for the confirmation for the next round of interviews, a longtime colleague who
worked in that district called me and shared what had been personally shared. A close
friend of the eventual superintendent told my friend that “there was some smart black guy
from Connecticut, and they could not let this guy interview in the final round in front of
the community or Rich would not get the job.” My experience is by no means unique.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research properly seeks answers by examining various settings and the
groups or individuals who inhabit these settings (Berg and Lune, 2012). Creswell (2014)
states it is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or
groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of this type of research allows
the researcher to collect the data in the participant’s environment, and make
interpretations and meaning of the data collected (Creswell, 2014). Since quantitative
research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship
among variables; which can be measured most often on instruments, this approach does
not work for the researcher who is seeking to focus on individual meaning, and to render
the complexity of the situation (Creswell, 2014).

My choice of this research methodology is based in beliefs that are grounded in
what Creswell (2014) calls a transformative worldview. A transformative worldview
holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change
agenda to confront social oppression on all levels. Donna Mertens (as cited in Creswell,
2014) summarizes the key features of the transformative worldview as such:

- It places central importance on the study of lives and experiences of diverse
groups that have traditionally been marginalized. Of special interest for these
diverse groups I how their lives have been constrained by oppressors and the
strategies that they use to resist, challenge, and subvert these constraints.
- In studying these diverse groups, the research focuses on inequities bases on
gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class
that result in asymmetric power relationships.
- The research in the transformative worldview links political and social action
to these inequities.
• Transformative research uses a program theory of beliefs about how a program works and why the problems of oppression, domination, and power relationships exist.

**Phenomenological Approach**

The origins of qualitative research come from anthropology, sociology, humanities, and evaluation (Creswell, 2014). There are several qualitative research designs researchers can use, such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnographies, and case studies. I chose to use phenomenological research as my approach. This design of inquiry comes from philosophy and psychology and it allows the researcher to describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants, typically through interviews (Gorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

**Theoretical Perspective**

A theoretical perspective provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race, as well as other issues of marginalized groups. It becomes a transformative perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change (Creswell, 2014). This perspective helps the researcher determine which issues are important to study, and which people need to be studied. It also speaks to the researcher’s position in the study (e.g., up front or biased from personal, cultural, and historical contexts) and how final written accounts need to be written (Creswell, 2014).
The proposed theoretical perspective for this study draws from the notion of “fit.” Duke and Iwanicki (1992) define “fit” as a perception or attribution when all other qualifications are considered equal. School communities use “fit” for the purposes of organizational sense making, which allows them to have stagnant notions that everyone accepts and uses to understand realities of jobs, people, schools, hence public school leadership (Duke and Iwanicki, 1992). When considering the notion of “fit” as it relates to who does and does not fit in school leadership, Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010) state that it is contingent on the intersection of Social constructionism, Identity theory, and Hegemony.

**Research Design and Site**

The study provides valuable research to the limited body of research regarding the career paths of Black and White superintendents in States A and B; the two New England states. The research consisted of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with twelve participants. These superintendents were either serving in State A or State B public schools. They were an equal mix of White, Black, male and female superintendents. As there were only six Black superintendents in total between the two states, all of them were interviewed. I personally sat down with four of the superintendents, and the other two were interviewed via phone. I tried to match the participants based on their experience level. I did not have much choice due to the extremely limited pool of Black participants. While there were potentially hundreds of White superintendents who could be solicited to participate, there were only six Black
superintendents, so the ability to match participants along any other demographic was not practical.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face with each superintendent. When this was not possible, the interview was conducted via the phone. For the face-to-face interviews, the researcher interviewed each participant in a setting of the participant’s choice, and one-to-one. The researcher traveled to each participant’s desired interview location, with the option of using email to ask and respond to follow-up questions. Two participants asked to be interviewed at the researchers work office. For those two interviews, precautions were taken so that the interviews were private, and there were no interruptions.

**Participants**

Participants were identified, recruited and selected for this study using what Creswell (2014) refers to as homogenous and snowball sampling. I wanted to understand the experiences of Black and White superintendents specifically. While I was able to easily reach the Black superintendents due to their extremely small population, I needed help finding the White superintendents who would participate. I originally approached two White superintendents that I knew personally. I specifically chose to approach these two because I knew that they held differing opinions on various social issues. I also knew that neither participant would simply tell me what they thought I wanted to hear during the interview. By using the snowball sampling approach with the two superintendents I knew, I was able to get recommendations and leads for other superintendents who potentially would be interested in participating in my study. I was
concerned that it would be difficult to find White superintendents who were potentially interested in the study, due to the nature of the study. The two superintendents helped to solve that potential problem, as they were more familiar with other superintendents who would honestly participate in the study. All participants had to meet the following selection criteria:

- Presently a Public School superintendent in State A or B
- Between 35-65 years of age
- Identify as White or Black/African-American (male or female)

I purposely chose not to interview superintendents who identified as Asian or Latino, as I wanted to focus my study on racial groups with whom I had the most experience.

Once I received Institutional Review Board approval for my study, I started to reach out to potential participants. As stated earlier, the Black superintendents were easier to reach as they were such a small population. I contacted each participant personally via a phone call, email, and followed up with the “Letter to Prospective Participants” (Appendix A). The letter included a brief introduction of who the researcher along with a brief description of the research he would be conducting as part of his dissertation requirements. In the letter, I asked participants if they would be willing to participate in the study by allowing me to conduct at least one face-to-face interview with each of them. The participants also received an “Informed Consent Form” (Appendix B) via email prior to the interview. This form provided information about the study, how any collected data will be shared, the confidentiality and that pseudonyms would be used for each participant to ensure protection of the participant’s identity. A
copy of each participant’s signed “Informed Consent Form” is stored in in their respective files at the researcher’s home office.

**Researcher’s Role**

Qualitative research is interpretative research that often involves the researcher in a substantial and intensive experience with participants. As a result of this type of involvement a number of ethical and personal issues are introduced to the process (Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman, 2013). Therefore, it is important that this researcher identify his own biases, values, and personal background as they relate to the proposed study.

As a Black male, public school administrator, I have a desire to advance in my career to the office of superintendent. During my career as an educator, which began in Virginia over twenty years ago, I have seen a few Black male and female educators advance to the level of superintendent. What I witnessed, read, or heard about most often was about a White male being promoted to that position. On a few occasions, I would hear about a White female becoming a superintendent. I found this pattern to be troubling as I never seemed to work in a school with an abundance of white male teachers. In Virginia, where I worked, the majority of my colleagues were Black females and males, as well as White females. Even the majority of school level administrators were primarily from the same demographic set.

When I returned to Massachusetts for graduate school, I saw very few people of color pursuing their advanced degrees in education or the requisite certification for the superintendency. My classes were made up of mainly White males and females, with a
couple of Black females. After graduate school, I returned to the education workforce in Connecticut. I was the only Black teacher working in the entire district. I found this fact disturbing as the district albeit a small one (less than 2000 students) had a burgeoning population of color in the district. Since I had my credentials to be an administrator I began to inquire about positions. A White male administrator encouraged me to join an “Aspiring Administrators Network” which was run by a statewide educational organization. This organization was led by one White male, and as I recall, two White female veteran educators.

I went to the monthly meetings, which were focused on some professional development, but mainly networking. The majority population of the group was White males, and soon, there were a few White females too. As I continued to participate in these meetings, and similar ones throughout Connecticut, I had only one or two opportunities to meet other Black male or female aspirants. After a couple of years and many rejections, I obtained my first administrative position as a Vice Principal. I have moved up the professional ranks and now hold the position of Assistant Superintendent. The next career move would be to the office of Superintendent. Admittedly, I have met and learned of many Black administrators in New England, but I continue to be concerned about the sparse number of superintendents from this group.

As I conducted this research I needed to be vigilant in ensuring I did not allow my own experiences to shape the interpretations I made during the study (Creswell, 2014). Since I conducted the study in the state in which I work, and with participants from a state-wide organization to which I belong, there was more potential for my interpretations
to be unduly influenced. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call this situation “Backyard” research. This occurs when researchers study their own organization, friends, or immediate work setting. I purposely sought to get participants with whom I had not interacted much if at all during my tenure in the state, because I wanted to hear the participant’s views on the topics for the first time. I have had many conversations in so many different settings across the state, with so many colleagues that I did not want to end up hearing what I already knew they would say.

**Data Collection**

The data collected during this research was used to document and describe each participant; their race, gender, age, years in the education profession, roles held in the profession, and any specific challenges faced as they progressed through their career path to the superintendency. Through the use of a “Demographic Information Sheet” (Appendix C) the researcher collected background information about each participant’s school system. The specific information collected referenced the size of the district (student enrollment, staff and community population), the type of district (urban, suburban, or rural). Information was also collected regarding the socio-economic status of the district, as well as the demographic makeup of the district (students, staff, and community). Creswell (2014) believes it is important for Qualitative researchers to gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than relying on any single data source. This allows the researcher to make sense of the data and organize it into themes, which further increases the credibility of the study.
(Marshall and Rossman, 2011). For my study, my data collected were the recorded interviews and the questionnaire.

Using an “Interview Question Protocol” (Appendix D), I was able to utilize a semi-structured approach to interview each superintendent. The interviews lasted approximately 45-75 minutes. Prior to interviewing any superintendent, I made sure to go over the Informed Consent Form, and to establish their pseudonym. I reminded them that they could choose to not answer any question, and that they could stop the interview if and when they became uncomfortable. All of the interviews were conducted between November 2016 and February 2017. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The recorded interviews were then transcribed by an online company called REV. This company provides secure and relatively quick transcription services.

**Validity and Reliability**

I took all the necessary steps to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. Validity and reliability in qualitative research are not the same as they are in quantitative research. Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007).

Validity in qualitative research is also referred to as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Creswell and Miller, 2000). It is important because it determines whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011). Creswell (2014) recommends
of the use of validity strategies in order to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers of that accuracy.

**Member Checking**

Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by allowing participants the opportunity to review their respective transcribed interviews, for the purpose of ensuring the participants agree with the accuracy of the specific descriptions or themes arising from their interview (Creswell, 2014). The process also helps the researcher understand that they have accurately captured the lived experiences of the participants. I sent participants their transcribed interview to provide them an opportunity to ensure that their thoughts and experiences were accurately captured, additionally to allow them the opportunity to remove any comments they had come to feel were not what they wanted to share. No participants removed any portions of their interview. The transcribed interviews were sent to participants once all the interviews were completed and transcribed. I did not give them a time limit, but all responded within approximately two weeks. Some participants inquired about my progress with the study as well as the themes that were emerging. All are looking forward to reading the final dissertation. I will send them each a final copy via email.

**Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing was used to enhance the accuracy of my account (Creswell, 2014). I had two different professional educators, who both hold doctoral degrees, review my study for the purpose of asking me questions that would help me clarify my
account of the interviews and subsequent emerging themes. I wanted to get their respective interpretations and understandings of my study. I believe their input helped me better shape my themes and hopefully allows for an audience beyond academia to benefit from the study.

In order to ensure the reliability of the study, Yin (2009) suggested that qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and to document as many of the steps of the procedures as possible. This would include setting up a case study protocol and database, so that others can follow the procedures.

**Check Transcripts**

Once the interviews were transcribed, I read through each transcript looking for mistakes from the process (Gibbs, 2007). I looked for spelling, and other errors that could potentially impact the intended meaning of the statement. One example of a common error was the use of the word “there” in place of “their.” Also words such as UCONN, that would be easily recognizable to a reader, were mistakenly written a “Yukon” during the transcribing process. While these are not extreme errors it is important to catch them and correct them.

**Data Analysis**

My data collection was conducted under a modified grounded theory method, and I used the tools of grounded theory to conduct my analysis. My data analysis process began with first organizing and taking stock of my data. I created a data inventory in google spreadsheet. The inventory contained the following categories: Participant ID, Participant Pseudonym, File Name, Data Type, Site, Interview Date, Interviewer,
Location of Copy 1, and Location of Copy 2. This data inventory provided me with a clear and handy document for keeping track of my data and my file locations (Galman, 2013). Since I had my interviews transcribed by an online company, I had to wait to receive the completed transcripts and I submitted the interview audio files. Not all of my interviews were conducted on the same day or even in the same month, so my audio files were submitted at different times for transcription. My inventory sheet also helped me to keep up with which interviews had been transcribed and whether or not I was missing any documentation from one of my participants. As I received the transcripts via email, I read through each one to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. This meant I also had to re-listen to my original audio interviews when the transcription missed words or used the wrong words. All of the audio files and transcripts (un-coded and coded) are stored electronically in a cloud account that is password protected. All demographic sheets and any written notes, to include memos are also stored in this online account. No other people have access to the account or password.

