

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT
BEHAVIORS

CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

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CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

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CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

ABSTRACT

An analysis of misinformation, disinformation, perverse rhetorical devices, and the origin of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) controversy were presented, as well as the motivations of those most likely to share misinformation and crisis communication strategies. The purpose of this mixed method study was to explore Ohio Superintendents' levels of understanding of CRT and preparedness to respond to allegations, as well as their perceptions of the impact of CRT allegations school, family, and community partnerships and student conflicts. An exploration of the statistical correlations between the number of CRT posts and allegations in a school district and the number of student conflicts, reported conditions of partnerships, and demographics was also presented. The outcome of this study could provide educational leaders with the needed information to better prepare proactive responses to CRT allegations as well as other school-targeted allegations while building positive relationships with all stakeholders.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory (CRT), disinformation, misinformation, school, family, community partnerships, student conflicts, Crisis Communication Management

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“The world breaks everyone, and afterward, many are strong at the broken places”

(Hemingway, 1999, p. 249).

My days as a forgotten child of the Southside of Niles, Ohio revisit me like the fading colors of a summer evening. I was one of a pack of dirty, calloused children, whose fathers toiled to the factory whistles, while our mothers remained without a voice for their opinions in our homes. The slag dump, endless mounds of jagged impurities discarded by the steel factories, became our playground. We scaled the rugged terrain without shoes nor coats in search of trinkets discarded by the faded industrial boom. The steel endurance that I learned in that dangerous place later fueled my determination to make my own children proud of me during the many, long hours of writing with only my silent companions, Annie, Stanley, and Bruno by my side. I would like to thank Dr Kristen Bruns, Dr Patrick Spearman, Dr Richard Rogers, and especially Dr. Jane Beese. Your advice was invaluable and always appreciated. Dear Dr Beese, your kind words were the droplets of sunshine often needed to inspire my growth.

To my children, Jordan, Marina, Dante, and Elise, you are my eternal, unconditional loves. I dedicate my dissertation to you in hopes of a better, more kind world for your own children one day. Elise, the times that you helped to keep our home clean and meals prepared, so that I could write, did not go unnoticed. I thank you. To Tyonnda Sanders, who loved Dante as her own, while I chased down the words on the page, I could not have done this without your help. To my best friend, Melissa Rumpel, the fun, laughs, and constant stream of Snaps kept my sanity through this process, and I thank you. To my mom, your quiet strength and enduring love for me has kept me going at all times, even when I doubted myself the most. You have always been my shelter in the storm. Mom, I want you to know that I am me because of your love.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented" (Wiesel, 2011, p. 170).

Voting Booths Can Eliminate Safe Spaces

The Waukesha School District in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is representative of the deliberate shift that is taking place in schools throughout the country without regard for the students and teachers who are being unwillingly silenced and marginalized as a result of these changes (Erin, 2021). The Waukesha School District's mission statement claims to value diversity and differences, but the teachers claim that the new rules dictating classroom displays created by the newly elected conservative school board tell a different story. Signs promoting Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+, and even Safe Spaces are now strictly prohibited. Efforts to include all students are consistently thwarted after complaints from parents ranging from Critical Race Theory (CRT) to sexuality and gender identity. Waukesha is not alone; nationwide, an overwhelming number of school board seats are now filled by newly elected conservative members, as a result of a systematic, deliberate plan to create school boards that are mostly residents bent on an agenda of their own beliefs of exclusion (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Many school districts across the 50 states have followed the same shift in thinking by dissolving diversity and equity committees, discouraging preferred personal pronouns, and rewriting curriculums to exclude authors of color and references to racial oppression and inequality (King & Quarshie, 2021). These changes are often a direct result of the large number of newly elected, conservative school board members who are supported by groups, such as Fight for Schools, a political activist group formed two years ago by parents who

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were concerned that the schools' focus on equality depleted academic achievement (King & Quarshie, 2021). The efforts of Fight for Schools and similar organizations include CRT mandates, explicit book content, and anti-LGBTQ+ (King & Quarshie, 2021; Phillip, 2021).

This study will research the factors and motivations of those who have made allegations and posts regarding CRT and schools, and review the reasons that CRT has become a hotly contested idea causing widespread controversy in recent years and the effects on school, family, and community partnerships, as well as student behaviors. The misinformation about schools and educators will be examined, as well as ways that educators can engage in Crisis Communication Management to build relationships with stakeholders.

Misinformation, Disinformation, and Flow of Communication

In order to understand the effects of pervasive untrue information on schools, it is important to first understand the historical foundation and flow of information, as well as the intentions for sharing misinformation.

Definitions and the Flow of Communication

The definitions of misinformation and disinformation are directly related to the intention of the person who created the original message and/or shared the message online with others. Simply stated, misinformation is misleading or false information that is shared with others without the intent to mislead or manipulate; however, disinformation is the intentional creation and dissemination of false information to mislead others to a desired outcome or gain. Disinformation is lying and certainly not a new phenomenon (Søe, 2021). "Disinformation" is derived from the Russian word, "*dezinformatsiya*," and Joseph Stalin is often credited with the coining of the term, and strategic use of disinformation for political gain first became prevalent when used by the Soviet Union in the 1920s (McNamara, 2019). The term was not used in

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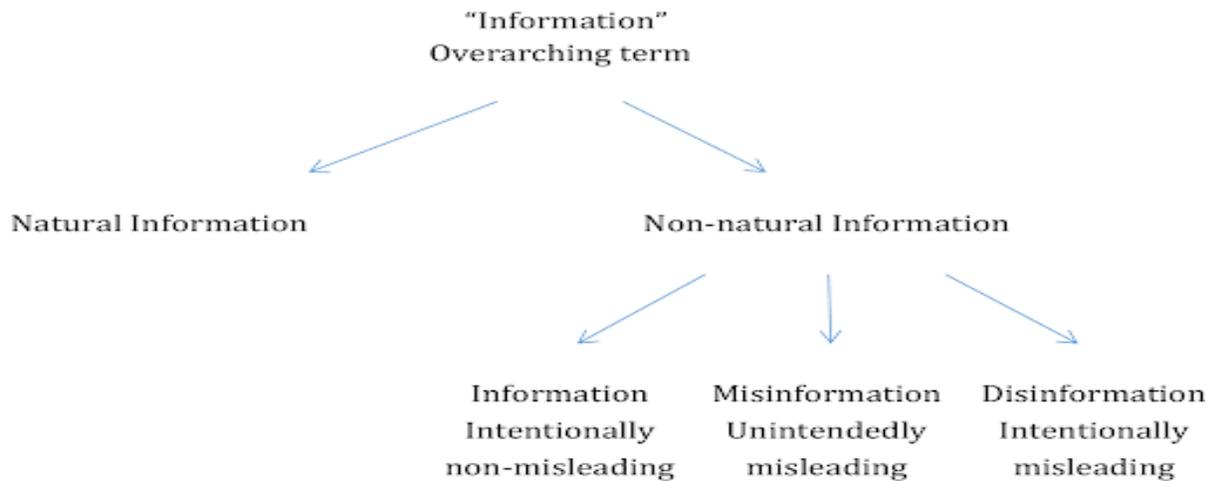
English until the 1950s Cold War disinformation campaigns; however, all previous disinformation endeavors pale in comparison to today’s exacerbated social media frenzy of disinformation campaigns (McNamara, 2019).

Natural v. Non-Natural Information

The transfer of information is not always a simple, direct process as a result of human interference. Natural Information is raw data (Søe, 2021). Yet, humans possess their own opinions and agendas; therefore, information can be manipulated and misrepresented.

Figure 1

Three Levels and Four Notions of Information



Note: Human interaction and intent defines the third level of information (Søe, 2021).

While information is the overarching term, the human intent causes the message to either simply inform or mislead, intentionally or unintentionally (Søe, 2021). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the consumer of the information to perceive information critically, paying attention to portrayals intended to elicit strong emotional responses or promote hidden agendas.

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Kids Bring People Together Until They Enter Communication Echo Chambers

While misinformation and disinformation often polarize people, having children is a unifying factor that often crosses political party lines to bring people together on issues unless the Echo Chamber Flow of Information Strategy has been employed (Houston, 2021; Kim, 2019). The Echo Chamber Flow of Information is the theory that explains that people are often fed online information that is in agreement with their pre-existing beliefs (Houston, 2021; Kim, 2019). Democrats and Republicans can often come together on issues, such as education spending, charter schools, and teacher salaries when both parties have children at home (Houston, 2021). Having children reduces party polarization and can enable people to work together for the common good of educational issues (Houston, 2021). However, political and social polarization is still often maintained through in group-slanted inflow of information, social reaction to the information, and social network perception, which creates a spiral of segregation (Kim, 2019).

To explain the concept of Echo Chamber Flow of Information Strategy, the example of the CRT disinformation will be used. A father, whose online algorithm has traced that he is a registered Republican, interacts with websites dedicated to preserving civil liberties, clicked like on a couple of racist memes on Facebook, briefly looked at conspiracy-based web sites, will see an online feed of information designed to reinforce his views if he searches “CRT in schools.” However, a father, who is a registered Democrat and follows “Woke America” on Twitter, joins a LinkedIn group dedicated to increasing workplace diversity, and has never interacted with conspiracy-based web sites. While both parents are trying to do what is best for their kids, each person is only seeing information designed to intensify the opinions they had originally, thus causing a spiraling echo chamber of information (Kim, 2019). The effects of the Echo Chamber

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will often cause the consumer of a factual article to scan past the facts and comments that do not align with their predetermined beliefs and focus on the comments that echo their predisposed ideas (Anspach, et al., 2020). As a result, by the time each parent arrives at the school board meeting, these individuals have been conditioned to a set narrative of information that is on replay in their heads, which then becomes their own outflow of information to their neighbors (Kim, 2019). Therefore, the human element of non-natural communication combined with the spiraling echo chamber has created each father into a spreader of information and misinformation to fit their preconceived, conditioned beliefs (Kim, 2019; Søe, 2021). In order to navigate the storm of information that circulates regarding CRT, it is important to understand the definition and history of CRT.

Theoretical Framework

Definition and History of CRT

CRT descended from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which was originally created by a group of law teachers, practitioners, and students, who felt that the law protected class and hierarchy in the United States; CRT emerged in response to the belief that CLS underestimated race as a form of oppression (Cole, 2012). Therefore, CLS centered on class and economic structure while CRT focused on race. Even though CRT was being discussed in legal circles in the 1970s, the concept did not become part of the conversation among educators until 1995 when Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate presented CRT to the educational research community as a tool for considering systemic educational inequities (López et al., 2021). Since the 1990s, CRT has been used by educational scholars as an analytical tool and theoretical framework to examine issues in education and academic research.

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Crisis Communication Management

The first steps of transformational leadership are understanding the problem, needs of your followers, and then working with others to align goals (Bass, 2006; Focus 3, 2018). Applying that strategy, it is important for an educational leader to assess the extent of CRT misinformation sharing within the school, assess the needs of teachers, and align common goals to create a proactive approach to discussing CRT, maintain a positive school culture, and preserve and enhance the integrity of the school curriculum. Professor Timothy Coombs created Crisis Communication Management and Responses Strategies Theory, which includes assess the crisis, identify the type of crisis, choose the right response strategy, and then create an action plan that addresses the motivations of those who spread misinformation and the means of spreading misinformation (Social Media, 2010). All three types of online crises are present in the example of CRT, which are false rumors, complaints, and the most dangerous: challenging practices by claiming what the school is doing is wrong (Social Media, 2010).

Motivations of Sharers of Misinformation

The two most common motivations for sharing misinformation are looking to entertain and sense of civic duty; however, a closer analysis of both motivations reveals the misinformation sharers' attention-seeking behavior (Chadwick, et al., 2018). The mom who shares misinformation on social media with the caption, "Look at what is going on at the school now!" often regards social media as a social outlet, while the dad who shares a misinformation post with the caption, "Your tax dollars at work!" may see himself as fulfilling a civic duty of keeping others informed. However, both examples seek attention from others and are unlikely to check the facts on the information before it is shared (Chadwick, et al., 2018).

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School, Family, and Community Partnerships

The work of Carol Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement overlaps with the study of public relations and community involvement in "Linking Administrative Performance of Principals Vis-à-vis Public Relations and Community Involvement" to demonstrate that the conversations and attitudes expressed at home carry over into a child's learning at school (Sanders, et al., 1998; Tadle-Zaragosa, & Sonsona, 2021). According to Epstein, the six types of involvement are (1) helping families maintain home environments that support students; (2) communicating children's progress and school programs; (3) recruiting volunteers to help support school activities and functions; (4) providing ideas and information to help students to learn at home; (5) including parents in school decision making; (6) collaborating with the community to identify and integrate resources and services to support students, and the shared goal is to help each other to raise successful, healthy children (Sanders, et al., 1998). However, if parents believe that schools are intentionally trying to manipulate, shame, or brainwash their children, a total breakdown of the framework occurs. Therefore, creating a good relationship with parents is a must (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021).

Aim and Scope of the Study

Through the extensive examination of the theories and motivations of the messaging surrounding CRT and Ohio superintendents' perceptions of allegations and social media posts, the gap in the body of research is a lack of exploration of the possible links between the messaging about CRT and the effects on school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors. Therefore, this mixed method study seeks to determine superintendents' understanding of CRT and perceived level of preparedness to respond to in-depth questions and allegations on CRT and the effect (if any) that their levels of understanding and preparedness

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have on the CRT allegations and posts. The study also aims to explore if there is a statistically significant correlation between the number of CRT social media posts and allegations in a school district and the possible effects on school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

Because the CRT messaging has permeated formal and informal media, thus causing confusion, many parents, community members, and political activists are spreading misinformation, disrupting school board meetings, banning books, and advocating for restrictive legislation (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; López, et.al, 2021). School districts across the county have experienced protests about CRT, which could be causing a disruption in the building of school, family, and community partnerships and affecting student behavior (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; López, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Political activists have intentionally disrupted public meetings and run for school boards, backed by far-right, conservative political action committees, with the expressed intent of rolling back equity efforts and rewriting school curriculums to be less inclusive (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Legislation and other restrictive steps have been introduced to address the teaching of systematic racism in 44 states; currently, 18 states have passed legislation or bans on classroom discussions of racism and sexism (Schwartz, 2023). Political candidates are running on “anti-woke” platforms, encouraging book banning and the reporting of educators who are teaching diversity in the classroom (López, et.al, 2021; Schwartz, 2023). Many educators were originally caught off-guard by the accusations surrounding CRT because it was a theoretical lens used at the graduate level, and most K-12 educators could not have defined the acronym before the political messaging regarding CRT (Kaplan, 2021). Meanwhile, the CRT disinformation campaign and

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restrictive legislation has now expanded to include schools teaching sexuality and gender identity in order to maintain public outrage and activism (Perry, 2022). Without the training and planned execution of purposeful relationship-building, messaging, and curriculum planning, American schools may experience a lack of positive partnerships and increased student conflicts.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this mixed method study was to explore educational administrators' understanding and perceived level of preparedness to respond to allegations of CRT. The participants' perceptions of the impacts of CRT posts and allegations on student behaviors, as well as school, family, and community partnerships will be analyzed. The outcome of this study could provide educational leaders with the needed information to better prepare proactive responses to CRT allegations as well as other school-targeted allegations while building and maintaining positive relationships with all stakeholders.

Methodology

The aim of the research is to survey the level of understanding of CRT of superintendents in Ohio, as well as their perceptions of their preparedness to respond to allegations. The aim of this research is also to survey the participants' estimated number of CRT social media posts and allegations, as well as disruptions of school board meetings and other school events. The objectives of the research are to explore possible statistical correlations between the participants' levels of understanding of CRT and preparedness and the number of posts, allegations, and disruption. In other words, the researcher sought a possible correlation between the superintendents' levels of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management and the number of posts, allegations, and disruption to answer the

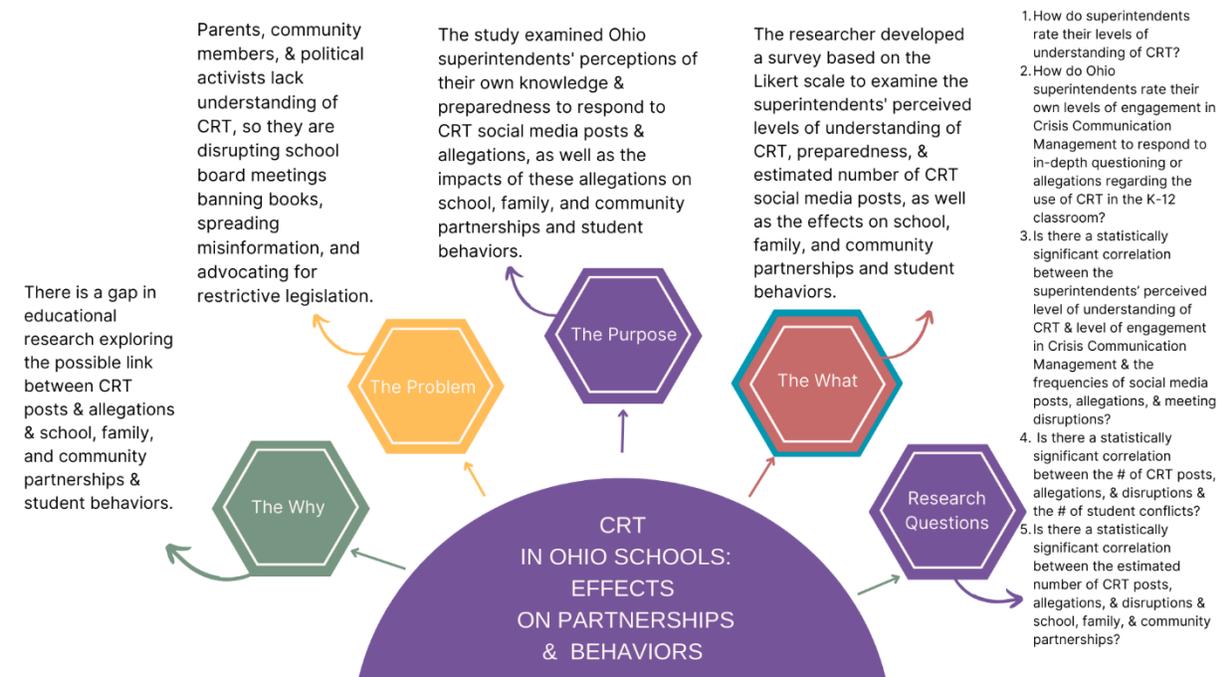
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question: are the superintendents who have had more training in CRT and Crisis Communication able to minimize the number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruption?

The study will also explore the number of posts and allegations in school districts and possible statistical correlations to school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors. As demonstrated in the Overview, shown in Figure 2, a gap exists in the current research exploring regarding the possible effects of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions on school, family, and community partnerships, as well as student behaviors. Therefore, the survey of Ohio superintendents will explore these possible correlations as well as measure the participants' self-reported level of understanding of CRT and Crisis Communication Management.

Figure 2

CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on Partnerships & Behaviors Overview



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Research Design

This mixed method study was based on a post-test, non-experimental single measure in order to determine educational administrators' levels of understanding of CRT, preparedness to respond to allegations, in addition to school, family, and community partnerships and student behavior. A detailed survey was created to address the posed research questions and distributed to all administrators in Ohio. Herein the information pertaining to the participants and survey procedures will be presented followed by the data analysis.

Participants

I utilized the Ohio Educational Directory System (OEDS) to distribute surveys to the 613 superintendents of the 613 public school districts. However, only 210 Ohio superintendents listed their emails on the OEDS website. Of the 210 surveys distributed via Youngstown State University Alchemer software, 6 were undeliverable, 6 were returned, and 198 emails were received. A total of 29 superintendents completed the Informed Consent, but only 14 (7.07%) completed and submitted the survey.

Instrumentation

The investigation was conducted by an electronic survey. The survey was created in SurveyMonkey and elicited responses via a form submission. Questions were created based on the theories presented in the research utilizing various response types on the Likert five-point scale and one open-ended question.

Procedures

The survey was sent by me through the Youngstown State University email system. Recipients had a clearly identified window of time of two weeks to submit responses, and two follow-up reminders were sent out within the timeframe prior to the response deadline.

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Demographic variables such as the type of school system, race demographics and socio-economics of students, and predominant political affiliations of residents in the communities served were asked to establish the representativeness of the participants' school districts. The study was a mixed method, non-experimental, one-time survey study using a five point Likert scale, and the data obtained from the survey was then imported into the IBM-SPSS software for analysis performing an Ordinal Logistic Regression test for possible correlations among independent variables. I then ran a Factor Analysis test followed by an Additive Index. A qualitative, open-ended question was included in the survey to solicit additional opinions and perceptions from the participants. The study was considered a mixed method, non-experimental design because there was no manipulated variable, control group, or random assignment (Field, 2018). The study was approved by the Youngstown State University Institutional Review Board on April 25, 2023. The interpreted results are presented in charts, tables, and graphs.

Validity and Reliability Concerns

Because the sample size was fairly small with only 14 participants, the external validity is low (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). However, the study is limited to Ohio and only superintendents, not other levels of educational leadership. Furthermore, internal validity, which focuses on causal relationships, is a concern in any and all data analysis. While this study cannot claim absolute causality between variables, the study does examine existing patterns within the data. However, there is a word of caution in the study. Because the sample size is small, one should not make sweeping generalizations regarding the data.

Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to provide educators with the history of CRT and the evolution of formal and informal messaging surrounding the theory as applied to K-12 schools.

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Today, educational leaders are frequently called upon to respond to allegations regarding the use of CRT in today's classrooms amid ongoing advocating for restrictive legislation. Yet, a lacunae of research regarding educational leaders' levels of understanding of CRT and preparedness for responding to allegations, as well as the possible effects to school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors has emerged. This study provides information that may be useful to K–12 educators and administrators who endeavor to maintain positive school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors within their schools. The information contained in this study is intended to assist educational leaders in their pursuit of an equitable learning environment for all students and quality relationships with all stakeholders.

Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study is to develop the survey, collect data, and interpret results. I am limited in access to administrators in Ohio for sampling purposes. However, I could potentially conduct further research outside of Ohio and include teachers in the future. I am also limited by the time constraints of the study and will therefore complete the data collection and analysis in the proposed time frame.

I am also an experienced classroom teacher; therefore, while every effort will be made to maintain neutrality, my bias toward equitable school cultures and curricula over divisive politics is noted. I had to develop what Ann Skeet refers to as “cultural humility as a growth mindset” in *Cultural Humility: A Leadership Virtue* and learn to meet those with differing opinions somewhere in the middle for the greater good of all of the people involved (Skeet, 2021, p 1). The bipartisan approach to curriculum planning is that middle ground designed for virtue of the greater good. Therefore, I have sought outside input, revisions, and additional research to maintain neutrality in this study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations function as a checkpoint for researchers to consider the assumptions assigned to the participants and data presented. Likewise, the limitations and delimitations work as statements of the elements of the research that are both beyond a researcher's control and within a researcher's decision-making (Research Philosophy, n.d.).