According to Charmaz (2014) “Grounded theory coding requires us to stop and ask analytic questions of the data we have gathered” (p. 109). I began the initial coding process of open coding my data in order to discover the thoughts and meanings contained within it (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). My open coding involved me reading whole comments or responses from my participants as opposed to line by line or word by word coding. This process made more sense for my study, as I was coding each transcript I could already begin to see themes emerging. I also wrote memos for topics or ideas that came up as I coded. Memos are useful for capturing thoughts, questions, analysis, and
interpretations of data that emerges while coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2014) states:

You will make discoveries about your data, emerging categories, the developing frame of your analysis- and perhaps about yourself. Memo-writing serves diverse purposes. Putting things down on paper makes your work concrete and manageable – and exciting. Once you have written a memo, you can use it immediately or store it for later retrieval. In short, memo-writing provides a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering, and to engage in critical reflexivity (pp. 162-163).

After open coding all twelve of my interview transcripts, I developed a list of initial codes. I found myself reverting back to terms that I had come across from my prior research. I was encouraged to retreat from this type of thinking and come up with codes that would better capture what the participants were conveying (Rossman and Rallis, 2012; Charmaz, 2014). I also found in vivo codes to be extremely helpful as they allowed me to develop my categories. These codes allowed me to capture the meanings of certain phenomena discussed by the study participants in a concise manner.

Once I had all of my initial codes, I began to make connections between the codes and further developing my sub-categories and categories. When analysts code axially, they look for answers to questions such as why or how come, where, when, how, and what results, and in so doing they uncover relationships among categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). I was able to see the phenomenon, or what was going on in my data. A
story began to emerge from the data (Galman, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the researcher might ask himself the question, “what were the lessons learned?” These lessons could be from my own interpretations based in my culture, history, or experiences. It could also come from the comparison of my findings and the information learned from the literature. In either case, the findings will either confirm past information or diverge from it. Another outcome, would be the realization of new questions that need to be asked that were not foreseen by the researcher prior to the analysis (Wolcott, 1994).

I was finally able to hone in on my five key categories (hookups, shot callers, schooling, new jacks, and hustling). With my categories set, I then began to write up the descriptions for each category as this was pertinent to my ability to connect readers to my research.

**Limitations of the Study**

My study has a few limitations. The first would be the small sample size of twelve participants, particularly just three from each demographic group. Although a small sample size, the six Black superintendents interviewed, represent the entire population for Black superintendents between States A and B. Nonetheless, the limited participant pool makes it difficult to generalize the findings to all Black and White superintendents in the United States. It is possible that the career paths for superintendents outside of States A and B could be quite different from those of the participants in this study.

Another limitation would be the use of only one interview with each participant. As the superintendents may have shared more with me if they had repeated opportunities
to engage. Although all participants chose to answer every question asked, there were some questions that caused participants to reflect a bit more prior to giving an answer. It was also evident that the Black superintendents were much more careful in their responses to these questions, which could be a result of their fear that the limited numbers could make them more easily identifiable.

**Summary**

In person interviews were conducted at each superintendent’s office or another site chosen by that superintendent. Interviews conducted via phone were done in a closed office with no other person allowed to enter the office while the interview was in progress. Each interview was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. I searched for patterns, similarities, or differences in the responses of the participants. During the analysis, particular attention was given to the perceptions of the participants about their professional experiences. This research is both valid and reliable. Every safeguard was taken to ensure that the research was conducted without bias and with the highest standards of ethics. I had no options in terms of who to interview as far as the Black superintendents were concerned. I provided each participant the opportunity to provide their own pseudonym or one would be provided. Two participants provided their own pseudonym. I allowed each participant to share and respond to their own level of comfort for each question. I even reminded each that they could choose not to answer a question at any time. All of the data collected will be stored safely and then destroyed within the time constraints of the IRB process.
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

This chapter begins with introductions of the major themes that emerged from all of the interviews and then descriptive participant profiles for the superintendents involved in the study. The profiles will allow the reader to share the lived experiences and more vivid picture of each participant. Additionally, the profiles help answer the main research questions of this study:

1. What does the career path to the superintendency look like for superintendents in States A and B; in particular, are there different patterns for men and women, or for White and Black superintendents?

2. To what extent have superintendents encountered the politics of “fit” in their careers, and how have superintendents of different races and genders experienced “fit” differently?

The participant responses shared in this chapter shed light on the differences in the career paths of these superintendents, and the role their race or gender may have played in this journey.

Each profile was created with the desire and responsibility to share the lived experiences of each superintendent, and to provide some demographic information. To protect the identities of all participants, pseudonyms were used and some demographic information is withheld. The profiles will provide a brief summary of each participant’s career path to their present superintendency. The summaries will be structured around
the questions asked of participants during their respective interviews. Based on the themes that emerged during analysis, there will be a focus on the networks and specific opportunities provided to each superintendent as they pursued a superintendency. Additionally, there will be some discussion regarding the role of their gender or race in their career pursuit.

For this study, twelve participants who are currently sitting Public School superintendents were interviewed. These superintendents were either serving in State A or State B public schools. They were an equal mix of White, Black, male and female superintendents. As a result of the data that emerged from the transcripts, specific categories emerged. All of the participants were the recipients of opportunities provided by someone in power as they progressed to the superintendency. These people in power not only provided the opportunities necessary for career advancement, they also provided access to information and other networks. These opportunities, access to networks, and information are what determined the speed at which a participant gained a superintendency. Black participants did not benefit from as many opportunities, networks, or level of information as White superintendents (DiTomaso, 2013). These participants usually held more positions (some repeated or for longer periods), and generally took longer to become superintendents. While some of the career path discrepancies are not as easy to display, it is important to keep at the top of mind the great disparity in superintendencies held between White and Black superintendents in States A and B, 495 to 6 respectively. I would also caution readers to not view these handful of Black superintendents and their career paths as evidence that the opportunities
for advancement are present for any candidate (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Black administrators aspiring to become superintendents will most likely not take the career path that these participants have taken. Conceivably, the argument could be made that these participants have experienced career paths that many other Blacks would gladly traverse.

The following three tables provide a quick visual of the demographic, racial, and gender comparisons of the participants. Table 4.1 provides a demographic summary for each participant. In looking at this table, a few comparative points can be made about the White and Black participants. First, most of the participants work in Suburban districts, with only four (two White and two Black) of the twelve working in Urban districts. This fact is not unusual since most districts in New England, are either rural or suburban, there are very few urban districts. It is interesting to note that only one White participant leads a majority White suburban district with a median income below the state median income. Typically, Black superintendents are not leaders of predominantly White districts, but three lead such districts. One leads a predominantly White urban district with a median income below that of the state. It is also interesting that one Black participant leads an urban district that actually has a median income above that of the state.

In looking at the years of experience in education prior to becoming a superintendent for each participant, there are more interesting points. Black participants on average, served more years in education than the White participants, before obtaining their first superintendency (22 years to 19 years). The female participants averaged more years in education than the males, prior to becoming superintendents (23 years to 18
years). The same five year gap manifested in the average number of years in education when Black male participants were compared to their White male counterparts (20 years to 15 years). When comparing the average time in education for both Black and White females, before becoming superintendents, the time is similar at twenty-three years.

Table 4.1: Demographic Summary of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT ID</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>YEARS IN EDUCATION</th>
<th>YEARS AS SUPT.</th>
<th>MEDIAN INCOME</th>
<th>DISTRICT TYPE</th>
<th>HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED</th>
<th>STUDENT RACIAL MAJORITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Echo 1</td>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>ABOVE STATE</td>
<td>SUBURBAN</td>
<td>DOCTORATE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 2</td>
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<td>WHITE</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>BELOW STATE</td>
<td>URBAN</td>
<td>DOCTORATE</td>
<td>MINORITY</td>
</tr>
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<td>Echo 3</td>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>BELOW STATE</td>
<td>URBAN</td>
<td>MASTER'S</td>
<td>MINORITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 4</td>
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<td>WHITE</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>BELOW STATE</td>
<td>SUBURBAN</td>
<td>DOCTORATE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 5</td>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>ABOVE STATE</td>
<td>SUBURBAN</td>
<td>MASTER'S</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 6</td>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>ABOVE STATE</td>
<td>SUBURBAN</td>
<td>DOCTORATE</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta 1</td>
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<td>BLACK</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>BELOW STATE</td>
<td>SUBURBAN</td>
<td>MASTER'S</td>
<td>MINORITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta 2</td>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
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<td>WHITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta 3</td>
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<td>30-35</td>
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<td>ABOVE STATE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta 4</td>
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<td>SUBURBAN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delta 5</td>
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<td>20-25</td>
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<td>BLACK</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>BELOW STATE</td>
<td>URBAN</td>
<td>MASTER'S</td>
<td>WHITE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 provides a career path comparison for the participant’s race. The type of roles held en route to the superintendency for each participant is shown. What is clear is that the White participants on average held fewer roles as they progressed to the superintendency.

Table 4.2 Career Path Comparison by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>ASST. PRINCIPAL</th>
<th>PRINCIPAL</th>
<th>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</th>
<th>SUPT.</th>
<th>WHITE SUPERINTENDENTS</th>
<th>ASST. SUPT.</th>
<th>SUPT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Echo 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 5</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>ASST. PRINCIPAL</th>
<th>PRINCIPAL</th>
<th>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</th>
<th>SUPT.</th>
<th>BLACK SUPERINTENDENTS</th>
<th>ASST. SUPT.</th>
<th>SUPT.</th>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 provides a career path comparison by gender for all of the participants. What is most notable about this information is that the females on average held fewer roles as they progressed to the superintendency. What makes this notable is the number of years females serve in the roles prior to becoming superintendents.
Table 4.3 Career Path Comparison by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>SUPT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>TEACHER COACH</td>
<td>INSTR. LEADER</td>
<td>SUPERVISOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ASST. SUPT.</td>
<td>SUPT.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
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<td>DIRECTOR</td>
<td>ASST. SUPT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ASST. PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>MALE SUPERINTENDENTS</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo 3</td>
<td>TEACHER</td>
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<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>SUPT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ASST. SUPT.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>TEAM LEADER</td>
<td>VICE PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delta 5</td>
<td>TEACHER</td>
<td>DIVERSITY DIRECTOR</td>
<td>EXECUTIVE COACH</td>
<td>ASSOC. SUPT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black Superintendents

Matthew

Matthew is a Black male superintendent who holds a master’s degree. He has been an educator for twenty years, holding the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and he has been a superintendent for the past three years. He leads a district comprised mostly of students of color, with a median income slightly below the state average.
Matthew taught for one year in State A, before moving to Maryland, where he taught two years and coached track. According to him, the coaching position put him “in the room,” with people who got him thinking more about moving to administration. Matthew’s first administrative position was as assistant principal. He believes it was an opportunity of timing. He had already earned his administrator certificate and the opportunity arose to take on the role. In the district in which he worked as an administrator, he had to go through a two-year training program, along with a cohort of new administrators aspiring to be principals. Although the program was intense, “like going through another grad program” Matthew shared, the district had a plan of progression for each administrator. Matthew left the program, and decided to move to another district to take on a principalship. He knew if he stayed in his current district, he would not have the same opportunities in a timeframe he wanted to experience. His move to the new district was the result of him knowing the deputy superintendent and superintendent, who both were Black. Just two years later, the superintendent who hired him left the district, so Matthew went back to his former district to take on a principalship for the next four years.

Matthew then decided to make a move he felt would move him along his career path, and he moved his family to the Chicago area, to be the executive director/founding principal of a charter school. After a few years, he moved back to the east coast to become an assistant superintendent in Washington, D.C. He shared that after three years in D.C. schools, he knew he was ready to move onto the superintendency. He started thinking about moving back to New England in particular, because he wanted his
children to have some of the experiences he had growing up in State A, where every town and city has its own school district. His children would be able to experience the “cultivation of pride and that sense of community” he grew up with in State A. Once Matthew started applying for superintendent positions, he quickly learned “there weren’t a lot of just Black superintendents, but there are barely any others of color period.” This was a different reality from his prior districts. Matthew applied for two urban districts in State A for the superintendency, but he did not get either district. He shared that he had “conversations but no interviews.” These conversations were part of the screening process with the search firms. He eventually applied to a posting he saw for his current district and after going through the interview process he was offered the position.

Matthew recalls, regarding invites to apply for superintendent positions, “no one had reached out, the funny thing is now I get them all the time.” One could surmise that maybe after a Black superintendent has held the superintendency, then he can “fit” as a superintendent in other districts. Matthew did not elaborate as to whether or not he was being solicited for majority minority districts or predominantly White districts.

When asked if he thought his career path was typical, he replied, “I think in the world that I came from it was typical, I think up here [New England] it’s not because I have superintendent colleagues that came from being… one of the guys [superintendent] came from being a middle school principal to superintendent… where I’m coming from in Maryland that doesn’t happen.” Matthew was surprised that a superintendent could skip serving in a central office role. He stated emphatically about his former large districts in Maryland and D.C., “they’re not hiring anybody who’s not had any…”

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legitimate superintendent experience before.” He was sincerely perplexed at the number superintendents he had come across in New England who came from all different types of roles just prior to becoming superintendents.

In reflecting on his career path with regards to mentors, Matthew shared that he was encouraged to pursue the superintendency while he was in the Chicago area working for the charter school. In fact, he was able to participate in a superintendent preparation program. He became part of a cohort that met monthly, and even traveled to different parts of the country to meet. The cohort also worked with current and former superintendents, who primarily shared their experiences dealing with, “what typically goes wrong after you’ve gotten the job; how do you work with the board, how do you maintain whey they hire you and then in two years everybody hates everybody.”

When asked if he thought his career path would have been different were he a White male, Matthew responded, “I am going to say no with a little asterisk in terms of I think some to the things that I had to do that was a double standard… but I think the career path itself from a time standpoint, it couldn’t have been any quicker.” While this response was measured one, Matthew further added if his career had been in New England, “I still think there’s an extreme level of bias, and I hear different things… I think it definitely wouldn’t have been as fast.”

Naomi

Naomi is a Black female superintendent who holds a doctorate degree. She has been an educator for thirty-five years, holding the positions of, teacher, assistant
principal, principal, and she has been a superintendent for eleven years. She leads a
district that is majority White students, and the median income is above that of the state.

Naomi knew she wanted to teach once she completed her degree in Biology. Relatives had visions of her going into medicine, but after one visit to a medical school
lab and the subsequent passing out, she knew that was out of the question. She went on
to teach Biology and Mathematics. She made the decision to pursue the administrative
track because she thought she could “have a bit more influence on some to the policies
and practices that weren’t good for kids.” Her first position in administration was that of
an assistant principal, in what she calls a “quasi suburban district.” She then went on to
become a principal in a suburban district. She admitted to only applying for her first
assistant principal position, and was invited to pursue all subsequent administrative
positions by colleagues from the respective districts. Naomi continued in the role of
principal for a number of years, as she moved from that suburban district to an urban
district, and then finally to the suburban district where she is currently the superintendent.

Prior to becoming the superintendent in her current district, she served as the high
school principal for six years. Naomi says she was encouraged to pursue the
superintendancy while she was principal of the high school. She was actually asked by
her predecessor to take on the role once he announced his departure. She said she had
told him “I don’t do politics well, because I am pretty outspoken… they don’t like to hear
our voices and I don’t hold back.” By our voices she was referring to Black people.
After that, she began to be pursued by the Board of Education members. All of this
attention came as a result of how much she had moved the high school with regards to its
academic standing statewide. According to Naomi, the Boards thinking was, “she’s obviously committed… she’s done the job and done it well… let her take a shot at this.” She did not want the role of superintendent, in fact she shared, “I delayed and I delayed and I delayed because I told them I didn’t want to do the political thing… but they begged and begged and begged and I said okay.” She is currently the longest serving Black superintendent in New England. Naomi realizes that she is in a unique position as the superintendent of a predominantly White, and affluent school district. She also knows that she has a level of support that is not too common for superintendents, especially a superintendent of color.

Although Naomi has clearly moved in her career and has seemingly landed in a supportive and positive district, she believes her career path would have been different were she a White female. “As a person of color, I saw along the path that I had to go through hurdles that my White counterparts never had to deal with” she said. For example, she shared that she is often overlooked or not acknowledged by her colleagues in group settings. She said, she would want to speak and would raise her hand as she had been taught, but her White colleagues would just jump in and speak. Naomi shared these types of behaviors have been occurring since she started taking administrative certification classes.

**Paul**

Paul is a Black male superintendent who holds a doctorate degree. He has been an educator for more than thirty-five years, holding the positions of teacher, team leader, vice principal, principal, executive coach, state consultant, assistant superintendent, and
he has currently been a superintendent for the past six years. He leads a district comprised mostly of students of color, with a median income slightly above that of the state.

Paul started his career as a middle school teacher in an urban district. He then moved on to another school in the district to take on the role of team leader. Paul remained in this role for thirteen years. His first administrative assignment was that of vice principal at an elementary school in the same district. He worked in that role for two years, until he was “tapped” as he puts it for a principalship, in which he served for seventeen years. When he left the principal position, he briefly served the district as an executive coach. In this position, he supported administrators across the district. In less than a year in that role, he got the opportunity to move on to a consultant role for the State Department of Education. During his two-year tenure in that role he worked with two struggling urban districts in the state. Paul was offered an assistant superintendent position back in his former school district, which gave him the responsibility of overseeing twenty-five schools. He worked in that role for four years before he got the opportunity to become the superintendent in his current district.

As for his motivation to become superintendent, Paul states it came from a number of people approaching and challenging him. During his seventeen years as principal, he brought his school to national prominence and received many awards and recognitions. Paul recalls a number of people saying to him, “you know [Paul], it’s one thing to transform and turnaround an elementary school, but it’s very challenging to transform or turnaround a struggling district.” He was intrigued by this apparent
challenge, and thus began to look for a district that required some turnaround work. He recalls, “that challenge motivated me to pursue the superintendency.”

Although Paul has relished the challenges presented to him throughout his career, he did not initially look for them. He admits, “just about every position, I was approached.” This point was interesting, and I wondered to myself if this had been the case due to the length of his career and the district he worked in at the time? He worked in a large urban district and this is where Black administrators most often got opportunities. In fact, it was Black assistant superintendent, who encouraged him to take on the role of vice principal. Paul recalls his assistant superintendent summoning to his office, where he asked him to take on the role of vice principal at a school lead by a principal who would help his career. He was told, “[this] will give you the opportunity to work with an educational leader.” This was significant since school administrators at the time were still considered managers, and the educational leader nomenclature had yet to take hold in the field. He has been aided along the way by other mentors, such as a former superintendent who took over his former district and personally asked him to return to the district as an assistant superintendent. He was then approached by “a number of stakeholders in the town” where he currently serves as superintendent, to apply for that position.

Even with the support and encouragement he received along his career path, Paul still believes his career path would have been different were he a White male. He stated emphatically, “it’s very obvious that we African American folks, we [pause] we have challenges and it’s no secret about those challenges.” While there was no further
elaboration on the question, he did share that his lengthy career path was by “choice.” He feels he could have pursued the superintendency earlier in his career had he chose to do so. Even still, he knows that the path to the superintendency is usually not the same for his White counterparts as it is for African Americans.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a Black female superintendent who holds a doctorate degree. She has been an educator for over twenty-five years, holding the positions of teacher, department chair, director of instruction, assistant superintendent, and has been a superintendent for five years. She leads a district comprised mostly of White students, with a median income below that of the state.

Elizabeth never thought about becoming a superintendent, she had planned to teach Biology at the college level after she completed her doctorate. She taught Biology for “many, many years.” She became the department chairperson at some point during those years teaching. While pursuing her doctorate degree, she was given the opportunity to take on her district’s newly created Director of Science and Technology position. Her move from chairperson to director while not the usual track, is definitely not unusual. I also believe this move was made even more possible for her since she worked for a Black superintendent. While serving in that role she was encouraged by her Black superintendent to move on in her career. She was told, “you should pursue maybe an assistant superintendency position.” Long since retired, he has continued to be a mentor and confidant to her.
Elizabeth stated, “while practicing for interviewing” she ended up being offered an assistant superintendent position in another district. She served in that role for three years. Her rise to the superintendency happened by “default” according to Elizabeth. Her superintendent actually passed away, and she was appointed as the interim superintendent. When she was not selected by the Board of Education, for the position permanently, she submitted three different applications. She landed a superintendency in another state, and served in that role for a couple of years before returning to State A.

Elizabeth does not believe her career path to the superintendency was typical because she did not serve in the role of building principal en route to becoming a superintendent. She also acknowledges that she had to take a very different route to her present superintendency. When she returned to State A she could not secure a superintendency so she took on a vice principal position and then a principal position. In her own words, “sometimes you have to take positions that you may not necessarily want to take at that time… for me, although humbling… I had to backtrack.” While serving as a principal she was applying for superintendent positions. She does not remember exactly how many applications she submitted but she admits, “it could have been dozens before I actually achieved [this] position.”

Elizabeth warned, “superintendencies are not easy to get for African Americans, particularly African American women in State A.” She feels if she were a White female, “my life would be so much easier.” Elizabeth knows all too well the obstacles, a major one she encountered were the headhunters or search firms hired by districts to find superintendents. She shared something the following regarding some headhunters, “there
are some headhunters who were just out to fill their slate and have diversity… they go oh well I need a little bit of color.” She had to work hard to get her position, after all she didn’t have “anyone knocking on her door.” She had to seek out her opportunities, because they were not handed to her.

**David**

David is a Black male superintendent who holds a doctorate degree. He has been an educator for twenty-three years, holding the positions of teacher, director, coach, associate superintendent, and he has currently been a superintendent for the past eight years. He leads a district comprised mostly of students of color, with a median income equal to the state.

David had a career path that was not what one would call the usual for typical educators who become superintendents. He only taught middle school for three years. The bulk of his career was spent as a clinical psychologist. He did spend twelve years in a part-time position at a private independent school as the Director of Diversity. His worked allowed him to work with students, teachers, principals, school districts, and ultimately coaching superintendents. David stated that becoming a superintendent was never a goal of his. He would often say to colleagues, “people who decide to become a superintendent are crazy because the job is undoable.” Even with his assertions, he spoke to mentors who would constantly encourage him to at least think about becoming a principal or superintendent. It was while he was coaching the superintendents that he first thought about becoming a superintendent. He shared that being almost fifty years of age, and his work experience played a big part in his decision. He told himself, “either I
ride out into the sunset doing more consulting for the next twenty years, or I could see if I could make the theories and concepts and support that I had been giving to others work for myself.”

Although David has held a few different types of roles during his career, he admits that he rarely applied for a position. As he puts it, “most of the roles that I went into were carved out and individualized from the conversations as opposed to application.” This is how his first public school administrator position came to fruition. While doing some consulting work for a foundation, he was approached by a client district about becoming the associate superintendent for that district. He saw this opportunity as a good step towards his goal of becoming a superintendent. While his first administrative role came about as a result of a conversation, his superintendency did not materialize in the same fashion. He admits, “I put in probably about fifty applications and interviewed probably at six or so places before getting an offer.” He attributes the lack of interest in his candidacy to his non-traditional career path. As he puts it, “I was a rather alternative candidate and had not come through the standard rank.” He also admitted that he was invited to apply for few superintendent openings, but he mainly applied on his own to postings he saw.

David believes his career path would have been different were he a White male, even with his non-traditional background. His explanation was very interesting, and maybe even philosophical:

I think that favor is given out on the basis of relationship and perceived or real intimacy. Color is often a barrier to that because it’s difficult I think
for White male leaders to create the kind of intimacy [with people of color] they might with their own. It’s little bit more dangerous for the White leader to take on a favorite son if they’re Black because of the dangers of their failure or being perceived in the wrong way. But I think that it is a little different.

Even with regards to women and people of color taking longer career paths to the superintendency David agrees and believes this phenomena may be a result of some level of fear. He stated “what I see is a lot of hesitation for the people of color, and particularly for women who don’t see the possibilities ahead of them… particularly if someone is not saying to them you could do it.”

**Hannah**

Hannah is a Black female superintendent who holds a master’s degree. She has been an educator for twenty-eight years, holding the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, executive director, assistant superintendent, and she has currently been a superintendent for the past two years. She leads a district that is predominantly White, with a median income well below that of the state.

Hannah has served in virtually every role as an educator en route to becoming a superintendent. She had taught English, Social Studies, and Special Education before becoming an administrator. She decided to make the move to administration after she had someone tell her she “needed to come out of the classroom.” This urging in connection with her realization that she was already “helping the administrators do some things,” pushed her to begin pursuing administrative positions.
Her first administrative position was as an assistant principal, which she held for just one year. As she puts it, she was “tapped to be a principal of an elementary” after that one year. She then went on to serve in two separate assistant superintendent roles. While serving in her second, interim assistant superintendent position, the position was eliminated, she was told by someone close, “you’ve been an assistant superintendent three years, you need to be applying for superintendent positions.” Hannah was hesitant to move on, as she felt she “needed to learn more” before becoming a superintendent. Hannah was invited to apply to two different superintendent postings, before securing her superintendency.

Hannah believes her career path was typical for a superintendent. She even went so far as to explain why she took the route she took. She felt it was essential to have the experience at each level because she believes superintendents must be able to relate to people at all levels. She feels, “if you skip essential office positions or a teaching position or even a building administrative position, when you sit in the superintendent’s chair it’s hard to really put judgement on something if you haven’t done what they are doing.” Although she believes her path was typical, she does admit “some people, and I am not going to say who, but some people don’t have to do all that I had to do, to get what I got.” Even without overtly speaking to race or gender, Hannah wanted to be clear that there were differences in the obstacles faced by different people as they pursue the superintendency.