Assumptions

A review of the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions provides the necessary groundwork to shape the research process (Research Philosophy, n.d.). In this study, the ontological assumption, which is based on the concept that there is one defined reality that is measurable and observable, is that the number of posts, allegations, and student conflicts can be counted. The assumption is that the superintendent is both aware of and willing to accurately communicate the numbers of the events specified in order to provide quantitative data on the realities of their school district. The epistemological assumption is the idea that knowledge is quantifiable and objective (Research Philosophy, n.d.). In the research, the epistemological assumption is that the participants' levels of knowledge and preparedness can be objectively measured by the participant. Human attitudes and belief systems can often shape one's perceptions, thus limiting the accuracy of the perception presented. In this study, the axiological assumption, which is the assumption that the researcher's biases play a role in the construction of the questions and the interpretation of data is that the researcher was able to construct quantitative questions requesting the numbers of occurrences of social media posts, allegations, and student conflicts that will inform the researcher of the current conditions of school, family, and community partnerships and student conflicts (Research Philosophy, n.d.).

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The methodological assumption is the idea that valid knowledge is obtained through research which requires objective analysis and measurement (Research Philosophy, n.d.). In the research, the methodological assumption is that the scores constructed on the survey using the Likert scale combined with the open-ended question will provide the knowledge of the partnerships and student behaviors in Ohio currently.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the participants' willingness to complete the survey openly and honestly, participants' potential biases and abilities to self-evaluate, and the lack of existing research. The first limitations of the study are the participants' willingness to first complete the study at all and then their willingness to be open and honest about their opinions on CRT and subsequent topics. Superintendents are often overworked, busy people, who may not prioritize responding to the survey. Because CRT is a widely debated topic, it is possible that administrators may be hesitant to share their views and experiences. However, the preface to the survey indicates that the survey is anonymous, so administrators should be more willing to be open and honest about their experiences and views on CRT.

The participants may also have biases that influence their perceptions and answers on the survey. The study is further limited by the administrators' ability to evaluate their own level of understanding of CRT and preparedness to answer in-depth questioning and allegations. While potential participant bias and inabilities to assess their own levels of understanding and preparedness are beyond my control, the fact that the survey requests quantitative data listing the numbers of times occurrences took place may counterbalance participant biases and inabilities. The lack of existing research on the topic is also a limitation. However, the research that does

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exist on school, family, and community partnerships and crisis communication management are applicable to many forms of minimizing damage that could be caused by allegations.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study focus on the sample size and specific content of the allegations being studied. One of the delimitations of the study is that the sample size is limited to one state; however, Ohio is a large, densely populated, culturally diverse state. It is possible that the results of the study would vary from state to state. However, given the small number of participants and lack of cultural diversity in Ohio superintendents, the participant sample is a delimitation. The study is also limited to superintendents only and does not include principals or teachers. It is often the superintendent who is called upon to answer questions and allegations the most in a school district, especially in a public setting. The survey is limited to questions on social media posts and allegations about CRT only and no other topics that could affect schools. However, CRT is the most prevalent topic of negative allegations toward schools currently and is therefore most relevant (Ujifusa, 2021; Farag, 2021).

Definitions of Terms

Critical Race Theory

CRT emerged in response to the belief that Critical Legal Studies underestimated race as a form of oppression (Cole, 2012). CRT is used to examine how racism and race shaped American culture, economics, politics, and education, and how racism maintains inequality (López et al., 2021).

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Motivations of Sharers of Misinformation

The two most common motivations for sharing misinformation are looking to entertain and sense of civic duty; however, a closer analysis of both motivations reveals the misinformation sharers' attention-seeking behavior (Chadwick, et al., 2018).

Crisis Communication Management

Professor Timothy Coombs created Crisis Communication Management and Responses Strategies Theory, which includes assess the crisis, identify the type of crisis, choose the right response strategy, and then create an action plan that addresses the motivations of those who spread misinformation and means of spreading misinformation (Social Media, 2010). All three types of online crises are present in the example of CRT, which are false rumors, complaints, and the most dangerous: challenging practices by claiming what the school is doing is wrong (Social Media, 2010).

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

The work of Carol Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement overlaps with the study of public relations and community involvement in "Linking Administrative Performance of Principals Vis-à-vis Public Relations and Community Involvement" to demonstrate that the conversations and attitudes expressed at home carry over into a child's learning at school (Sanders, et al., 1998; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). According to Epstein, the six types of involvement are (1) helping families maintain home environments that support students; (2) communicating children's progress and school programs; (3) recruiting volunteers to help support school activities and functions; (4) providing ideas and information to help students to learn at home; (5) including parents in school decision making; (6) collaborating with the

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community to identify and integrate resources and services to support students, and the shared goal is to help each other to raise successful, healthy children (Sanders, et.al., 1998).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I contains an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, role of researcher, assumptions, and operational definitions. Chapter II presents a literature review for the study. In Chapter III, the research purpose, questions, study design, role of the researcher, participants, procedures of research, data collection methods and analysis, evidence of reliability and validity, and limitations of the study are presented. Chapter IV states the results and analysis. The results are then summarized in Chapter V, with discussion of the implications, future research, and the study's conclusions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

“History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” (King, 2010, p.14).

Introduction to Literature Review

I parked in the same parking spot where I have parked my car for more than 25 years, and I was distracted, thinking about my lesson plans and yearbook deadlines that morning, which is probably why I did not notice the large SUV that pulled up next to my car or the mom who waited while I gathered my bags, laptop, and mask that fall morning. Once I started to cross the parking lot, the woman purposely strode toward me, “Excuse me, you teach English. Right?” The tall blonde was wearing a tennis outfit and might have come to use the high school tennis courts, but she looked angry. I did not recognize her. I cautiously answered, “Yes,” as I walked *faster*. The woman responded, “Are you going to be teaching CRT today? Do the other English teachers teach CRT? What about in history class? *What exactly are you teaching today?*” I kept moving even *faster*. I asked, “Could you remind me of your name and how we met?” No answer. I walked straight to the office to report the bizarre encounter. The principal said there were multiple “tennis moms asking questions about CRT” in the parking lot that morning. I must admit that in the fall of 2020, I could not define CRT and had no idea why that woman was so angry. I also would not have predicted that the encounter in the parking lot was a symptom of a larger, more intentional political movement and would be the beginning of an onslaught of public and private inquisitions regarding curriculum and theory centered on race in my own school, classroom, and life.

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Since that fall morning, it is now apparent that the current fervor over CRT is a result of the disinformation and misinformation that has been distributed throughout the formal and informal media that has targeted schools and educators while educational leaders lack the training and skills to disarm and immobilize incorrect information with truthful, focused messaging and stakeholder relationship building. I will analyze the definitions and history of the CRT disinformation campaign and perverse rhetorical devices used to intentionally fuel the zealous wave of anger, criticism, and combative behaviors that have been witnessed across the country, and new legislation written. I will also examine the expanding targets of the CRT disinformation campaign and the use of audience engagement metrics to maintain public interest in sharing misinformation about schools and educators. In the last section of the Literature Review, a study of the motivations of those who share misinformation and the current research on response strategies, transformational leadership, parental involvement, and building relational trust while reviewing curriculum and creating professional development will be presented, so educational leaders will be able to proactively minimize misinformation sharing and preserve the curriculums, integrity, and equitable safe havens that are the cornerstone of the belief that education is a *right* to all children (Brown, 1954).

Definition and History of CRT

“For its 2016 word of the year, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) chose ‘post-truth,’ which it defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’” (Farag, 2021, p.19).

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Ironically, while CRT seems to incite passionate reactions in today's world of disinformation, the origins of CRT were based in law and theory to study the inequities of society, only to be later weaponized for political means.

The Beginnings of CRT

CRT descended from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which was originally created by a group of law teachers, practitioners, and students in 1976 at the Conference on Critical Legal Studies, who felt the law protected class and hierarchy in the United States; CRT emerged in response to the belief that CLS underestimated race as a form of oppression (Cole, 2012).

Therefore, CLS centered on class and economic structure while CRT focused on race. “The late Harvard Law School professor, Derrick Bell, wanted to understand how—despite the Brown versus Board of Education (1954) decision desegregating public schools and the 1960s’ civil rights laws—racial discrimination continued to assign people of color to a second-class citizenship” (Kaplan, 2021, p.3). Therefore, Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Alan Freeman, Cheryl Harris, Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, and other scholars created CRT to examine how racism and race shaped American culture, economics, politics, and education and how racism maintains inequality (López et al., 2021).

Even though CRT was discussed in legal circles in the 1970s, the concept did not become part of the conversation among educators until 1995, when Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate presented CRT to the educational research community as a tool for considering systemic educational inequities (López et al., 2021). Since the 1990s, CRT has been used by educational scholars as an analytical tool and theoretical framework to examine a wide range of issues in education and academic research. CRT is a scholarly movement subscribed to by many researchers and activists in education and legal studies that is designed to study the history of

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racism in the United States and the ways that racism currently influences our courts, school, and institutions. “Almost 20 years ago, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a founder of the [CRT] movement, suggested that Critical Race Theory was 'now used interchangeably for race scholarship as Kleenex is used for tissue'” (Copland, 2021, p. 5). The premise of CRT is to learn and validate the experiences of people who have been ignored and marginalized by policy makers, judges, and educators in an effort to achieve a more equal society (Frag, 2021).

Is CRT Marxist?

According to Mike Gonzalez and Jonathan Butcher, authors of “State Education Officials Must Restore a Sense of National Character in Public Schools” and members of the conservative group called Heritage Foundation, CRT is based on Critical Theory, which applies Marxist theory to every aspect of life and contradicts the American beliefs in equality and freedom. Therefore, the Heritage Foundation asserts that authorities must ban all forms of CRT from being implemented in classrooms. However, a closer look at CRT reveals that CRT and Marxism are incompatible (Frag, 2021; Gonzalez, 2021).

In its truest form, Marxism is the political and economic theory in which an ideal society does not have classes. Marxism, created and named after German philosopher Karl Marx, encouraged the working class to question the low wages and oppression forced upon them in the 1848 publication *Communist Manifesto*, with contributions from Friedrich Engels (Cole, 2012; Frag, 2021). According to Marxism, the uneven distribution of wealth and privileges allowed the ruling class to exploit laborers during the age of Imperialism; the ruling class would then use religious, financial, and educational means to maintain power over their subordinates (Cole, 2012). According to Karl Marx, capitalism created a false consciousness, where people prioritized wealth over love and humanity (Frag, 2021). Therefore, Marx and Engels predicted

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that the working class would eventually revolt and abolish capitalism leaving a classless, equal society in the wake of the revolt (Frag, 2021). Since Marxism focuses on capitalism, wealth, and the exploitation of the working class, the theory is not relatable to CRT, which focuses on the systematic oppression of people of color (Cole, 2012; Frag, 2021).

As a result of the differences in the two theories' interpretations of society, there is tension between those who subscribe to Marxism and those who subscribe to CRT because the two philosophies focus on different aspects of society (Cole, 2012; Frag, 2021). CRT focuses on deconstructing white supremacy, while Marxism focuses on deconstructing capitalism (Frag, 2021). Marxist Scholar Mike Cole described the two theories as incompatible because of the dramatic differences in focus and the reality that someone who subscribes to CRT advocates for equal opportunities for all people regardless of ethnicity or race in all economies, capitalist or otherwise (Frag, 2021). Therefore, while there is an anti-racist educational component to Marxism (as well as many other philosophies), it is incorrect to assume that all anti-racist education thought is based on Marxism (Cole, 2012). Simply stated, CRT focuses on the intentional suppression of people, and Marxism focuses on economics and capitalism.