Hannah did not hesitate to respond to the as to whether or not her career path may have been different were she a White female. She emphatically said “yes!” She went on
to explain in more detail her experience as the assistant superintendent which had been eliminated. She believed she was the one chosen for elimination and the White female who did not have her experience was allowed to retain her position. She was offered the opportunity to return to the classroom as a teacher. Hannah says this situation pushed her to prove that superintendent wrong. She also shared that she believes, this person through his subordinates may have created obstacles to her pursuit of positions in other districts. The obstacles in her mind were twofold, “as an African American female, we have dual, we have the female one then we have the color one.”

I have just finished sharing the profiles of each of the six Black participants. While most of their career paths to the superintendency do not show any extreme differences as compared to their White counterparts, keep in mind that these six represent the entire population of Black superintendents in States A and B combined. Tables 4.2 provides a comparison of the career paths by position of White and Black superintendents. Table 4.3 provides a comparison of the career paths by position of male and female superintendents. The table do not account for any specific amount of time in a particular position.

**White Superintendents**

**John**

John is a White male superintendent who holds a doctoral degree. He has been an educator for twenty years, holding the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, and he has currently been a superintendent for two years. He leads a majority White school district, with a median income above that of the state.
Pursuing the superintendency was a “natural” thing for John. He knew early on as a teacher, that he wanted to move into administration, and that he wanted to pursue the pinnacle of the career field. He also had the opportunity to be “in rooms with them [principals, assistant superintendents, superintendents] discussing how to run schools, how to run a school district.” just a few years into his administrative career. These opportunities to be around and learn from administrators in powerful positions, gave him the confidence to keep moving in his career. He shared that after meeting some influential superintendents, he declared to himself “you know what, I like this, this is something I think I can do. I am going to try to learn what I need to learn to be able to run a school district.” John secured his first and current superintendency after applying to less than six postings. He did not receive any personal invitations to apply, he just applied to the postings on his own. Interestingly enough, he refers to some of the interviews he had as “throwaways” which were interviews he went to and did not really expect to get the position, but interview experience. He also sees his career path as typical.

In responding to the question as to whether his career path may have been different if her were Black, John responded with an immediate “yes.” He understood his standing in this career field. According to John, as the “All-American white dude, who had a pretty privileged upbringing… when I was doing the networking, I never felt out of place, I was always welcomed.” Going to interviews or even speaking to the search consultants never presented a problem to John because most of the people he saw “were like me.” He shared that he didn’t have many obstacles en route to the superintendency,
in fact he admits his only obstacles were “himself and how he had to grow.” He even shared that he already looked like a typical superintendent since he was a “tall white dude.”

Nancy

Nancy is a White female superintendent who holds a doctoral degree. She has been an educator for over thirty-five years, holding the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, and she has currently been a superintendent for over a decade. She leads a school district that is comprised mostly of students of color, with a median income below that of the state.

Nancy began to pursue an administrative career after being a classroom teacher for over fifteen years. She was prompted by superiors to begin pursuing an administrative career after finding so much success and recognitions for her efforts in the classroom. She recalls her journey into administration as a “springboard.” Just a few months after earning her administrator license, and submitting only five applications, she secured an assistant principal position, less than a year later she was a principal. Her work in turning around the middle school she was leading got her noticed and she shared, I was told “if you can turn that school around, I would become a superintendent.” Her Board of Education asked, or as she puts it “strongly encouraged” her to consider moving into the superintendent role since her superintendent was leaving. She interviewed, and was offered the position. In just seven years after leaving the classroom, Nancy became a superintendent.
Nancy does not believe her career path was typical. She shared that she is aware that most people on the field of education believe a person must “do the ladder work… so from a principalship you need to go to central office, perhaps take an assistant superintendent and then move into the superintendency.” Reflecting on her quick path, Nancy states “I had some great mentors.” She admits that she may not have pursued the superintendency as quickly were it not for her mentors and the opportunities provided her. She believes that there were opportunities present that caused her to act. She said, “the opportunity knocked and I took it.”

Asked if she thought her career path would have been different had she been a male, Nancy quickly answered “yes, no, I don’t know about that.” What she was wrestling with was the speed at which she became a superintendent, compared to so many male superintendents she knew. After a bit more thought she admitted that she was aware of the “glass ceiling” for women. Even still she showed no desire to show weakness or accepting of that reality, nor did she look for special considerations. She defiantly stated, “I’m not a game player… my toes are on that line everyday as far as I won’t cross that line. I’m not going to owe political favors.”

Omar

Omar is a White male superintendent who holds a master’s degree. He has been an educator for fifteen years, holding the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, and he has currently been a superintendent for the past five years. He leads a district comprised mostly of students of color, with a median income below that of the state.
Omar “knew right away” after embarking on his teaching career that he wanted to be a principal. He recalls, “I think I even knew that in college.” His love for the tasks of managing a building, along with the students, and working with families was always a vision of his. After serving as a principal for three years, the superintendent position became available in his district. He was “encouraged by certain people that this is something they thought would be a good match for his skillset.” He had not given thought to this move up until this point. He had expected to be an assistant superintendent first, so as to get a better understanding of the district level work. He could not ignore the opportunity presented to him, especially because it was in a district he “loved.”

Omar knows that his career path was not typical. He had only applied to two administrative positions before securing his assistant principal position. After that, his administrative career moved relatively quickly. He also, applied for only one superintendency, which is the one his currently holds. Omar’s former superintendent was actually the one who “encouraged” him to go for the position being vacated. The two of them had been very close since the superintendent had arrived in the district. He says he was encouraged to pursue the position because his “skillset and talent would work well in this type of position.” The people in power around him saw him as “someone who had a lot of potential.” Omar believes these same people saw his “hunger for challenge,” as well as his “great credibility with the faculty, and parents, and community, and our kids.”

In terms of obstacles, Omar did not face many. He shared that his district had always been good to him. “At every level… I have always been afforded opportunities to
take on new responsibilities. I have always been surrounded by people who cared about me as a professional, who cared about me as a person.” Omar believes his career path would have been different if he were a Black man. He shared, “I am very aware of the privilege that comes with being White… I am aware that doors have opened for me… I am aware of being a male and what being a male has opened to me.” Omar stated he wants to be a part of the system that changes this sad reality.

**Tabitha**

Tabitha is a White female superintendent who holds a doctoral degree. She has been an educator for thirty years, holding teaching, teacher coach, instructional leader, supervisor, director, assistant superintendent, and has currently been superintendent for the past two years. She leads a district that is majority White, with a median income below that of the state.

Even as a little girl playing school at home, Tabitha always played the principal. Throughout her career as an educator, she has mainly held roles related to Special Education. She has taught at all levels of K-12. The trigger for her getting into administration came when her family moved to the west coast. It was there she was hired as a teacher coach for Special Education teachers. Her responsibilities included “working with teachers on how to deal with special education issues… behavior issues… and how to make program decisions for students of all grade levels.” It was while she was doing this job that she began to receive feedback regarding her leadership potential. Her family moved back east and she landed a position as a special education instructional leader. Tabitha shares, “my superintendent at the time was pushing me really, really hard to get
my [administrator certification].” The superintendent even told her, “get your [administrator certification] and I’m going to have you be principal of this school.” Tabitha declined that offer as she was expecting and did not believe she could give her best to the position and her family simultaneously.

Once she completed her certification program, she was presented with the opportunity to become a special education supervisor, and she took the position. The next year she was promoted to the position of Special Education Director. Seven years later she would be promoted to assistant superintendent. Not long after receiving the promotion, her superintendent announced she was leaving and she wanted Tabitha to take on the role. Tabitha did not have the certification and did not want to go back to school at the time. The opportunity passed and she remained in her position, but she did eventually get her superintendents certification. Five years later, she gets another great opportunity presented to her. Her superintendent decided to leave the district and he gave his endorsement for Tabitha to the Board of Education to replace him. This opportunity was taken by Tabitha, she stated, “I had to go through an interview process, but they didn’t open it up publicly.” She also believes her career path has been typical.

Tabitha has been fortunate throughout her administrative career path, she stated, “you know, here’s the reality, I am not sure I ever submitted a single application for an administrative position because they promoted from within.” She applied to another district once, but that was only because she did not think the superintendent in her district was planning to leave so soon. That application was also a result of her being told by a central office administrator in the other district, “Tabitha, I want you to apply, I think
you’d be great.” She interviewed but did not get the position. She learned not long after from a trusted colleague that “you didn’t stand a chance at all, they would have never hired a female.” When asked if she thought her career path would be different were she a male, she replied, “male? for sure!” Although she has been encouraged all along throughout career to take on new opportunities, she still believes males have an edge. In her view, a candidate going into an interview as an unknown has a better shot if the candidate is a male, because a “male is probably seen as a more powerful leader than a female.”

**Peter**

Peter is a White male superintendent who holds a master’s degree. He has been an educator for twenty-two years, holding teaching, department head, principal, assistant superintendent, and for the past three years superintendent. He leads a district that is predominantly White, and has a median income above that of the state.

Peter shared that he was the first to graduate from college in his family, and that all of his career moves have been a result of this fact. He had never thought about becoming a teacher until he had the opportunity to coach baseball at a small New England school and was subsequently asked to take on a long-term substitute assignment at the school. After that assignment, he moved with his wife to the town and district he currently serves as Superintendent. While teaching at the high school his retiring Department Supervisor told him, “you should take over as Department Supervisor.” Peter was pretty confident about the opportunity, he even told himself, “there was nobody that loved History the way I did, and I didn’t want someone else to be my boss.” While
still taking classes to earn his administrator certification, his supervisor left for medical reasons, and Peter was put in the position of Department Supervisor prior to obtaining his certification.

Years later his principal announced her retirement and Peter who at that point was very popular and comfortable in his role, once again decided to go for the job because he believed there was nobody better suited for the job. Not even the current assistant principals in his school. Peter applied for the position and was offered a middle school principal position. Defiant and confident, he told the Director of Human Resources, “oh no you don’t understand, I don’t want to be a principal, I want to be principal of this school.” Peter was given the position as the high school principal over the other current administrators. Peters next opportunity came when he was promoted to assistant superintendent by a superintendent who had in his words, “always been good to me.” She ensured he was provided with many opportunities to grow as a central office administrator, and this also afforded him the chance to be noticed by members of the community. Four years later, the superintendent retired and the Board of Education appointed Peter as the Superintendent without doing a search. The Board told him they were proceeding in this fashion because “[he] was the right person from within.” Even when one Board member brought up the issue of him not hold a doctorate degree, the other Board members rose to Peter’s defense, and asked the lone member, “you are not questioning his academics or intelligence are you?” Peter shared he never even thought about applying to any other districts for a superintendency.
When asked if he thought his career path would have been different if he were a Black man, Peter stated “no, I think I’ve proven myself.” He did share that he had heard in the town chatter that “he’s not diverse.” He knew that there was a movement to get someone with more “diversity.” When pushed on this comment, he stated, “I am not trying to pull any reverse discrimination.” He felt his record working with the students and families of his high school which had a student population similar populations of White students and students of color. Reflecting further, he changes his answer somewhat, as he believes he may have been perceived as “angry” if he were a Black man when he was teaching, due to his outspoken nature. Poking fun at himself, Peter shared his response to himself once he had agreed to take part in this study, “I am going to be the poster child for [the] privileged White.”

Lois

Lois is a White female superintendent who holds a doctoral degree. She has been an educator for twenty-two years, holding the positions of teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, and she has been a superintendent for seven years. She leads a district that is majority White, and boasts a median income above that of the state.

Lois did not initially start out wanting to be an educator. Similar to Peter, she fell into the opportunity to take on a substitute teaching assignment and this put her on the path to becoming an educator. As she puts it, “I know what I want to do, I want to become a teacher.” This subbing opportunity helped her to a whole new realm of possibilities. She taught English at the high school level for two years in one district and for five years in another. It was during her stint at the second school that she was first
approached about moving into administration by her principal. Initially, she wanted nothing to do with administration and recalls telling the principal, “I’ll never join you and I’m never gonna go into administration.” Laughing, she said it was a quote from the movie Star Wars she was referencing.

Lois watched her principal for two years and she slowly started to see herself in the administrative role, because she saw “he could lead with kindness and still be effective.” She thought to herself, “oh that’s what administrators can look like and be like.” Inspired now, she went back to school to earn her administrator certification. While working on her certification, she was given the opportunity to serve on a committee that was comprised of secondary and collegiate educators. The committee was tasked with designing a magnet school. When the committee had completed its school design, Lois was approached by the members to become the principal. She was surprised and thought to herself, “this is crazy, I’m not just gonna become a magnet school principal, I don’t even have my certificate completed yet.” She went ahead and interviewed and was offered the position. While serving as the principal of this school, she went on to earn her doctorate.

The school she was leading served several districts, and one of the superintendents approached Lois about applying for an elementary principal position in his district. Lois again thought this did not makes sense as she had spent her entire career at the high school level. The superintendent told her, “I think you should apply, you know your skills will transfer, you’d be great!” She applied for the position and was hired for that principalship. Four years later, she saw an assistant superintendent position
opening in another district. She shared her plan to apply with her superintendent, and he provided her with great encouragement. He exclaimed to her, “you’re gonna get that job… you got to apply!” With his encouragement, she applied for and was hired as the assistant superintendent in her current district.

Lois had never planned to become a superintendent, she stated, “it was never a long-term goal of mine.” Lois ended up having a great opportunity land in her lap, and just ended up becoming the superintendent. After just over four months in her new role as assistant superintendent, her superintendent announced his retirement. The Board of Education immediately approached her about taking on the superintendent position. The Board only conducted an internal search and Lois was ultimately hired as the superintendent, just eight months after becoming the assistant superintendent. She admits, “it was very fast, it was a whirlwind thing.”

Lois has not faced many obstacles in her career progression. She has only applied for one position which she did not get, it was not a superintendency. She believes she did not get the position because of a “bad interview.” She shared, “in all my other jobs I got every job I applied for, this was a humbling experience.” Lois believes things happen for a reason and that she was meant to be in the position she is in now. She admits career wise, she has had “unbelievable luck.” While the positions held are quite typical for someone seeking to become a superintendent, the speed at which she ascended to the position is definitely not the norm. Interestingly enough, Lois believes there is a trend now in which younger superintendents are being hired as opposed to those who traditionally were older or closer to retirement.
As to whether or not she thought her career progression would have been different if she were a Black woman, she responded, “I believe messages being sent to me by society might have encouraged me to think differently about my path.” She feels society sends messages, and she doesn’t know what those messages may have been if she was a Black female moving along her career path. She stated that she has spoken to people of color, and “they talk about messages, subtle messages that being sent.” She imagines these messages would have had an impact. She also states, she has spoken to some people of color who said, they did not receive these subtle messages from society.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I shared a brief summary of the twelve participants’ experiences as they each moved along their respective career paths to the superintendency. The experiences of the White and Black superintendents shed some light on the access to opportunities, as well as the obstacles faced by some on their professional journey. I specifically wanted to explore potential differences in the career paths, with a focus on the race and gender of the participants. At first glance, it would appear that the career path to the superintendency is quite similar for Blacks and Whites, as well as for males and females. I would bring attention to the number of Black superintendents presently leading State A or State B, school districts. At a ratio of 495 to 6, something is wrong beyond the look of the career path, I would suggest the career path is most informed by the look of the person on the path (Tooms et al., 2010). With the majority of school districts labeled as suburban and rural, and the requisite populations mainly White, there seems to be little chance for what Crenshaw et al., (1995) refer to as “interest
convergence.” The school boards have the power to hire and thus they decide which traits are the most desirable for their superintendent. As long as those district populations stay mostly White, the school boards will continue to hire White superintendents (Turoczy, 1996; Valverde, 1980; Young & Fox, 2002). In the next chapter, I will share the emerging themes that came from each participants’ career path to the superintendency.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to examine the career paths of White and Black, male and female superintendents, in States A and B. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the themes that emerged from the twelve participant profiles presented in Chapter Four. My analysis of the interviews was guided by my two central research questions:

1. What does the career path to the superintendency look like for superintendents in States A and B; in particular, are there different patterns for men and women, or for White and Black superintendents?
2. To what extent have superintendents encountered the politics of “fit” in their careers, and how have superintendents of different races and genders experienced “fit” differently?

The data analysis from the twelve interviews produced five core themes. These themes illustrated how Black and White superintendents moved along their respective career paths. The five themes to be discussed in this chapter will be: (a) Hookups, (b) Shot Callers, (c) Schooling, (d) New Jacks, and (e) Hustling. The terms that emerged from the participants were more common terms such as, “opportunity, mentors, fit, networking, encouraging, and exposure.” Opportunity and fit, were by far the most shared term, but it leaves others to believe that someone could simply be in the “right place, at the right time, with the right skill.” There was no clear or consistent standard of accomplishment,
but rather a decision by someone or multiple people in more powerful or influential positions to grant the person the promotion. I chose to use more contemporary and culturally Black terms, as opposed to common academic terms to describe the themes. My reasoning for doing this is that I want these findings read by academics and non-academics. I have found that too often, the findings of significant pieces of research fail to impact those who could benefit the most from the research due to the overly academic terminology used in the study. I hope to make my findings applicable to people currently in education, as well as those who aspire to become educators, particularly educators of color.

These themes help to answer the research questions, and provide a context for how and what the participants encounter or need to do in order to advance along their respective career paths to the superintendency. Whites are more likely to be in the position of the shot caller, which means they will most likely possess the knowledge and experience to provide the schooling and hookups to others. More often than not, those who get the benefits from the shot callers are also White. DiTomaso (2013) refers to this taking care of each other on the part of Whites, as “opportunity hoarding.” Meanwhile, the Black educators or for the purposes of this study new jacks have to hustle or work much longer and harder than their White colleagues in order to achieve their goal of becoming a superintendent.

**Hookups**

A “hookup” as a situation in which one has received a good, service, or deed as a favor that provides that person an advantage in a given situation. For the purposes of this
writing I shall write the phrase as one word, hookup. Examples would be “my friend Lynn gave me the hookup with front row tickets to the Tina Turner concert,” or “my classmate’s mother is the CEO at XYZ, Inc. and I got the hookup when she gave me a summer internship without me having to interview.” Hookups come in many different forms, they not only can be one time acts or favors, but they may also be continual acts that continuously benefit the receiver.

In the context of work this could look like a person in power providing a subordinate the opportunity to sit in on an important decision making meeting, network with other folks in power, or just providing that person with important tips for career advancement (DiTomaso, 2013; Tatum, 1997). The closer or more familiar the subordinate comes to the person in power, the greater the likelihood that the subordinate will be promoted or provided opportunities that lead to promotion faster than the other workers. This is because the person in power is now more comfortable with the subordinate and trusts the subordinate. Very often the person in power provides these hookups to subordinates, friends, family members, or those who are most like the one in power (DiTomaso, 2013). These similarities often fall along racial or gender lines (McIntosh, 1989). Those who don’t have these similarities are often not provided the hookups or at least not to the same extent.

The participants defined their hookup with a number of phrases. They each spoke to how they had been the recipient of the good fortune of others in positions of greater power and influence. They were able to move along their respective career paths as a result of the career opportunities offered to them. The frequency and impact of the
hookups were different for the participants. Some participants shared that were the beneficiaries of hookups from early on in their administrative careers. These hookups continued and as a result they were able to secure a superintendency. Other participants reported that they received these hookups less frequently, if at all. These participants felt they had to work harder for their opportunities and promotions than other participants.

Lois (WHITE) shared that her hookup came as a surprise, she was asked to apply for an open high school principal position, “how could I be principal and I don’t even have my certificate completed yet?” Her hookups continued as she was invited by a superintendent to apply for an elementary principal position in his district. She was shocked when she got the job, “I remember there were 35 applicants, 18 of them were sitting elementary principals… I should not have even made the paper cut, because I didn’t have any elementary experience.” After a couple years as an elementary principal, she was hired as Assistant Superintendent in another district for one year before being asked by her Board of Education to become Superintendent. Lois recognizes the hookups she has received along her rather speedy career path, “I think the speed at which I became superintendent is probably atypical.”

Tabitha (WHITE) did not get the benefit of hookups as early on in her career as Lois, but she did get them. She shares that “my superintendent at the time was pushing me really, really hard to get my [administrators certification].” Tabitha’s superintendent was so direct with his hookup that he told her “get your [administrators certification] and I’m going to have you be principal of this school.” Although, Tabitha turned down the offer, a year later she was promoted to a district level position as Special Education
Supervisor, without having to apply or interview. She continued to get a hookup when she was promoted to Assistant Superintendent without having to apply or interview for the position. The biggest hookup came when her Superintendent resigned his position, and then endorsed her to the Board of Education for Superintendent; “I had to go through an interview process, but they didn’t open it up publicly.”

Elizabeth (BLACK) is a participant who did not reap the same level of hookup benefits as the other participants. She was a classroom teacher for many years, the department chair, before obtaining a district level position as Director of Science and Technology. She gained her positions through the typical application and interview process, with the exception of a few unique occurrences. After completing her PhD, a colleague told her “you really should pursue maybe an assistant superintendent position.” Elizabeth shared that her first hookup came while practicing for interviews, “I actually ended up being offered a position as Assistant Superintendent.” She explained that her next hookup was the result of a very sad opportunity, “I actually was interim superintendent when our Superintendent at the time had passed away.” When the position was posted by the Board of Education, she was not hired. It is very common for an interim superintendent who has already worked in the district they are serving to get the permanent position. The school board is already familiar with the person and if there had been any concerns, the person would not usually be offered the interim position. She shared that she put in “dozens” of applications before landing her current superintendency. Elizabeth took a position she truly felt was beneath her skillset and education in order to keep moving forward in her career. When asked why she would
take a less desirable position, she replied, “you have to work! So sometimes you have to take positions that you may not necessarily want to take.” Her situation speaks to why so many Black superintendents have the longer career paths to the superintendency. They do not have very many options or the privilege to be picky about which opportunities they will pursue. They do not have the same powerful networks and mentors from which to access the “hookups” needed.

Matthew (BLACK) was surprised to learn that there were superintendents in his state who had not previously held Central Office positions. In speaking of his colleagues he shared, “one of the guys… he came from being a middle school principal to being a superintendent… and then another guy who came from [mumbling] so they’ve been able to skip the central office position. The [state] where I am coming from, that doesn’t happen.” It was not uncommon to hear similar stories from the superintendents of color. Paul (BLACK) nodded in agreement that White superintendents did not have to through all the obstacles as Black superintendents, but only stated “I’ll leave it at that.” Interestingly enough, he refused to elaborate. Hannah in a similar fashion shared her feelings, she said, “some people, and I’m not going to say who, but some people don’t have to do all that I had to do to get what I got.” It is understood that she is speaking of White superintendents, when she says “some people.” They all went through similar career paths in which they spent more years working at a particular level such as principal, or they had to work more positions prior to ultimately becoming a superintendent.
Shot callers

In every culture or society there are those people who possess the power to control various situations. For this study they will be called “shot callers.” Shot callers is a term used in hip hop circles as well as urban communities. These people control all of the activities happening in the community (legal or illegal). Everyone in the community learns from an early age who they are and just how beneficial or dangerous they can be to those who cross their path. They can take the form of politicians, business owners, drug dealers, mobsters, even religious leaders. Members of those communities seek to make connections with these shot callers when they are seeking to gain advantages, opportunities, access, or simply information.

These shot callers then decide if and when they will assist the person looking for their help. It is also understood that their help comes with strings, or the expectation that the person given the favor will do something for the shot caller, which could be stated or unstated. The favors are first grounded in loyalty to that person or people, I would even suggest there is an expectation that the person provided the favor does not go outside of the group to provide favors on the same level to non-Whites. For the purposes of this study, shot callers are those people in power by positioning or political affiliation who provide opportunities for those seeking their help to move along the career path to the superintendency. These shot callers decide who gets these opportunities and when these opportunities will be made available. The opportunities shot callers provide look different in different scenarios but they accomplish the same purpose of helping the recipient move along the career path in a quicker fashion.
Omar (WHITE) has had the good fortune of building a relationship with a shot caller very early on in his career. While he was just a teacher, his superintendent began to provide him with opportunities that would help his career progression. While the shot caller did not come out and overtly say to him “I am going to help you do this or that,” he provided the access. Omar said concerning his superintendent, “as the new superintendent, he immediately connected with me… I became his first leadership hire actually.” He further shares, “he spent time with me… he was very supportive of me.” After just three years of being a principal Omar was personally asked to consider taking on the superintendency in the same district. He recalls, “I was encouraged by certain people that this would be a good match for my skillset.” The use of the word encouraged is fairly consistent throughout the data when participants spoke of access to opportunities.

It is understood that the encouragement comes from the person or persons who have the power to help the participant access whatever position is being presented at the time. Omar was not even reluctant by his own account, as he thought he should progress “along the lines of assistant superintendent” so he could actually a chance to “view the work from inside [central] office.” Omar knew “coming from the school to central office was big transition,” but of course he followed the encouragement of the shot callers because “it was an opportunity here in the district and town that I love… I was really happy to take it.” Omar was able to become a superintendent in his early thirties, an age not common at all for new superintendents. As a White male, with all the perceived qualities desired by those hiring he would be perfect for the job (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Blount, 1998; Hargreaves, 2005; Lugg 2003a, 2006; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). One
never knows when certain opportunities will come along, and since these opportunities are basically the gifts of shot callers, it would be wise to accept them when presented. There are so many looking for these opportunities, that they can simply be given to someone else and the person who turned it down may never get that same opportunity.