Many K-12 Teachers Never Heard of CRT Before

In “Understanding the Attacks on Critical Race Theory,” Francesca López explains that CRT is more likely to be found in upper-level college courses and scholarly research than a K-12 classroom. “[I]deologues are using CRT as a frightening symbol to intensify a collection of cultural and political fears related to race, racism, and the prospect of an increasing number of citizens from marginalized groups participating in the democratic process” (López et al., 2021, p.4). Furthermore, the authors of “Countering the Furor Around Critical Race Theory” explain that it is correct to state that CRT is not taught in K-12 American public schools because masters

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and doctoral students use CRT as a theoretical lens to view and challenge systematic racism, which is not the depth or scope of K-12 learning (Kaplan, 2021). That being stated, certain CRT concepts naturally exist in the K-12 curriculum, such as an accurate study demonstrating that people of color were systematically denied voting, education, and employment opportunities throughout United States history. So, while the initiative to retell American history through many voices, including historical figures of all races, is a concept present in both CRT and K-12 curriculum before CRT was splashed across media outlets, most K-12 educators could not have defined the acronym (Kaplan, 2021).

Early in 2020, before the onslaught of the CRT disinformation campaign, Antony Farag, author of “The Fear of Multiple Truths: On Teaching About Racism in a Predominantly White School,” conducted a study of 104 social studies teachers in predominantly White public schools, and 62.5% of the teachers could not define CRT (Farag, 2020, p. 4). Farag’s study is significant because while teachers have been accused of deliberately using CRT to indoctrinate children into White guilt, the fact that most social studies teachers could not define the concept is not congruent with the messaging that CRT is a deliberate plot to brainwash children. In addition, even more (64.4%) social studies teachers reported they felt they did not know enough about CRT to implement the concept into their pedagogy (Farag, 2020).

Politics, Race, & Education

The situation with CRT is not the first time that schools have become a hot button topic of political debate in the United States or other countries, such as Germany (Panchenko, 2019; Vitale, 2019). However, Germany has changed its approach to teaching their own country’s history in response to the changing demographics of their population while the United States continues to debate the portrayal of its own human rights violations (Panchenko, 2019; Vitale,

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2019). Like Germany, the United States is currently experiencing a change in the population's demographics. However, the approaches to teaching and learning about the histories of oppression have been slow to become more inclusive and cast under intense political scrutiny in recent years (Chadwick et al., 2018; Horsford, 2019; Ujifusa, 2021).

Changing Approaches to Teaching About Oppression in Germany and the United States

In recent years, the educational and political leaders of Germany have made a conscious, deliberate decision to make learning about the rise of National Socialism and the Holocaust an integral facet of secondary school education (Panchenko, 2019; Vitale, 2019). Since 1992, the German education system acknowledges that totalitarian regimes utilize xenophobic messaging to achieve their goals, and the younger generation is the most easily influenced by propaganda (Panchenko, 2019; Vitale, 2019). Therefore, Germany has changed its approach to the teaching of the Holocaust in recent years to accommodate the rise in diversity, religious, and cultural tensions since 2015, when Chancellor Angela Merkel created an open-door immigration policy (Vitale, 2019). Germany is now the main destination for many refugees in Europe and has processed over one million applications for asylum since 2015.

However, with the increase in diversity, Germany has also seen a marked increase in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and overall intolerance (Vitale, 2019). Many of the recent immigrants and refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran. These students have often previously been taught that the Holocaust was a conspiracy or an "equal fight" in which the Nazis, as well as the Jews, were active aggressors (Vitale, 2019). Therefore, the approach to teaching the Holocaust has changed to encompass conversations about religious and cultural diversity as well as tolerance, human rights, and the need for democracy. The emphasis of instruction has also been placed on the bystanders to the Holocaust, who remained aloof while

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crimes were committed (Panchenko, 2019). Holocaust education is no longer presented as a Jewish issue, but rather as an infringement upon all human rights issues (Vitale, 2019).

The United States has yet to enjoy a unified approach to the instruction of its own history of human rights violations. Once *Plessy v. Ferguson*'s 1896 ruling of separate but equal was overturned in 1954 by *Brown v. Board of Education*, the floodgates of educational reform and change were cracked open in an attempt to right the wrongs of America's past (Horsford, 2019). However, the changes were not always positive or beneficial to people of color in the United States. In the neoliberal era, large urban school districts serving predominantly Black students were reorganized and students were bussed long distances in the name of educational reform (Lipman, 2015). While the original intention of the school bussing was to integrate the schools, the unequal funding based on property taxes continued to present inequalities among school districts (Lipman, 2015). Black teachers and administrators were often left without jobs and replaced by the White educators previously working in other school districts (White, 2016).

While the demographics of the school populations changed, the histories of people of color remained brief in the textbooks and daily lessons (White, 2016). The horrors of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights Movement were allowed brief mentions in most United States history books as the expectations for students of color remained low (Lipman, 2015). President Linden B Johnson signed affirmative action into law in 1964 to expand access to a college education to underrepresented groups, such as women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, and Congress designated February as Black History Month in 1986 (Horsford, 2019). While access to a college education for minorities did improve, the inclusion of minority historical figures in education remained minimal. In fact, many schools did not add

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the stories of people of color to their history curriculums but would instead simply teach those figures during February.

The beginning of the 21st century marked an important shift in American education when President George W Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 also known as No Child Left Behind in 2001 (Horsford, 2017). The federal government led the charge to hold schools accountable for the performance of students and coined the phrase Race to the Top to describe the education initiative. P.A. Nogura pointed out that considering the United States history of associating race with a lack of intellectual ability, “the fact that federal educational policy has made the goal of closing the racial achievement gap a national priority is truly remarkable” (2008, p 61). Unfortunately, the Race to the Top campaign pitted school districts and states against one another with very few plans nor funding for improvement for the subgroups identified as “left behind” (Nogura, 2008, p 61).

Even though President Barack Obama reauthorized the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the carefully documented high achievements of White and Asian students contrasted with the low performance of Black and Hispanic students only to reaffirm negative stereotypes about the minority groups amid high-stakes accountability reform, lack of funding, and a pervasive lack of concrete plans to close the glaring achievement gaps among subgroups of students (Horsford, 2017). In addition, during President Obama’s presidential terms, a push for equitable learning environments for all students began to appear in the standards assigned to teachers and administrators, even though very little was done to address the unequal funding of school districts and racial inequalities that remained in the United States (Horsford, 2019). The strides made in United States education under President Obama’s presidency toward diversity training, equitable learning environments, and more inclusive curriculums would later become

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the incitement of the current CRT controversy that will be further explained more in-depth later in this study (Horsford, 2019).

Disturbing Similarities Between Germany and the United States

The parallels between Germany's treatment of Jewish people and the United States' treatment of people of color are disturbingly similar; in fact, Germany derived much of the caste system that they created from the history of the United States (Wilkerson, 2020). Yet, the approaches taken to the educational retelling of their histories varies greatly between the two cultures. When the Nazi bureaucrats met in 1934 to plan the systematic, rigid hierarchy of an Aryan nation that would eventually become the Nuremberg Laws, the United States was the first topic on the agenda.

By the time that Hitler rose to power, the United States 'was not just a country with racism,' Whitman, the Yale legal scholar, wrote. 'It was the leading racist jurisdiction—so much so that even Nazi Germany looked to America for inspiration.' The Nazis recognized the parallels even if many Americans did not (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 81).

The unwillingness of Americans to recognize past injustices is the most significant discrepancy between the two countries' approaches to education. American laws on race and segregation were the precedent for Germany's laws to restrict Jewish movement, marriage, procreation, and property ownership (Wilkerson, 2020). However, even though the Nazis found the American commitment to legislating racial purity to be worthy of praise, the law that one-drop of Negro blood was sufficient for an individual to be counted as Black was deemed as too harsh by even the Nazis, yet the law had been an American practice for many years.

Today, many American schools educate students on in-depth studies on the Holocaust, yet will often shy away from revealing the harsh truth that the Nuremberg Laws were based on

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America's treatment of people of color (Wilkerson, 2020). Much of the confusion over American history's depiction of the country's treatment of people of color is the lack of adequate language to illustrate the realities of our history (Horsford, 2017; Wilkerson, 2020). A caste system is defined as a "network of laws, policies, customs, and institutions collectively operating to ensure that certain groups remain in a predetermined status within society" (Kiel, 2015, p. 613). While the history of the United States is riddled with examples of public policies, laws, institutions, and customs that systematically withheld people of color from upward mobility and educational opportunities, the education system did not acknowledge the caste system by name, even when discussing nearly a century of slavery (Horsford, 2017; Kiel, 2015; Wilkerson, 2020).

Symbols, School Curriculums, and Books in Germany and the United States

Germany's approach to educating younger generations about the Holocaust has evolved as the country split, reunified, and continued to change and grow (Vitale, 2019). Immediately after World War II, the textbooks propagating National Socialism were destroyed more as a result of foreign pressures than internal motivations since many Germans saw themselves as victims. During the Cold War, East and West Germany presented some information about the Holocaust in their classrooms but did not make it a focus. It was not until the fall of the Berlin Wall that classroom conversations turned to concentration camps and memorials.

Today's Germany not only owns the country's crimes against humanity of the past but affirms that through education these atrocities will not be repeated (Vitale, 2019; Wilkerson, 2020). In modern Germany, displaying swastikas is against the law, as well as denying the existence of the Holocaust, unlike the United States, where the Confederate flag can be seen flying in front of many homes and businesses daily (Wilkerson, 2020). There are no schools named after Nazi leaders like the names of Confederate Army Commanders still found on many

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American schools. The memorials in Germany have been erected to the victims of the Holocaust only, unlike the memorials of insurrectionist Southern generals that still stand in the United States today. German schools mandate the teaching of the Holocaust in all 16 federal states with 16-20 lessons allocated for the study of National Socialism (Panchenko, 2019). German high school students are the largest category of tourists at the Holocaust memorials; the focus of the memorials is always on the victims of the Holocaust and never the perpetrators (Vitale, 2019).

American history textbooks, symbols, and names have evolved slowly and remain areas of political and educational controversy today (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). In 1925, the American Legion conjectured that the ideal textbook must inspire children to be patriotic and must speak mainly of the successes of the United States while only briefly referencing the failures as moral lessons (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). American history books held a long-standing tradition of using archetype characters to illustrate and reinforce American exceptionalism, such as primitive tribes, and virgin continent, to influence students to think America was a large, empty plot of land when Columbus landed, and that he discovered natives who needed the help and inventions of the civilized Europeans (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). “Since five-sixths of Americans never take an American history course after high school, what they learn in school—archetypes, mistakes, and omissions included—forms much of what they know about our past and leaves them unable to think accurately or effectively about our present and future” (Kaplan & Owings, 2021, p.8). Today, book burnings have become frequent in response to the CRT controversy. Kaplan & Owings contend that when viewing angry parents burning books, one should consider that many times those parents have those learned archetype characters in their collective memories and thus experience extreme discomfort at any disruption in their learned romantic history (2021).

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Furthermore, only one-sixth of Americans have had exposure to a college history class (Kaplan & Owings, 2021).

While the use of history to inspire patriotism is not necessarily harmful, it should also be noted that people learn a perception of what is ordinary and what to deem “problematic” through the story-telling process of education (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Because American education has traditionally excluded an accurate or balanced delivery of the histories of people of color, there remains a large gap in the knowledge base of most Americans concerning our nation’s history. “As a result, according to French comparative historian Marc Ferro, the United States has the largest gap of any country in the world between what historians know and what the rest of us are taught” (Kaplan & Owings, 2021, p.8). As a result of the gap in knowledge of United States history by most Americans, the current CRT controversy has started a moral panic in many and an onslaught of books banned from public schools (Oliver, 2023).