Peter (WHITE) is another example of someone benefiting from the opportunities provided by shot callers which don’t always seem connected, but ultimately prove very fortunate and purposeful. He was able to access opportunities that helped him to clarify his own career goals, as he was not even initially planning on becoming an educator. His first opportunity came while coaching at a small high school that asked if he would take on a long-term sub position for a teacher who went out on medical leave. Peter got inspired by his teaching experience, he thought to himself “I’m reading about history, talking about history, and I’m coaching kids… I’m around people I love every day, this seems to be what I should do.” While serving as a social studies teacher, his retiring department supervisor told him “you should take over as department supervisor.” He did not have the appropriate licensure for administration at the time. Even before the supervisor retired, or earning his license, Peter was allowed to start the job due to the supervisor being injured. He worked to earn his administrator license while he worked in the supervisor role. His next opportunity when he was selected as principal of his high school, having never been an assistant principal. He knew this was a big opportunity being provided to him, and “realized it might be difficult for some because I’ve only been an administrator for two years.” While Peter was serving as principal, a new superintendent was hired and according to him “she was good to me.” Peter was hired as
her assistant superintendent, and served under her for four years. Upon her retirement, he was asked by the Board of Education to become Superintendent of Schools. Peter was proud to share that “they [Board of Education] agreed not to do a national search, that I was the right person from within.” It is the norm for Boards of Education to conduct national searches for their superintendent vacancies, but they are not required to do so. They are the shot callers and therefore they can proceed in whatever fashion they desire, if a candidate “fits” then they are satisfied (G. Anderson, 1990; Capper, 1999; Ortiz, 1982; Sherman, 2005).

John (WHITE) is a White superintendent who understands his privilege and the ways of society when it comes to the superintendency. He speaks of his less successful interviews as “throw aways,” meaning he did not expect to get the job because he knew what he did wrong in the interviews and used them as learning experiences. He even referred to himself as an “alpha male” and believes this along with being a “tall White male.” He believes “people are predisposed to people like him becoming superintendents.” John’s speaks of these sentiments as though they were not social constructs, but rather a natural occurrence (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It is important to restate the fact that these shot callers are overwhelmingly White, and male. It is not difficult to see how White males, and secondarily White females would best connect with these people who are predisposed to seeing their own as superintendents (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hilliard; 2001 Tate, 1995). I have even heard this sentiment repeatedly in my professional circles, colleagues regularly talk about who looks like a superintendent and who does not.
Black superintendents did not have access to the shot callers at the same level or frequency as their White counterparts, nor do they look like the shot callers, they do not reap the same level of benefit, support or encouragement (DiTomaso, 2013; McIntosh, 1988).

**Schooling**

Schooling would include all of the networking and informational activities one participates in for the purpose of career advancement. The culture and norms of the shot callers would be shared during these activities. Additionally, the potential to gain favor with the shot callers would be increased. To receive schooling or be schooled, is to be informally educated in the ways of the people in power. Whenever a person enters a new arena, be it a community, school, job, team, jail, or other type of organization, they must be schooled about the ways and norms of that new environment. When a person begins a new job, he or she must learn the formal and informal culture of that organization. Often there will formal trainings provided to teach the new employee about the formal culture of the organization, but the informal culture must be learned in a less structured or programmed manner. The new employee will be taught who to eat with, how to interact with certain colleagues, where to hang out after work, and most importantly how one gets promoted in the organization. All new employees get some level of schooling, but I am alluding to the information that only a select few get. Very often this schooling is not announced but rather organically begins. It does not take long for a new employee to find out who does the schooling. The employees who have already gained a sense of entitlement in life, already know to look diligently for these schooling opportunities.
John knew he wanted to become a superintendent very early on in his teaching career so he made it his business to get schooled. He made sure to put himself in positions that afforded him these opportunities.

I was being exposed to a lot of principals and assistant superintendents at a very early stage of my career. When I was like six, seven years in. I was in rooms with them discussing how to run schools, how to run a school district. I was exposed to individuals like Tom Novella, at a very young age. I said, you know what, I like this. This is something that I think I can do. I'm going to try to learn what I need to learn to be able to run a school district.

John understood that he was now accessing opportunities to learn from some shot callers and other influential people. He understood that the information he was being exposed to would serve him well as he moved toward his goal of becoming a superintendent. He also knew he was in places that were not easily accessible by many of his colleagues with the same aspirations. When he talked about being “in the room” he was not speaking of one particular physical place. The room is actually any place or time when he was in the presence of or at minimum made aware of vital information these people held.

DiTomaso (2013) speaks of the powerful networks that Whites have access to, which of course are accessible to their family and friends. Those who have access to the room or network to receive this schooling understand that they are not necessarily going to openly share whatever information they have been given.
Sometimes the schooling does not come across as clear and direct as what John experienced. Not everyone is so clear about their career moves, nor when and how they should get schooled. Some people need to get schooled without even knowing it is or has occurred. Sometimes the schooling is simply the encouragement and supporting of another person’s abilities. Naomi (BLACK) experienced this type of schooling when she was encouraged by her Board of education Chair. When asked about taking over the superintendent role in her district she initially declined because as she put it, “I don’t do politics well, it’s not my forte;” the Chair replied, “well, I’ll do the politics for you, you just run the schools.” Naomi was actually schooled on how the politics of the superintendency actually work. As the superintendent, she is to work with her board Chair to ensure the needs of the district are being met, the Chair is really the one who will maneuver the political arena to support the superintendent. Naomi needed to be encouraged so that she could take that step into the superintendency. Naomi experienced an exception to the norm for most non-White superintendents.

Paul also experienced schooling in the form of encouragement, but one could even say he was pushed into his schooling. He recalls being invited to his Assistant Superintendent’s office, years ago. He did not know why he had been summoned to that office. His remembers his assistant superintendent blurring out, “the reason I asked you to come here is because I want offer you the position of vice principal at the Fancy Elementary School… going to Fancy Elementary to work with Roy Dobson will give you the opportunity to work with an educational leader.” Paul understood he would have the chance to learn from a leader in education, he recalled Mr. Dobson “was a pioneer and in
fact considered by many as an education leader, that was significant.” Another participant, Hannah (BLACK), was schooled in the same fashion. She had not thought about pursuing the superintendency even though she had already been an assistant superintendent for three years. She was told, “you've been an assistant superintendent three years, you need to be applying for superintendent positions.” These encouraging words were significant to Hannah because she still thought she needed more experience.

Whether a person seeks out the schooling opportunities on his or her own, or is encouraged or pushed into those opportunities, he or she will be provided information that will most certainly be of benefit to their career advancement. When a person has access to the shot callers, then the opportunities for schooling come more regularly.

**New Jacks**

Any person who is not born a White male, or does not have ready access to shot callers. These people are seen as outsiders, and possibly threats. Quite often they are women, and people of color. They are watched closely by the shot callers and those looking to gain favor with the shot callers. In terms of the school superintendency, New Jacks are those individuals who have earned the stated credentials to move along the career path, but they don’t necessarily have the network to support their career aspirations. They don’t have access to the shot callers who can provide them with the hookups and schooling that will propel them on their career paths. New Jacks are basically starting out on their career path from scratch, and are pursuing the
superintendency against many obstacles. Nancy (WHITE) shared her experience as a female trying to gain a superintendency;

My path in obtaining the superintendency was through very hard work, perseverance and, being told that ... you know, you're not going to make it. The school system I was at, it was more ... it was the good old boy's network, it really was. The boys got to the top and I'm like, I'm not sticking around for this.

Nancy was not part of the “good old boys network” as she put it, so she was not provided the same access and opportunities as her male contemporaries. She even believes “expectations are different for women than men.” Although Nancy is White, she is a female and at times has to face obstacles that are not so prevalent for White males. She may not have the same networks to help her move as easily up the career ladder. White males hold the majority of leadership roles with power in public school systems and in the private sector (Bell, 1992). This means the greatest privilege will often rest with White males, and they will help each other navigate to positions of power.

Another problem faced by female New Jacks is the issue around parenting. The administrative ranks are already male dominated, so similar to what Nancy shared, females aspiring to move up through the administrative ranks face the pressure of harsh expectations simply because they are mothers. Hannah faced this situation as she pursued her administrative career and even understood that she had two obstacles to overcome as a woman of color.
One thing is that as a female, people sometimes think that because you're a mother, and I was a single mother at this point, I got divorced when my daughter was five, and so as I became an administrator, I was single. They think that you're going to take time off, you're going to do this and do that. But I think, for myself, that makes you more driven, it makes you want to shut the naysayers up and say hey I can do this and do it better than you. But you still have these glass ceilings that you're still hitting and I think as an African American female, we have dual, we have the female one then we have the color one.

She understood that she was not viewed the same as her male colleagues and that these thoughts would be in the minds of the people who would be potentially hiring her, or even working for her.

At times the obstacles, sexism, and racism faced by some New Jacks are so daunting that many choose to pursue a limited number of opportunities or even none at all. Nancy has witnessed this in her own personal circle of professional women of color.

I think there's so much more hidden biases. I think there's so much ... I'd hate to say no, but I know, speaking to some of my colleagues who are frustrated, who are women, African-American, yeah. I think they're frustrated. I think some of them are, the ones I'm close to are, very talented and yet are very reserved in their pursuit of different opportunities for themselves because they just don't know what to expect, and times I don't blame them.

When Nancy speaks of the women of color being reserved with the number and types of superintendencies they pursue, she is speaking in direct contrast to the actions of
“Caucasian males [who] wouldn’t be that careful… they’d just apply for everything.”

She understands that White males don’t experience the number of obstacles and challenges that New Jacks face, so they are less like to become reserved in their pursuits of superintendencies.

Naomi is a highly educated Black woman, holding a doctorate degree. She has a long career in education, but has had to work much harder to move in her career. She shared that “as a person of color, I saw along the path that I had to go through hurdles that my White counterparts never had to deal with.” She even noticed the challenges as far back as her courses for the superintendency. She remembers professors “being more receptive to other people’s responses… I could say something and a Caucasian or White person would say the same thin two minutes later and [the professor] would be like oh that is a wonderful idea.” She admits that this phenomena occurs even more frequently now that she is a superintendent. During her meetings with other superintendents now, she will raise her hand to speak to a point over and over, but her White counterparts, particularly males, will just blurt out their responses and she is not acknowledged. She stated that at times she would wait for a natural pause then speak up. Of course, she is in the room with the shot calllers from other districts, so I am sure her actions are noted by them and they take the position that she has not learned her place or how she it to behave in their environment. I have personally heard some of the less than flattering comments made about her by other superintendents. One in particular called her “angry.”

Naomi has been in her current superintendency for a number of years. She has a proven track record of success academically for her school district. Even with this stellar
record, she has found it challenging to say the least to move to another superintendency. I am aware that she has attempted to move to other districts whether for the new challenge, pay increase, or simply a change of scenery, but has been unsuccessful in securing the next superintendency. It does not take much wondering as to why she is not moving, I am sure the shot callers see her as not being a good “fit” for other districts.

David (BLACK) holds a doctorate degree from Harvard, but this pedigree has not provided him with the schooling that would move him more quickly to the superintendency. Although he did years of consulting work around educational organizations, and even got his first break as a result of his consulting, he did not get access to those who would propel his career. In his own words, “I sort of scaled up the ladder from working with students, to teachers, to principals, and whole school districts, and then coaching superintendents.” He was almost fifty years old when he decided to pursue the superintendency. Even with all of his coaching of superintendents, he had to begin his journey as an Associate Superintendent.

**Hustling**

Hustling is actions taken by those individuals desiring to become superintendents. This would include jobs held, tasks undertaken, roles, degrees earned, and all other activities and responsibilities believed to be necessary for advancement to the superintendency. In popular culture, hustling is often associated with illegal or dishonest activities on the part of people working outside of the accepted realm of employment. One may even have heard a person referred to as a hustler. In this context, hustling is at
all times above board, and meant to demonstrate the difficult path a New Jack must often take when attempting to become a superintendent. New Jacks quite regularly hold more roles or positions throughout their careers as they don’t often get the same hookups provided by Shot callers. We can see this in Hannah’s experience.

I have a Bachelors in English. I've attended law school. I have a Master’s in Education. I have an [administrator and superintendent] certification in State A. Then I have a superintendent certification in State B. I've been an English teacher, social studies teacher, a 5th grade inclusive teacher, assistant principal, principal, executive director for elementary education, assistant superintendent for secondary, interim assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and now I am superintendent.

Hannah’s career path is typical for those who are not connected to the right networks, or who don’t belong to the same racial groups as those in power. Matthew’s path to the superintendency was just as adventurous. He shared his journey,

I was an English teacher for a year in State A, two years in Maryland, and then I became an administrator… I was a High School Principal for six years, so before that I was a teacher and then Assistant Principal. After being a Principal I went to Chicago for a couple of years to open a Charter School.

After leaving the Charter School, Matthew took on an assistant superintendent position in Washington, D.C. before landing his superintendency in State B.
David on the other hand would not be able to relate to any of those experiences; he states, “when I decided to become a superintendent I did put in probably about 50 applications and interviewed probably at six or so places before getting an offer.” Before even applying for a superintendency he was a teacher, psychologist, diversity director, principal, consultant, and associate superintendent. Hannah, Matthew, and David all illuminate the concept of hustling. The superintendents of color are going to hold more positions prior to gaining their first superintendency. They do not get the benefit of a shortened or even evenly spaced career ladder.

The shot callers dictate which roles or positions need to be held prior to someone becoming a superintendent. Nancy talked about this when she stated, “some people feel you need to do the ladder work… In other words, up the ladder, so from a principalship you need to go to central office, perhaps takes an assistant superintendent, and then move into the superintendency.” This idea of the “ladder work” seems pretty straightforward, but all too often, candidates connected to the Shot callers get the hookups, and their ladders become step stools.

Peter experienced this step stool versus the ladder, his ascension from department chair, to principal, to assistant superintendent, and finally superintendent was not much of a ladder. He knew his career path was atypical and even his hiring as the superintendent was a hookup. Once his superintendent announced her retirement, he met with the board of education and “they agreed not to do a national search, [and] that I was the right person from within.” Regarding her ascending to the superintendency, Tabitha stated, “I went through an interview process, but they didn’t open it up publicly.”
Lois went through a similar hiring process for her superintendency. Once her superintendent announced his retirement, her Board of Education approached her for the job and she went through an internal search process, which resulted in her being hired as superintendent. In fact, Lois has enjoyed a rather fortuitous career path, she has never known what it was like to not get a position to which she applied.

Omar too did not have to work in so many positions. He was able to move from a principal position to the superintendency. The path from teacher, to assistant principal, to principal, superintendent while not the most common career path, it is not an extreme outlier for some White superintendents.

Summary

As a result of this study’s findings, my two central research questions have been answered to some extent, if but only for my extremely small sample of participants. I believe it is important to keep in mind the sample size for my study as I discuss findings, themes, and any potential recommendations. First, the career path to the superintendency in States A and B, differed to somewhat for White and Black superintendents. There may be some commonalities, such as licensing and the requisite levels of education, but the White superintendents (male and female) had a shorter path to the superintendency. They both will have greater access to “hookups” provided by “shot callers” who will also give them the “schooling” necessary to move along their career path faster than the “new jacks” who lack many of these benefits, and who will have to “hustle” more than their counterparts. Opportunity hoarding, and the powerful networks Whites have access to, continue to provide them with opportunities not available to non-Whites in all workplaces.
(DiTomaso, 2013). Black superintendents (male and female) are not as fortunate in their career path. They will most likely have to work in more roles, for more years, and they will often have to move districts in order to pursue career opportunities.

As for the second question, regarding the politics of “Fit” and how have superintendents encountered it in their careers, it is a given that all have dealt with this notion on some level. It is difficult for any educator to become a superintendent, but it is even more difficult for those educators who most often possess none of the characteristics of the hiring committee, school board, or community. Whites maintain their control and dominance of the highest positions of educational institutions by utilizing the notion of “fit” so as not to appear racist, prejudiced. They also utilize “fit” in order to satisfy what the community seeks in its superintendent. This notion does not just come into play when Blacks are interviewing for superintendent positions, in fact, they are being schooled from a very early age in life. Whites want to keep their position as the dominant culture, and they achieve this by convincing members of subordinated groups to accept, adopt, and internalize their definition of what is normal (Kusmashiro, 2004). This convincing comes via mass media and mass schooling (Apple, 2001; Edelman, 1988; Foucault, 1975).

The insidiousness of this indoctrination is that members of the subordinate groups are not even aware of the indoctrination and domination (Tooms, et al., 2010). Many believe, if they just learn more, get more experience, earn another degree, and of course work harder, they can change their fortunes. Society teaches Whites and Blacks what leaders look like from an early age, so it is difficult for a number of Whites in the
position to hire a superintendent to hire a Black candidate. It is clear from the outset that the Black candidates will not have a real chance at the job because they walk into the room with one big deficit, and that would be they are not a good “fit” as a leader. How could they be a good “fit” after-all they do not look like a leader (Dyson, 2008).
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

An examination of the literature provided a few plausible theories for the low numbers of Black superintendents, and the high number of White male superintendents. The theories covered were Critical Race Theory (CRT), “racism without racists,” “power of networks,” and the notion of “fit.” Each of the discussed theories addresses the subtlety of racism and its power to impact opportunity for people of color in this present “post racial” society.

Theories Revisited

Critical Race Theory

CRT attributes the lack of social mobility or advancement strictly to racism on the part of Whites. It presents the most negative and straightforward view of racism on the part of Whites. Whites have held political, social, and economic power for a long period of time. They have explained and justified their status by pointing out the difference in color and the inferiority of intellect of non-whites. As time, the legal system, and the accomplishments of people of color have systematically chipped away at that reasoning, Whites have had to continually develop new strategies for maintaining their power and privilege.

Critical race theorists define racism as “a means by which society allocates privilege and status [and] racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people’s homes”
CRT is grounded in the realities of the lived experiences of racism. Thus the common experiences of African-American male superintendents, who have had a difficult time obtaining a position as a school superintendent, can be helpful in ending discriminatory policies and practices against other African Americans (Gregory, 2006). Another way Whites ensure their racism-granted privileges remain is via what Bell (1992) calls “racial nepotism.” Racial nepotism explains why Whites will most often show preference to other Whites when they are looking to hire, rent to, sell to, or do any kind of deal, if the other option is a person of color. In order to explain why a person of color gets passed over for a job for instance, easily manipulated terms like “best qualified” and “merit” are used by Whites to explain why they hired a “family member” instead (Bell, 1992).

Whenever a superintendent vacancy posting is advertised, the stated qualifications desired are always written in a fairly straightforward fashion (education, experience, proven success, etc.). Any candidate can quickly assess whether or not he or she holds those stated qualifications. The qualification that is never written in a posting is race. Of course we know this would be illegal, but race is definitely at play. The embarrassingly sparse number of Black superintendents, and the number of years Blacks spend in other roles prior to becoming a superintendent speak to race having to be a key factor when the shot callers decide who gets the hookup. The data shows that experience and education levels are not going to be negatives for Black educators. So if they have the experience, and the education, what other qualification are they missing?
Racism Without Racists

Bonilla-Silva’s position is that Whites have become subtle with their racist tendencies and thus have made the argument against racism less potent, with arguments based in reason and undeniable facts. This strategy has been quite effective, as those who argue that racism still impacts opportunity and access are thwarted by the facts that there are people of color who have achieved so much in this same society. The argument is made, that the people complaining are simply not working hard enough and are looking for handouts. The exceptions are used to prove the rule.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) believes that racism is a structural problem, rather than a problem of internalized belief. He asserts that Whites view racism as prejudice, while people of color see it as part of a system. He further posits that this system of inequality benefits the dominant White race, and therefore Whites have created their own explanations for this inequality. These explanations allow Whites to justify the structure and yet hold no responsibility for the inequality. As the racial structure has changed, so has the style by which we approach and discuss the topic. There now exists a style of color-blind racism. A certain language has been created in our color-blind society, a language which serves to mask true beliefs and thoughts. It allows Whites to protect themselves from being judged as racists (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Bonilla-Silva’s ideas were manifested by the number and length of time held various positions were held by the Black superintendents prior to obtaining a superintendency. None of the Black participants were ever explicitly told to “not” apply for a job. Feedback from headhunters and search firms never spoke directly to their race.
They each spoke to working hard and continuing to persist until they were ultimately successful. The fact that each of the Black superintendents are in the positions they are in, and even more, leading the types of districts they are leading, speaks to the argument that Whites use for justifying the continuing inequalities. These six superintendents become the exceptions to prove the rule, or make that point that Blacks are making progress, so racism is not the issue anymore.

**Power of Networks**

DiTomaso goes a step beyond the “racism without racists” argument, and speaks to the power that Whites possess and retain by ensuring it is passed on to other Whites only through specific social practices. The privileges Whites take for granted are so intertwined in the fabric of society that they do not even have to acknowledge them. Opportunity hoarding, and the powerful networks Whites have access to, continue to provide them with opportunities not available to non-whites in all workplaces. Their network of family, friends, and other Whites ensures they will always have access to opportunities, as well as the protection of these opportunities for their offspring. When a friend or family member is looking for a job, there is nothing racist or illegal about offering support. However, according to Nancy DiTomaso (2013), when Whites do it for other Whites, Blacks lose. Most Black people still lack the networks that can provide them with the types of good jobs that Whites often take for granted.

While DiTomaso (2013) addresses the “new” racism, symbolic racism, modern racism, or racial resentment, she brings a more focused perspective, by stating that the majority of the social science literature on race is organized around a framework of
discrimination; so the focus is on the negative things Whites have done to Blacks and other minorities. She believes the racial inequalities are more a function of the advantages Whites provide each other, rather than what they do to minorities. Whites assume that other people are racists, but not them. They assume that equal opportunity embodies fairness, but they live lives of advantage; that is, of unequal opportunity” (DiTomaso, 2013).

Opportunity hoarding manifested itself consistently throughout the data when it came to my White participants. Although this was just a sample of the 495 White superintendents in States A and B, most of the participants in my study benefited from opportunities or hookups provided to them in their district. For the most part they were each able to progress in their career to the superintendency without having to leave their district. Even when they did move districts for advancement, it was the result of a personal invitation or encouragement to apply for the position. Four of the six White participants were actually handpicked by their boards of education to replace the departing superintendents. In three of the situations the board of education did not even post the position vacancy. Conversely, only one of the Black participants experienced this monopoly game move; “go directly to superintendency, do not worry about interviews or competition.”

**Notion of Fit**

The latest manifestation of racism is probably the most ingenious. This would be the notion of “fit.” So even when the law has put measures in place to ensure equal access and opportunity for all citizens, “fit” can be used ambiguously and summarily to
explain away all the reasons why a person of color was not hired or afforded an opportunity. Historically, school administrators have been White, Protestant, heterosexual, and male (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Blount, 1998; Hargreaves, 2005; Lugg 2003a, 2006; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This means any person lacking these traits, seeking to gain one of these positions most likely will be labeled as not a good “fit” (Carlson, 1998; Hacking, 1999).

Although all postings and advertisements will clearly state what the responsibilities and credentials necessary for the job, they will never share those “preferred unspoken qualifications” (Blount & Tallerico, 2004; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hernandez, 2007; Newton, 2006; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1999; Tooms, 2006, 2007). Candidates can be labeled a good or bad “fit” based on some part of their identity (Turoczy, 1996; Valverde, 1980; Young & Fox, 2002). When a candidate is deemed to be the best “fit” for a position in educational administration, the community is saying they believe that administrator looks like its conception of a leader, and therefore must be able to behave as accordingly (Tooms et al., 2010).

“Fit” throughout the study has become the go to safe word in so many respects. Keeping the definition in mind, it appears as though all of the White participants were good “fits” for their respective hiring districts. Even those leading districts with majority minority populations were good “fits.” I see “fit” as simply the “unassailable” verbalization of the practice of opportunity hoarding. The data appears to show us that the White participants were immediate “fits” no matter where they were, while the Black participants had to find where they could be a good “fit.” The search firms, and
consultants, hired by school boards are only going to bring forward the kinds of candidates who already “fit” what the school board has expressed as the desired archetype. Since the school boards are legally able to even skip this process, they often just move the desired candidate into the position without issue. I submit the racial disparity between Black and White superintendents suggests Blacks are almost never going to be a good “fit.”

Discussion

As I reflect on the interviews and subsequent findings of my study, I am struck by the consistency with which the findings match up to the research on race and progression. As a result of this close match, I cannot confidently state that one of aforementioned theories explains the career paths and nuances associated with those paths; nor can they individually explain why there are so many more White males and females holding superintendencies compared to Black males and females. They actually overlap with each other in my view. I believe each theory has borne out the need to explain racism and all of its mentally and socially dominating power.

Career Paths

I discovered that the career paths for White and Black superintendents were slightly different. My initial assumption was that Black males, females, and White females held more positions en route to a superintendency. The typical route to the superintendency consists of four positions prior to becoming a superintendent; the roles are teacher, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent. Three of the six White participants worked in only three positions prior to becoming a superintendent.
Two White participants worked the typical four positions, while only one participant served in six positions prior to becoming a superintendent.

By comparison, three of the Black participants served in the traditional four positions prior to becoming superintendents. Two Black participants served in five and seven positions respectively before they became superintendents. Only one Black participant had a career path with three positions prior to becoming a superintendent. The longer career path for the Black superintendents noted in the research, matched my findings.

I believe these shorter career paths are a direct result of all the theories at play. All of the hiring bodies, whether school boards, or ad-hoc hiring committees are comprised of mostly White people who will practice what Bell (1992), calls “racial nepotism.” White hiring bodies feel that White candidates are a better “fit” more often than Black candidates, so they get hired more quickly and more often.

**Implications for Practice**

I see a few implications for practice for state boards of education, school boards, hiring consultants, any other hiring committees. None will be easy for the predominantly White power structures to accept or even attempt. However, if these groups truly wish to educate all students well then something different has to occur.