Differing from Germany’s reaction to their own changing demographics, the prediction that Whites will no longer be the majority in the United States as early as the 2040s seems to launch many Americans into a frenzy of efforts to control cultural education (Oliver, 2023; Wilkerson, 2020). Currently, there are 1,586 books banned in 86 different school districts across the United States (O’Connell-Domenech, 2022). The books banned most commonly focus on race, gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ identities; many of the banned books had previously been adopted by the Obama-era quest for equitable curriculums and libraries (O’Connell-Domenech, 2022). In fact, 16% of the banned books are nonfiction biographies about historical figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, and Rosa Parks (O’Connell-Domenech, 2022).

Pennsylvania ranks third in the country for the most banned books, right behind Texas and Florida, thanks to the group Moms for Liberty, which originally started as an anti-mask

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activist group during the Covid-19 pandemic and has now adopted a mission to oppose LGBTQ-positive policies and materials in schools, as well as all curricula they deem to be influenced by CRT (Day, 2023). The Moms for Liberty activist group now claims to have over 200,000 members with chapters in 35 states (Day, 2023). In fact, last year's guest speakers at the Moms for Liberty summit included Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. The group has also claimed to have endorsed 270 candidates for school boards around the country, who have pledged to further their censorship cause (Rahman, 2022).

The influence of activist groups, such as Moms for Liberty, could also have far-reaching ramifications in the future since members of a similar activist group, The Florida Citizens Alliance, are currently on the Florida textbook review board, which approves textbooks for the entire state (Mervosh, 2023). Textbooks are a \$4.8 billion industry, and Florida, along with California and Texas, are major predictors of content of the textbooks. The books must be written to pass the guidelines in these major markets, and then would be replicated throughout the country. Because presidential-hopeful Ron DeSantis signed the Stop W.O.K.E. Act, which prohibits school instruction that could cause students to feel guilt, responsibility, or anguish for the actions of their ancestors, publishers must adhere to Florida's guidelines in order to publish textbooks that will be used in classrooms across the country (Mervosh, 2023). As a result of the political leanings in Florida, one publisher vying for the Florida contract went so far as to remove race from the Rosa Parks story entirely. In short, the United States education system will be shaped by these activist groups for many years to come, and a unified approach of taking ownership of a history of human rights violations seems unlikely in the near future (Mervosh, 2023; Wilkinson, 2020).

Who Waged War on CRT in Schools?

After learning the current controversy of CRT in American education, one may question why if CRT is a scholarly movement primarily used at the graduate level, then how did the theory become the center of so much controversy in K-12 education? That question can be answered best by Christopher Rufo, who played an integral role in the onset of the CRT disinformation campaign during the summer of 2020 (Wallace-Wells, 2021). Once the explosive aftermath of the George Floyd murder splashed across America's screens, the country was a bundle of raw emotions, which is often the main trigger to motivate people to share misinformation (Chadwick et al., 2018; Ujifusa, 2021). The fight over CRT is the perfect storm demonstrating the effects of disinformation and misinformation on parents and schools.

Making CRT Toxic

After the last 40 years of educational reforms that have included mandatory testing, school vouchers, and for-profit schools, the public school system has become an integral talking point for political candidates, which has included making curriculums a center of controversy that mirrored America's disagreements over class structure and race (López et al., 2021). Before being appointed as an Associate Justice to the United States Supreme Court by President Richard Nixon in 1972, Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr wrote a memorandum to the United States Chamber of Commerce that asserted,

[The] American economic system is under broad attack. We have seen the civil rights movement insist on rewriting many of the textbooks in our universities and schools . . . a return to a more rational balance is needed to counter the 'Communists' and 'New Leftists' found on college campuses and in the media, intellectual journals, and other Outlets. (López et al., 2021, p.7)

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Powell advocated for conservative think tank funding and increased corporate political involvement to rectify his perceived attack on the American economic system.

Justice Powell's wish for conservative think tanks and corporate activism was granted, as well as his insistence that textbooks remain bowdlerized versions of American history in the form of the CRT disinformation campaign ignited by Christopher Rufo, a self-described "brawler" for conservative politics (Kaplan, 2021). While the country was reeling from social upheaval and racial strife in July of 2020, Rufo discovered CRT in anti-racist materials from an anti-bias training course, and a new political weapon was born. Christopher Rufo would later brag that he had found a new language for which conservatives could claim their grievances about the social and ideological changes taking place. Rufo then introduced CRT to a national audience when he appeared on the Fox News show, *Tucker Carlson Tonight* (Wallace-Wells, 2021).

Christopher Rufo's appearance on Fox News drew national attention, including President Donald Trump, who tuned into the program, and the CRT disinformation campaign was launched (Wallace-Wells, 2021). When asked about CRT during the Fox News segment, Christopher Rufo looked directly into the camera and stated, "Conservatives need to wake up. This is an existential threat to the United States. . . . I call on the President to immediately issue this executive order—to stamp out this destructive, divisive, pseudoscientific ideology" (Wallace-Wells, 2021, p.2). The President's Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows, called Christopher Rufo the next morning and invited Rufo to the White House to assist in drafting an executive order that would limit the discussion of race at federal diversity seminars. Rufo later bragged, "This entire movement came from nothing . . . Critical Race Theory is the perfect villain," yet many Americans did not view CRT as "nothing" because the campaign against CRT consumed

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President Trump's Twitter and Fox News into the fall of 2020 and would later result in a wave of educational legislation (Wallace-Wells, 2021, p. 2).

CRT Replaced Common Core as a Political Crucible

CRT is not the first time education has been targeted for political gain; approximately a decade ago, the political firestorm of education was Common Core Standards. In fact, President Donald Trump's campaign promise in the 2016 election was to end the Common Core and hand the choice-making over to parents and local leaders, a practice he lacked the power to enact yet vigorously promised (Ujifusa, 2021). During the 2016 election and immediately thereafter, Americans often shared and cited misinformation regarding Common Core, while many state lawmakers and educational leaders hurried to dump Common Core amid the fierce debate over standards.

The Common Core bandwagon was left on the side of the campaign trail in 2020 when President Trump chose to drive the CRT bandwagon instead (Ujifusa, 2021). While the combative exchanges and potential consequences to educators in the Common Core battle were nominal compared to CRT, the method was the same: flood the media with disinformation to ignite the passions of parents and divide the masses, leaving children and education in the cavern of the divide of misinformation.

The 1619 Project and Patriotic Education

During President Trump's final year in office, talk of Common Core vanished, and the President instead turned his social media attention to "patriotic education" and criticized the trends of students learning American history and racial discrimination (Ujifusa, 2021). In September 2020, President Donald Trump denounced the teaching of The 1619 Project, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. The 1619 Project aimed to educate Americans on the

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contributions and turbulent history of African-Americans, who struggled for education, freedom, and political suffrage, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of enslaved people being brought to the colonies (Kaplan, 2021; Pettypiece, 2020). The New York Times created a high school curriculum unit featuring The 1619 Project, complete with study guides, learning activities, and materials designed to enhance regular curriculum but not to replace traditional curriculum (Kaplan, 2021). However, in addition to President Trump threatening to cut off funding to schools that teach The 1619 Project, the Trump administration published The 1776 Report, which told American history from a conservative stance. The president wrote an op-ed published on RealClearPolitics' website in addition to managing a constant stream of social media messaging harshly criticizing The 1619 Project, CRT, American teachers, and schools (Brewster, 2021; Kaplan, 2021).

Ohio: Microcosm of Changing Demographics, Socioeconomics, & Politics

Ohio schools represent an appropriate sampling of the United States because the densely populated state has experienced many changes in ethnicities, economics, and political affiliations over the last 20 years (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Ohio Population News, 2001; Ohio, 2023). As of 2023, Ohio's population is currently 11,747,774 people, which makes the state the 10th most densely populated state in the country; however, Ohio currently ranks 43rd for population growth out of 50 states with only a 0.67% growth rate (Ohio, 2023). Ohio links the United States Midwest to the Northeast because the state possesses the 10th largest highway network and is only a day's drive to more than 50% of the entire country's population.

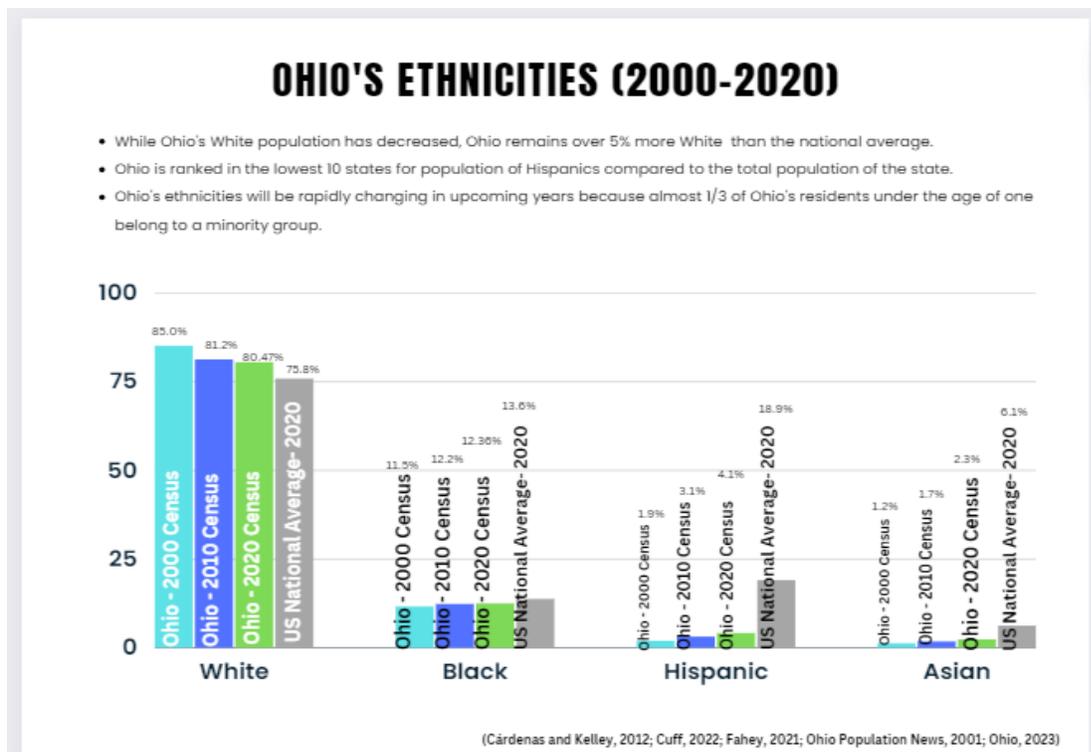
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Ethnicity Demographics

Ohio's ethnicity demographics have changed in the last 20 years (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio Population News, 2001; Ohio, 2023). As presented in Figure 3: Ohio's Ethnicities (2000-2020), Ohio's population demographics are trending toward a larger non-White population, similar to the rest of the United States (Ohio, 2023).

Figure 3

Ohio's Ethnicities (2000-2020)



However, while the Hispanic and Black populations have propelled Ohio's population growth, it should be noted that Ohio still has a larger White population than the National Average (Ohio, 2023). The population is predicted to continue to change in Ohio, considering that in 2010, 25.7% of Ohio's children were children of color, and in 2020, nearly one-third of the children under the age of one are minorities (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio, 2023). Therefore, while the

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sampling of Ohio's superintendents cannot be truly representative of the entire country, the perceptions of the educational leaders who are charged with educating our young people amid the changing demographics are valuable and indicative of an evolving nation.