State boards of education routinely decry the need for more educators of color. There are conferences and forums held all over the country with this issue as the focal point. In particular, I am aware of the initiatives to recruit more educators of color to New England. While there are a litany of reasons why Black educators choose not to
come “north” as many state when I am recruiting in the south, is that they do not believe there are opportunities to move up the career ladder. The recruiting efforts cannot focus solely on getting these Black educators in the classroom, they must include real opportunities for career growth. It is hard to picture oneself in a position, when there are no similar people in that position.

The first implication would be the encouraging and formation of racial affinity groups. These groups would bring together Black educators at all career levels for the purpose of networking and forming bonds. The administrators at the central office level, to include superintendents could share with these aspiring administrators, and current building level administrators information and wisdom for succeeding and progressing in the profession. They could develop and initiate professional development opportunities aimed at helping these aspirants navigate the path to the superintendency. They would be able to mentor these aspirants and become references for them as well.

The next implication would be the utilization of the collective influence of these affinity groups to gain audience to influential people or “shot callers” who could be invited to share their wisdom and expertise with members of the affinity group as well. An important piece of these interactions would be the development of mentoring relationships between the Black aspirants and the White superintendents. These superintendents would be the people who could provide the aspirant with a familiarization of the community norms and expectations. They also would be able to introduce the aspirant to school board members, as well as other political figures in the community they serve. I believe these regular interactions would help ease
misconceptions, so that when the aspirants apply for positions they would be familiar to more people who are in the position to hire.

A related implication would be the increased involvement of oversight agencies for boards of education. All states have organizations or agencies that are responsible for the oversight of the local boards of education. These oversight agencies could provide workshops and trainings around equity and diversity, so that board members could begin to become more comfortable with the idea of hiring superintendents who are not White. They could also receive trainings on how to conduct more equitable interviews processes. Trainings in this area could focus on helping members recognize their own biases as they review applicants, as well as aid them in the development of interview questions and rating systems that focus on the skills and experiences of the candidate. Members of the aforementioned affinity groups would be invited to participate in these trainings and workshops along with the participating members of school boards. Their participation would provide another opportunity for both groups to become more familiar and comfortable with each other.

My final implication, which is much more stringent, would be the State Departments of Education creating policies that would require school boards to report in greater detail their hiring practices. This would mean, the school boards would have to share their hiring procedures and practices with the state. They would have to furnish to the state the number of applicants for a superintendency vacancy, along with the credentials, race, and gender of the applicants. They would also have to share which candidates were actually interviewed and why or why they were not moved along in the
process. A key component to this reporting requirement would be the furnishing of interview rating sheets for the candidates. These boards would also be required to provide to the state a rationale as to why they selected the candidate they did for the superintendency. In order to gain compliance from school boards, these reporting requirements could be tied to funding from the state.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study was informative, the limited number of participants in this study bring about suggestions for further research. The first recommendation would be a quantitative study; as interviews would be impossible, to learn about the career paths of all superintendents in States A and B. This would be more informative with regards to whether or not this study’s sample is representative of the typical career paths for these superintendents. This study could also be replicated in states across the nation.

A second area for further research would be a study of Black administrators below the superintendent level, focused on whether or not they intend to pursue the superintendency, if not why?... if yes, are there any superintendent postings they would not consider applying to… why?

Finally, a study focused on boards of education would be informative. This study would seek to learn from the boards of education those qualities they seek most in a candidate; as well as their feelings as to why so few candidates of color actually get hired as superintendents?
Concluding Remarks

White people have been preaching and practicing racism for so many centuries that they cannot divorce themselves from its ills. They have developed a necessary blindness to its effects. Sadly, Whites have been taught to believe that Black people are lazy, shiftless, dangerous, and intellectually inferior. I believe they know the power of the structures racism has built not just in the U.S. but globally. I believe Whites know they must continue to adapt and morph their racist reasoning as each argument falls under the weight of science, close scrutiny, research, and just plain reality.

As a Black male educator, currently in an assistant superintendent role, I am seeking answers as to what it is I can do to enhance my candidacy for superintendent postings. I have a career that spans over two decades in education. I have successfully worked in four public school districts. I have a proven track record of academic success for the schools in which I have taught and lead. I have mentored a number of White and Black educators who have become administrators. I have served in an adjunct capacity for three colleges and universities. I am routinely sought after to speak on various education topics as either a keynote, or panelist. I am about to earn a PhD in Education Policy and Leadership from one of the best universities in the nation. While I am proud of my accomplishments, I do not see myself as an anomaly. I am aware of many other Black educators with impressive resumes as well. The question I am left wrestling with is when will we as Black educators ever be seen as worthy of leading school districts and ensuring the educational futures for ALL students? When will race no longer be a qualification? When and where will Black people ever “fit” in this country?
These questions are always on my mind and they also drive me to achieve and help students, teachers, and other administrators realize their potential. As a Black man, I was born into this fight. I will spend every waking moment of my life trying to make things better for those who come behind me.
APPENDIX A

LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Dear (SUPERINTENDENT NAME),

My name is Terrell Hill and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Policy and Leadership program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. My dissertation topic examines: The career paths to the superintendency for White and Black, male and female superintendents in States A and B. I am seeking superintendents who would be interested in participating in this study. The following is a brief description of the study and the criteria that will be used for selecting participants:

Brief Description of the Study:

There are approximately four hundred and ninety-five superintendencies between States A and B. A closer look at those holding these positions reveals some interesting facts. Black males and females hold 11.3 superintendent positions, which breaks down to 6 fulltime superintendencies in traditional school districts; while another 5.3 of those superintendencies are a mix of full and part-time for various charter schools. This study seeks to learn more about why this large disparity exists by examining the career paths of White and Black superintendents in States A and B?

Criteria for Participant Selection: Participants must meet the following criteria:

• Presently a Public School superintendent in State A or State B
• Between 35-65 years of age
• Identify as White or Black/African-American (male or female)

The interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of each participant and would happen at a location convenient to the participant. If you meet the criteria and you are interested in participating, please contact me at thill913@gmail.com or (413) 478-1901 (cell). If you know of others who meet the stated criteria and may be interested, I encourage you to share this opportunity with them as well. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Terrell M. Hill, Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Researcher(s): Terrell M. Hill, Doctoral Candidate
Study Title: Get in where you fit in: The career paths for White and Black Superintendents?

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

In order to participate in this study, subjects must be at least 18 years old, male or female, identify racially as White or Black/African American, and currently employed as a public school superintendent in Connecticut or Massachusetts.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the career path to the superintendency for superintendents in States A and B; and whether or not there are different paths for men and women, or for White and Black superintendents.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview. The interview will take place in location of your choosing that is reasonably accessible to the researcher. You may be contacted after the interview for the purpose of clarification or follow-up on the original interview answers.
5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions that will be focused on experiences related to your career path to the superintendency. You may skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering. The researcher will record the interview on a digital recording device and take written notes. If a face to face interview is not possible, the interview can be conducted via phone.

6. What are my benefits of being in this study?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may benefit the advancement of knowledge around superintendent preparation, and hiring.

7. WHAT ARE my RISKS OF being in THIS STUDY?

Due to the potential for recalling negative experiences due to some of the questions (e.g., unsuccessful job searches, negative memories around work, negative comments) I understand there is a potential risk for psychological distress. If this occurs the appropriate medical professionals will be immediately contacted. We believe there are no other known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study.

8. How will my personal information be protected?

Confidentiality cannot be “guaranteed” due to the fact that others might be able to deduce a participant’s identity based on demographic and/or other contextual factors. The risk for Black superintendents participating in this study is greater due to the small number of potential participants.

The researcher will utilize the following procedures in order to ensure as much protection as possible for you as a participant and your study records:

1. The researcher will not use my name, nor will the researcher identify me personally, in any way or at any time. I understand that I will be given the option to select a pseudonym to protect my identity. If I choose not to provide a pseudonym, one will be generated for me. The purpose of the pseudonym is to describe participants’ experiences for the dissertation (e.g. John or Sara said....)
2. The researcher will also select pseudonyms for the school districts in which I report having worked, or having applied unsuccessfully for jobs.

3. The researcher will keep all digital recordings, data, and notes in a locked file cabinet. The files will be coded and the master key that links names and codes will be kept securely in a separate location.

4. The researcher master key and audio recordings will be destroyed (3) years after the close of the study. All electronic files containing identifiable information will be password protected.

5. The researcher will allow me the right to review my transcript and any manuscript produced from the project.

6. The results from the interviews will be included in Terrell Hill’s doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.

9. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact Terrell M. Hill. Terrell’s phone numbers are (413) 478-1901 or alt. cell (860) 841-4367. Additionally, you may also contact Dr. Kathryn McDermott (Faculty Sponsor) at (413) 545-3562 or via email at mcdermott@educ.umass.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

10. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

11. WHAT IF I AM INJURED?

The University of Massachusetts does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.
12. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

(please initial)

I AGREE TO BE AUDIO RECORDED. (yes___ / no____)

I AGREE TO BE CONTACTED IN THE FUTURE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON HIRING PRACTICES IN EDUCATION. (yes____ / no____)

Participant Signature: _______________ Print Name: _______________ Date: _______________

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _______________ Print Name: _______________ Date: _______________
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

This information will be kept confidential and will be used for describing the data. For the purpose of preserving the confidentiality of participants, you may choose or be provided a pseudonym that will be used for reporting out the results of the study.

Participant
_______________________________________________________

Coded Name ________________________ Race
_________________________

Total years in education: ____________ Years as superintendent: _____________

Teaching Certification area(s): ___________________________________________

Highest degree held: _____ M.A./M.S./M.Ed. _____ Ed.D./Ph.D. _____ J.D.
_____ M.B.A _____ other

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

District (Urban/Suburban/Rural) __________________________

Enrollment Range: ___ <2,000 ___ 2,000-5,000 ___ >5,000 ___ >10,000 ___ >25,000

District student racial composition (approximate %):
_____ African American _____ European American _____ Mexican American
_____ Asian American _____ American Indian _____ Other

Community racial composition (approximate %):
_____ African American _____ European American _____ Mexican American
_____ Asian American _____ American Indian _____ Other

Median Income: ____________________________

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APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTION PROTOCOL

RESEARCH QUESTION 1 and 2: What motivated you to pursue the superintendency? What positions have you held in education prior to becoming a superintendent?

1. What is your educational background?
   1a. Why did you decide to move into school administration?
   1b. Why did you decide to pursue the superintendency?

2. How many applications did you submit before securing your first administrative position… and what was that position?
   2a. For the administrative positions you applied for and did not get, do you have any thoughts about why you did not get those positions?
   2b. Would you share your thoughts about the number and types of positions held on your way to your superintendency?
   2c. How many superintendency postings did you apply to before being hired as a superintendent?
   2d. Do you believe your path was typical in terms of the number or types of positions held prior to becoming a superintendent?

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: Did you have a mentor or sponsor to help you towards your goal of becoming a superintendent?

3. Were you encouraged to pursue the superintendency or was it always a goal?
   3a. Why do you think you were or were not encouraged to pursue the superintendency?
   3b. Were you invited to apply for a superintendency or did you respond to a posting?
   3c. Did anyone in particular encourage you to apply for a specific posting?

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: Did your school district aid you in pursuing the superintendency?

4. How did your current or past school district support you in pursuing the superintendency?
4a. Were you selected for specific leadership roles or responsibilities in the district?

4b. Did your superintendent or another superintendent ever say to you something to the effect; “I could see you becoming a superintendent someday?”

4c. Were you told by your superintendent or another superintendent that you needed to pursue a doctoral degree as part of your career path to the superintendency?

4d. Were you told it would give you an edge as a candidate for a superintendency?

4e. Were you provided the time and financial support to pursue the doctoral degree?

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: What obstacles if any did you have to overcome en-route to the superintendency?

5. Do you believe your career path would have been different if you were a male… female… White… Black?

5a. Some researchers believe women… people of color often take longer paths to the superintendency, does this finding fit with your experience?

5b. What do you believe are some the perceptions held by society of male… female… White… Black superintendents?

5c. What do you believe are some of the perceptions held by educators of male… female… White… Black superintendents?

5d. Do you believe the superintendency is equally difficult for males… females… Whites… Blacks?

RESEARCH QUESTION 6: Did you have a preference for a specific type of school district; urban, suburban, rural, majority White, or majority minority?

6. Why are you a superintendent in this (rural, urban, suburban) school district?

6a. What feedback did you receive from the hiring committee, Board of Education, or whoever offered you the position?

6b. Why do you think you were hired?

6c. For the superintendencies you did not get hired for, why do you think you were not hired?

6d. Would you ever consider pursuing a superintendency in a (majority minority, or non-minority) district? Why or why not?


Galman, S. C. (2013). *The good, the bad, and the data: Shane the Lone ethnographer's basic guide to qualitative data analysis.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.


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