Socioeconomics

Ohio's economic trends are also indicative of the trends currently occurring in the United States when considering the wage gap among ethnicities (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio, 2023). In 2010, it was reported that people of color in Ohio faced extreme economic hardships because the annual median household income levels of Hispanics (\$33,178) and Blacks (\$27,172) were significantly lower than the annual median household incomes of Asians (\$62,426) and Whites (\$48,334) (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012). Unfortunately, the wage gap did not improve in the next decade. In 2020, while the median household income for all Ohioans was \$62,300, the median household income for Hispanics was \$52,100 and Blacks was \$36,929. Asian households had a median income of \$85,319, and White households had a median income of \$66,456 (Ohio, 2023). To put these numbers into perspective, a superintendent, who has worked in education over the last decade would have witnessed the increase in the wage gap among Ohioans represented in the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch each year.

Politics

Finally, the political trends of Ohio have been progressively leaning toward a predominantly Republican state that is able to heavily influence presidential elections (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021). Ohio has not had a Democratic governor since Governor Ted Strickland, who was in office for one term ending in 2011 (Cuff, 2022). Since then, both Governors John Kasich and Mike DeWine had been two-term Republican governors, with mostly Republican

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Congressional Delegation. Currently, 10 Ohio representatives are Republican and 5 are Democrats, with one senator from each party (Cuff, 2022).

Wielding 18 votes in the electoral college, Ohio votes matter — and they matter a lot. Commentator Chris Cillizza speculated that Ohio was the most important state in the entire country when Democrat President Barack Obama secured the Rust Belt in 2008 and 2012 (Cuff, 2022). However, the predominance of Democrat votes in Ohio and Obama’s blue wall seem to have corroded amid economic decline and the popularity of President Donald Trump. Many Ohioans have voiced frustrations with rising gas prices, supply chain breakdowns and rising interest rates (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021). The post-industrial Ohio now resembles its mostly conservative neighbor, Indiana, after President Trump had won Ohio twice (Fahey, 2021). After losing the 2020 election, Donald Trump’s endorsement of far-right candidates still influenced voters. Trump-endorsed Senator J.D. Vance, Representative Max Miller, and Republican primary winners, J. R. Majewski and Madison Gilbert, demonstrated that Trump’s endorsements still weighed heavily in Ohio (Cuff, 2022). Even when Trump refused to endorse Governor Mike DeWine after DeWine’s aggressive Covid-19 restrictions and public criticism of Trump on January 6th, 2021, Donald Trump’s choice to refrain from endorsing DeWine’s opponents helped Mike DeWine to secure a second term in 2022 (Cuff, 2022). Therefore, the right-leaning trend of Ohio voters is perhaps the most compelling reason that those in charge of Ohio school districts may be able to offer unique insights to the impacts of CRT allegations on student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships. Ohio superintendents have been straddling the political messaging of CRT and schools while observing the influences of these allegations on all stakeholders during these shifting political trends.

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The Power of Words, Enthymemes, and Perverse Rhetoric

Once President Trump announced his personal war against CRT, his continuous messaging spread through media headlines and Twitter, including words devised to play on the readers' fears and passions. The term "Critical Race Theory" expanded from the original challenge of the methods used to teach racism in American history to encompass sexism and all forms of diversity in schools thus revealing the underlying enthymeme of advising followers to report teachers who taught any material parents found objectionable and painting a target sign on the backs of many educators (Hayes, 2021; Pettypiece, 2020; Ujifusa, 2021). Eventually, the concept of CRT spread beyond Black and White race issues to encompass Indigenous Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx, sexuality, and gender identities (Kaplan, 2021). President Donald Trump's tweets would eventually encourage parents and students to review and report any and all topics in the American education curriculum that were deemed unacceptable or offensive.

Fighting Words and Perverse Rhetoric

President Trump's use of emotion-provoking words streamed throughout his constant messaging of perverse rhetoric, calling on his followers to challenge and distrust educators. A closer look at the words chosen in speeches, tweets, and writings by Donald Trump reveal the etymological manipulation of his audience. While standing before the Declaration of Independence and The Constitution at the National Archives Museum during the President's "White House Conference on American History," Trump used terms such as "web of lies," "hateful lies about this country," "toxic propaganda," "child abuse," and "ashamed" to describe American schools and teaching (NBC News, 2020, 5:40; Pettypiece, 2020). In response to questions at the conference about the riots in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd,

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President Trump responded, “left-wing rioting and mayhem are the direct results of decades of left-wing indoctrination in our schools,” adding “it’s gone on far too long” (Trump Delivers, NBC News, 2020, 16:45). As the country struggled with civil unrest and outrage, the public’s attention, anger, and blame were diverted toward educators and schools in an attempt to use the common enemy strategy to unite Mr. Trump’s followers — and it worked.

President Donald Trump’s method of disinformation dissemination utilized during the “White House Conference on American History” was a combination of scapegoating and perverse rhetoric (Gunn, 2018). While many people were repelled by Trump’s perverse rhetoric style, which connects emotionally charged hyperboles, bombastic word choice, and racial slurs, a number of his ardent followers seem to be entranced by his words with feelings of empowerment (Gunn, 2018; Hayes 2021).

Enthymemes and Tweets About CRT

President Trump heavily employed enthymemes when spreading disinformation regarding schools and curriculum. The concept of an enthymeme is a rhetorical device where the audience and rhetor share common beliefs and interests and build an argument together. However, in an enthymeme, part of the argument is intentionally missing because the two parties share a confidential understanding that does not need further explanation and can hide the meaning from those outside of the intended audience and rhetor (Hayes, 2021). An analysis of Trump’s tweets reveals that he intentionally created a fog of disinformation regarding education, which allowed him to connect with his followers over the unstated us versus them philosophy (Hayes, 2021). As illustrated in Table 1: Trump’s Tweets on Education, the President’s repetitive word choice and use of enthymemes became an apparent call to action to the President’s followers that has incited many Americans to challenge our educational system.

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The enthymeme is established with the continuous use of collective pronouns combined with religious and emotionally charged words to elicit an emotional response from former President Trump’s followers (Hayes, 2021). Words such as “we” and “our” imply the us versus them scenario to Trump’s followers; notice the President’s deliberate use of emotionally charged words that contain religious connotations, such as “purge” and “indoctrination,” to play on his followers’ religious motivations (Hayes, 2021).

Table 1

Trump’s Tweets on CRT & Education

9/5/20 - 7:52:06 AM EST “Trump Orders **Purge** of ‘Critical Race Theory’ from Federal Agencies <https://t.co/ygXcTXRHsQ> via @BreitbartNews This is a **sickness** that **cannot be allowed to continue**. Please **report** any sightings so **we** can quickly **extinguish!**” (Trump Twitter, 2020).

9/17/20 - 4:25:59 PM EST “Today, **we** are seeing the results of decades of left-wing **indoctrination** in **our** schools. No American should be made to feel **ashamed** of their history or identity” (Trump Twitter, 2020).

10/31/20 - 5:31:03 PM EST “Over the next four years, **we will stop** the **radical indoctrination** of our students, and **restore** PATRIOTIC EDUCATION to **our** schools. **We will teach** our children to love our Country, honor **our** history, and always respect **our** great American Flag” (Trump Twitter, 2020).

11/2/20 - 2:22:20 PM EST “Just signed an order to establish the 1776 Commission. **We will stop** the **radical indoctrination** of **our** students, and **restore** PATRIOTIC EDUCATION to **our** schools!” (Trump Twitter, 2020).

Note. All words used to create a **sense of collusion** and a sense of shared stakeholder are highlighted in **yellow**. The words used with **religious and emotional charge** have been highlighted in **orange**. The words used to incite a **call to action** by the reader have been highlighted in **green**.

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A study of Trump's tweets before running for the presidency showed almost no religious connotation; however, once he became the Republican Party Nominee in need of the White Evangelical vote, Trump quickly became the President to use the most religious language in the last 100 years (Hughes, 2020). Trump's religious references are most commonly coupled with American xenophobia, thus creating a sense of us versus them meant to outcast any group or individual not within his circle while maintaining his fold of followers (Hughes, 2020). It should be noted that 81% of White Evangelical Christians voted for Trump in 2016; it seems finding religion served Trump's political goals well (Hayes, 2021; Hughes, 2020; Woodard, 2021).

Finally, Trump's implicit and explicit call to action was achieved by using words such as "report" and "will stop" to complete the message that public schools were the blame for America's issues of racial tensions and rioting; therefore, it is the task of Trump's followers to report anyone who is not subscribing to his teachings and purge CRT from the schools, which indoctrinated the nation's children and caused social unrest (Hayes, 2021; Hughes, 2020; Woodard, 2021). The call to action wrapped in religious motivation was invariably part of Trump's enthymeme with his followers as in most of his communications. This type of bombastic disinformation motivated many conservative parents to lead protests and confrontations at school board meetings while systematically organizing to dominate school boards and change public policy.

After two years of the ongoing CRT disinformation campaign and much legislation written in response to Christopher Rufo's original battle cry, the campaign originators have widened their target range to include religious, sexual, and gender identification as hot button talking points regarding educational curriculum (Kaplan, 2021; Perry, 2022). Christopher Rufo's

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wording in a tweet about CRT used the same methods of perverse rhetoric and enthymemes that President Trump had used, as demonstrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Christopher Rufo's Tweet About Turning CRT Toxic



Note. (Rufo, 2021)

Christopher Rufo's Tweet outlined the intent to create a negative perception of CRT and indicated that more elements of culture and curriculum would be engulfed under the brand category that Rufo and his followers aim to turn toxic (López et al., 2021; Rufo, 2021). Rufo, like Trump, engaged in the use of enthymeme by not directly defining "all of the various cultural insanities," and the use of the word "we" reveals the us versus them form of manipulation of Rufo's followers (Hayes, 2021; Rufo, 2021).

Maintaining Public Outrage: Disinformation's Expanding Targets

Christopher Rufo's promise to put "all of the various cultural insanities" (Rufo, 2021) into the toxic brand category was fulfilled through a flood of disinformation and legislation centered around schools teaching sexuality and gender identity using audience engagement metrics and Education Emasculation Theory (Green & Longoria, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021;

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Perry, 2022). According to “Digital News Audience Engagement and Web Metrics: Exploring Major Research Trends,” audience engagement metrics, which is the study and measurement of the number of clicks that an online story will merit and the time spent by users on the story, decrease over time; therefore, the story needs to change over time to arouse new interest in order to maintain one’s audience in political endeavors (Kozhamkulova, 2021). By the spring of 2022, interest in CRT news stories was waning, and the introduction of news stories and social media posts about the Parental Rights in Education and Individual Freedom bills in Florida provided the spike in audience engagement and outrage needed to launch the next wave of disinformation regarding sexuality and gender in classroom teaching (Kozhamkulova, 2021; Perry, 2022). This new wave of politically-motivated disinformation was once again aimed at educators and lacks a basis in facts.

“Don’t Say Gay” Law

On March 28, 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis signed the Parental Rights in Education Act, also known as the “Don’t Say Gay” Law, which was extensively covered in national media, as well as the Individual Freedom bill, commonly referred to as an anti-“woke” bill (Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022). The text of both bills, however, leaves opportunity for ambiguity regarding what can and cannot be taught in the classroom, which has had a chilling effect on educators (Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022). Teachers who are homosexual fear violating the law by merely discussing weekend plans with their same-sex partner or discussing a child’s LGBTQ+ parents (Pendharkar, 2022). “The law is clearly designed to have a chilling effect,” says Sean Cahill, a political scientist and the director of health policy research at the Fenway Institute, an organization committed to LGBTQ+ health. “It’s [meant] to make it so that teachers and school staff will not want to go near these issues with a ten-foot pole” (Perry, 2022). In addition, fifteen

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states have passed similar legislation over the past year, and 27 other states introduced bills attempting to restrict discussions of sexuality and gender in the classroom, including Ohio (Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022).

The confusion over this controversial law has continued since its inception, and online disinformation is representative of that confusion. The Florida law and bill do not mention the terms “gay” or “woke,” nor do they directly forbid acknowledging gay people; however, Governor Ron DeSantis openly publicized his intentions to curb classroom discussions on gender identity and the LGBTQ+ community (Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022). In addition, lawmakers introduced a number of bills targeting LGBTQ+ students' ability to access medical care and play sports. The legislation also opened potential legal problems for school districts over classroom discussions and increased bullying and isolation of LGBTQ+ students (Carlisle, 2022).

Emasculation Through Education Theory

The laws and bills targeting sexuality and gender identity in schools coincide with a surge of disinformation regarding schools teaching sexuality and gender identity; Emasculation Through Education Theory has been an especially prevalent form of disinformation in recent months (Green & Longoria, 2021). Emasculation Through Education Theory is the idea that educators intentionally influence young men to become less masculine and effeminate, which was distributed throughout pop culture in the 1960s and early 1970s during the Vietnam War as an intentional disinformation campaign to discourage young men from dodging the draft and attending college instead (Green & Longoria, 2021). The theory is shared online in a purposeful manipulation of the reader to instill distrust in teachers and associate schools with LGBTQ+ and gender identity. Social media posts like the one represented in Figure 5, Emasculation Through Education Meme, demonstrate the resurgence of this theory and the intentional effort on the part

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of the creator to incite fear, utilize enthymeme, and capitalize on traditional American heritage imagery combined with perverse rhetoric (Green & Longoria, 2021).

Figure 5

Emasculation Through Education Meme



Note. (O'Neill, 2022).

Former Navy Seal and Fox News Contributor Robert J. O'Neill tweeted the above depiction of the Emasculation Through Education Theory on April 11, 2022, when the media coverage of the backlash to the law signed by Governor DeSantis was at its height. The short, repetitive word structure and intentional teacher-bashing were meant to attract the reader's attention quickly and drive audience engagement metrics up with over 77,000 shares (Hayes, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021). It is important to note that disinformation like the example presented in Figure 5 can create a lasting, negative impression in the minds of students and parents, so the verbiage and

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messaging presented to families and the community should be chosen carefully not to unintentionally reaffirm negative misconceptions (Green & Longoria, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021).

Legislation and Lawsuits on CRT

While President Trump's original Executive Order (EO) 1395042 passed in September of 2020 and withheld funding from federal entities that promoted "divisive concepts," race or sex "stereotyping," and "scapegoating" was rescinded when President Joe Biden took office, at least six similar bills have been introduced in Congress (López et al., 2021). In 2021, numerous Republican lawmakers pushed back on President Biden's lifting of (EO) 1395042 by introducing copycat legislation to eliminate "divisive concepts" in K-12 curriculum (López et al., 2021).

Legislation and Political Activism

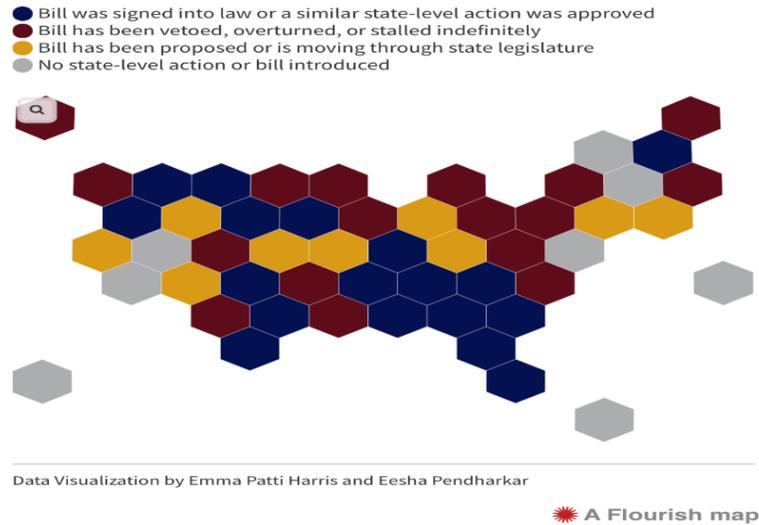
Currently, 44 states (including Ohio's House Bills 322 & 327) have introduced or adopted laws that address the teaching of systematic racism (Schwartz; 2023; Stout et al., 2022). Political action committees, such as the 1776 PAC, have been founded to financially support far-right conservative school board candidates and advocate to change school policies and ban books on racial, religious, and transgender discrimination and rights (Camera, 2021).

As illustrated in Figure 6, the legislation is widespread throughout the country and continues to gain momentum. When this study was first started in the spring of 2022, there were only 38 states that had introduced anti-CRT legislation. As of March 2023, the count is at 44 states with introduced legislation (Schwartz, 2021; Stout et al., 2022).

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Figure 6

Map: Where CRT is Under Attack



Note. (Schwartz, 2021)

The Conservative Political Action Conference held in July of 2021 hosted a presentation, “Activism Applied: How to Save Your School Board,” which instructed over 4,000 listeners on how to organize against local school boards they claimed were indoctrinating children in a curriculum based on race (Camera, 2021). The speakers’ recommendations included donating to politicians and school board candidates running on “anti-woke” platforms, publicly banning books, initiating open records requests looking for monies spent on diversity training, and challenging and reporting educators’ teaching and class discussions (Camera, 2021). The Founder of Fight for Schools, a Conservative Education PAC, Ian Prior, vehemently stated, “We’re going to take our army of ‘Minute Moms,’ and we’re going to go across the country and fight these battles” (Camera, C5). The Fight for Schools PAC has requested a recall of Loudoun County, Virginia School Board Members, alleging that the members were engaged in a “secret”

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Facebook page created solely to promote and indoctrinate the county's students in CRT (Camera, 2021).

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of board members being targeted for recall and harassed. In the fall of 2021, recall efforts targeting school board members had more than doubled when compared to any other year, and the numbers continue to grow as Conservative activist groups continue to seek to replace board members with those sympathetic to their causes (Camera, 2021). Chip Slaven, Chief Advocacy Officer for the National School Boards Association, confirmed that many members were being harassed and threatened in person and online (Camera, 2021). The National School Board Association (NSBA) requested collaboration among the U.S. Postal Service, the federal government, and state and local law enforcement to investigate the growing threats and acts of violence toward board members (Durkee, 2021).

Lawsuits Against CRT Concepts in Schools

S. Ernie Walton, author of "Yes, CRT is Being Taught in Public Schools," refutes the claim that CRT is not taught in-depth in K-12 schools and asserts that the concept is taught both indirectly and directly by schools through classroom activities, policies, and curriculum as an intentional method of controlling children's views of themselves and others (2021).

Furthermore, those opposed to the teaching of CRT in any form in schools cite the disruption to the educational process that has taken place during recent protests and lawsuits, led by parents who have learned of instructional practices that they view as divisive (Copland, 2021).

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District -- which determined that students should not be required to "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate" -- has been cited in multiple judicial cases recently where

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both students and teachers felt their rights were violated by the schools (*Tinker v. Des Moines*, 1969, p 1). In Loudoun County, Virginia, parents sued their local school district for unconstitutionally discriminating on the basis of race and infringing on First Amendment rights to free-speech (Sam, 2021). Parents are not the only ones filing suit; Stacy Deemar, a White K-8 teacher, filed suit against her employer for violating Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the federal constitution during a teacher training, where she would be required to label herself as an oppressor (Douglas, 2021).

Another United States Supreme Court decision that has been used as a reference point during cases involving CRT is *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, which established government employers' responsibility for their employees' words and actions (2006). In this case, the court determined, "When public employees make statements pursuant to their official duties, they are not speaking as citizens for First Amendment purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications from employer discipline" (*Garcetti v. Ceballos*, 2006, p. 5). In eastern Pennsylvania, parents sued their local school district after the superintendent denied their request for their students to opt out of a required class activity on "white fragility" (Rudy, 2021). The pending legislation and ongoing lawsuits promise that the controversy over CRT in the classroom is far from over. Therefore, it is important that educators understand the motivations of those who share misinformation and the appropriate response strategies when dealing with those who believe misinformation.

Understanding the Motivations of Those Who Spread Misinformation

The two most common motivations for sharing misinformation are looking to entertain and sense of civic duty; however, a closer analysis of both motivations reveals the misinformation sharers' attention-seeking behavior (Chadwick et al., 2018). For example, the

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mom who shares misinformation on social media with the caption, “Look at what is going on at the school now!” often regards social media as a social outlet, while the dad who shares a misinformation post with the caption, “Your tax dollars at work!” may see himself as fulfilling a civic duty of keeping others informed. However, both examples seek attention from others and are unlikely to check the facts on the information before it is shared (Chadwick et al., 2018).

Therefore, the first words from any educational leader when dealing directly with these individuals should be “I hear and appreciate your concerns, please allow me to provide further information.” Meet the sharers' need for attention first and thank them for their time so they know they have been seen. They will be more likely to listen to your response once that need has been addressed (Coombs, 1995; Chadwick et al., 2018).

Who is the Most Likely to Share Misinformation?

While the attention-seeking behaviors of those seeking to entertain and be entertained, as well as the civic-minded are motivating factors, the commonalities at the basis of sharing misinformation are startlingly obvious: people share information because they believe it to be true and have prior familiarity with the information (Buchanon, 2020). However, indication of author authority, consensus, and digital literacy are not consistent variables of the sharing of disinformation; therefore, if people already believe the information to be true and have seen it before, they are more likely to share the information without checking facts (Buchanon, 2020). If people had a bad experience with schools and teachers, they may look for negative stories about schools and teachers. Furthermore, because people are more likely to engage with like-minded people, it is unlikely they will face opposing viewpoints but rather the same stream of misinformation to reaffirm their beliefs (Chadwick et al., 2018).

Two Groups Most Likely to Share Misinformation

While anyone can share misinformation, the two groups most likely to share misinformation are uneducated men in their 20s and men in their 50s and older, regardless of their level of education; both groups are most often men who score lower in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and higher in Extraversion and Neuroticism (Buchanon, 2020; Chadwick et al., 2018). In fact, younger men are even more likely to share misinformation than their older counterparts, especially if they have a high level of disagreeability (Buchanon, 2020). If a person has a high level of disagreeability, it is highly likely that person had difficulty with the daily rules and procedures of school as a student and lacked positive educational experiences during their own educational experience. For these reasons, it is important to allow this person to feel heard and treat them with the careful respect that they may feel that they have not been paid in the past (Buchanon, 2020; Coombs, 1995).

If the sharer of misinformation is low in agreeability, they will also be unlikely to correct the misinformation previously shared, even if they now understand the errors in the information previously shared. For this reason, it is not recommended to engage in public conflict with these personalities, but rather, correct the misinformation with simply stated facts and then move on (Chadwick et al., 2018; Coombs, 1995).

Distrust and the Bandwagon Effect

It is not surprising that the individuals who rated the lowest on the agreeableness scale were found to be the most likely to subscribe to conspiracy theories and share misinformation, especially if they perceive that a large number of people agree with them (Chadwick et al., 2018). Agreeableness is often associated with trusting behavior; therefore, disagreeable individuals are more likely to subscribe to conspiracy theories and lack trust in government

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institutions, including schools (Buchanan, 2020). They are often attracted to misinformation and disinformation because the articles tend to be critical and negative, thus reaffirming their cynical outlooks (Buchanan, 2020).

While many disagreeable people claim they prefer to stand alone in their beliefs, contentious personalities are especially susceptible to the bandwagon effect, which is amplified when bots are used (Buchanan, 2020). Bots are a network of computers designed to quickly share information on platforms, such as Twitter, through the use of fake accounts to give the illusion of consensus, are especially effective on disagreeable sharers of misinformation because they feel that they have the acceptance of other like-minded people (Buchanan, 2020). These personality types are often not concerned with offending others and do not mind making a public display of their beliefs, especially if they are surrounded by people who share their beliefs. Correcting these individuals with the facts is advisable and then professionally move away without engaging in conflict (Buchanan, 2020; Coombs, 1995). An even more efficient method of providing further information would be to invite the “leader” of a group for a one-to-one conversation to dispel misconceptions. That being stated, do not expect these individuals to retract past statements publicly or admit errors (Coombs, 1995).

Schools and Disinformation

Since CRT has become a buzz word used by political leaders, educators will be forced to face a couple of hard realities. Schools and educators are easy targets for politically motivated disinformation; CRT will probably not be the final disinformation attack (Ujifusa, 2021). Just as having children can bring parties together, the emotions accompanying parenthood can also divide. Schools, unlike large corporations, do not have budgets and staff for a public relations department, and educators are sometimes befuddled for the right words to use in response to

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controversy. Yet another uncomfortable reality is that while the current entropy over CRT will eventually fade, the creation of restrictive laws that target teachers and ban entire areas of exploration will prove to be challenging for educators for many years to come, so remaining silent is simply not an option (Ujifusa, 2021). Chief Advocacy Officer for the National School Boards Association Chip Slaven has stated that local school officials should clarify that CRT is not taught in schools and then emphasize what schools are doing instead (Ujifusa, 2021). Chip Slaven is correct that schools must directly address the misinformation . . . but, how?

Using Transformational Leadership to Minimize Misinformation

After examining the turbulent history surrounding CRT, many educators may feel they want to avoid any mention of race in schools entirely; however, the research on transformational leadership theory, crisis communication, and public information management, Carol Epstein's six types of parental involvement, and proposed bipartisan understandings of CRT education indicate that the best way for educators to navigate the storm of CRT misinformation is to proactively maintain transparency with all stakeholders while preserving the educational integrity of our schools. Therefore, the following two-pronged section including an external team-building strategy with families and community members and internal curriculum review and professional development approaches have been written to inform educational leaders of proactive strategies of information management and relationship building that will minimize misinformation sharing, further develop the expertise of teachers, enhance curriculum, and maintain positive school and community cultures. By understanding the importance of school community building, assessing the misinformation crisis and climate in schools, choosing the appropriate response, proactively managing positive messaging and relationship building through transformational leadership with all stakeholders, reviewing curriculum, crafting professional

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development, and establishing a school, family, and community partnership focused on building trust in the school, educational leaders will be better able to navigate discussing sensitive issues while maintaining a positive school culture and the integrity of the curriculum. In order to maintain an unbiased approach to educational methodologies and strategies, the following section is primarily based on the research and reflections of Professor Timothy Coombs, the authority on Crisis Communication Management (2014); Carol Epstein and S.L. Sheldon, authors of “Necessary but not sufficient: the role of policy for advancing programs of school, family, and community partnerships” (2016); Leslie S. Kaplan and William A. Owings, educators and authors of “Countering the furor around critical race theory” (2021); and James Copland Senior Fellow and Director of Legal Policy at the Manhattan Institute, Conservative American Think Tank on Domestic Policy and Urban Affairs (2021).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, developed by Barnard M. Bass functions as a model for school leadership, in which the leader strives to raise followers' level of consciousness on the value of goals and desired outcomes, inspire followers to think past their own self-interests for the sake of the whole, and empower followers to self-actualization (Mora, 2012). Therefore, transformational leadership can be used to unite individuals who have opposing viewpoints to reach a common ground for the shared goal of a quality, accurate education for all children (Mora, 2012). Building a team of educators and parents to set and achieve the shared goals of building and maintaining positive relationships with families and communities, while minimizing the sharing of misinformation about the school, can be a powerful platform upon which a positive school and community culture can be built to counteract the disinformation that can negatively affect your school culture.

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It is not surprising that when families and schools work together, students are able to achieve more; therefore, when educational leaders utilize shared leadership with the professionals in their building and district and then expand to outreach to parents, students report that they feel more comfortable and motivated in school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). While the schools in the United States continue to become more diverse culturally, racially, economically, and linguistically, outreach programs to families have become more important than ever before because the positive interactions and trust that has been built between the school and families help to minimize spread and belief in negative misinformation viewed online (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021).

Understanding Problem, Needs of Followers, and Aligning Goals

The initial tenets of transformational leadership must be applied to the misinformation crisis within one's own school, which is seeking to understand the problem, learn the needs of your followers, and then work with others to align goals (Bass, 2006; Focus 3, 2018). While applying transformational leadership, it is important for an educational leader to assess the extent of CRT misinformation sharing within the school, assess the needs of teachers, align common goals to create a proactive approach to discussing CRT, maintain a positive school culture, preserve, and enhance the integrity of the school curriculum.

Assessing the misinformation crisis includes understanding the details of the crisis, categorizing the type of crisis, and determining the outline of next steps to address the crisis (Social Media, 2010). The first steps of assessing the misinformation crisis are scanning for negative comments, determining the importance of the person spreading the misinformation, and forecasting the potential for spread (Social Media, 2010). The scanning for negative comments can be done by a member or members of the School, Parent, Community Partnership. (The

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creation of the partnership will be further explained in a later section of this study.) Furthermore, all three types of online crises are present in the example of CRT, which are false rumors, complaints, and the most dangerous: challenging current practices by claiming what the school is doing is wrong (Social Media, 2010). Therefore, the initial steps of the action plan must incorporate being seen by creating an online and media movement blatantly addressing the misinformation and going to the sources who are launching the complaints with an approach of engagement, rather than intimidation (Social Media, 2010). It should be noted that there is a glaring need for transparency on the part of the schools to dispel misinformation because the schools have nothing to hide and have been falsely accused.

Professor Timothy Coombs, an authority on Crisis Communication Management, once made the comparison that social media crises can “eat an institution’s reputation” at astonishing speed, much like the way that “zombies eat brains” (NEMO, 2013; 06:47). Not only can misinformation move at lightning speed like the virus spreading to create zombies, but it can also cause lasting damage if left unchecked, thus leaving the victims of the misinformation zombies struggling to move forward because the “viruses” in both cases pass quickly among individuals and gain virulence (NEMO, 2013; 06:47). Therefore, schools must learn to assess the crisis itself, identify the type of crisis, choose the right response strategy, and then create an action plan that addresses the motivations of those who spread misinformation and the means of spreading misinformation (Social Media, 2010).

Choosing the Right Response Strategy

Of course, the chosen response strategy will vary according to the crisis; however, in the case of CRT, the only appropriate response strategy is the “non-existence strategy” because schools have been left in the unfortunate situation of defending themselves against the lies that

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imply that teachers are trying to brainwash and shame children regarding racial identity (Coombs, 1995). It is important to note that the school is not denying any form of teaching the sensitive topics of race and oppression; the school is denying that intentional public shaming and brainwashing are being taught in the school. The non-existence strategy is essentially denying the presence of the crisis in the first place; if no crisis exists, there is no reason to discuss the negative consequences of the “supposed crisis” (Coombs, 1995, p. 450). The four micro-strategies involved in the non-existence strategy are clarification, providing further explanation of why there is no crisis, attack, and intimidation (Coombs, 1995). The last two options are not recommended to be used by schools; however, providing clear communication regarding further explanation of why there is no crisis should be the most important strategy when schools are approaching communication regarding CRT (Coombs, 1995). It is most helpful when educational leaders debunk and deny the misinformation while explaining the actual situation and include evidence to support their position (Coombs, 2014).

Example of a Non-Existence Explanation

A school’s website should be regarded as the center for answers in a school community, and a campaign to train all stakeholders to go to the school’s website when seeking information should take place before a crisis (NEMO, 2013). Therefore, the initial step of any school system should be to devise a fanciful campaign (that has nothing to do with negative media) to allow all students, parents, and staff to become accustomed to checking the school’s website frequently.

Once website frequency has been established, a statement denying negative practices and providing further explanation on CRT should be strategically placed on the site providing a transparent, easily understood message to dispel misconceptions regarding CRT (Coombs, 2014). For example, “We at Proactive City Schools do not teach negative self-identification or

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perceptions of one's own culture because it is not and has never been a curriculum standard or learning goal. We teach your children to treat others with respect and compassion, just as you do in your homes. We value the well-being of your child and all children, as we work together to meet each child's educational needs with the utmost academic integrity as evidenced by our tradition of student achievement success." The statement fulfills the requirements of a non-existence strategy regarding an "educational crisis" because it is true, specific, provides additional explanation, difficult to argue against, and uses straightforward wording (Coombs, 1995, 2014). Caution should be noted regarding all educators' responses to parents and community members.

While the Ohio Education Association has now adopted the attack strategy in press releases regarding House Bill 327, it is not advisable for teachers, principals, and other administrators to adopt the attack strategy when communicating with stakeholders (Coombs, 1995; Olmstead, 2022). House Bill 327 was written to prohibit the advocating, teaching, or discussing divisive concepts in the classroom (Olmstead, 2022). On February 16, 2022, Katie Olmstead, the Media Relations Consultant for the Ohio Education Association, issued a formal press release condemning House Bill 327, stating that the bill, which has been created in response to the CRT disinformation campaign, is an effort by certain lawmakers to whitewash American history and shirk their duties to fund all Ohio public schools, utilizing the non-existence strategies of mortification, clarification, and attack to provide further explanation to voters regarding the association's stance on the bill (Coombs, 1995; Olmstead, 2022). Verbiage such as the Ohio Education Association being "appalled" illustrate the overall tone of mortification of the piece. The strong opening of the release utilizes both an appeal to reason and the bandwagon effect in a statement that is even more poignant because it is true. "The Ohio

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Education Association (OEA) stands with the majority of Ohioans who believe all children deserve the opportunity to receive an honest and reflective education that empowers them to become critical thinkers and strong future leaders” (Olmstead, 2022, page 1). The opening is the perfect example of a statement responding to disinformation because it is true and would prove difficult to show public disagreement.

However, the aspect of the release that should prove especially effective is the clear, bold manner in which the release was written. The wording of the statement from OEA President Scott DiMauro is a bold attack against the creators of disinformation.

“Make no mistake, this latest version of HB 327 is just another exercise in smoke and mirrors by some state leaders to deflect their constitutional responsibility to fully fund all of Ohio’s public schools and provide Ohio’s children with the resources they need to succeed,” OEA President Scott DiMauro said. “The lawmakers behind this horrendous bill can dress it up anyway they want as they continue to do the bidding of a national network of extremists who are looking to control the political narrative at any cost. But this new version is just as outrageous and inexcusable as the prior version. And in some ways, it’s *worse*” (Olmstead, 2022, p. 1).

Notice that the direct language choice mimics the same bombastic style often used in disinformation regarding CRT. However, this release is written without the religious, manipulative undertones. It should further be noted that this is the first release where the OEA has used a direct attack method and actually named “a national network of extremists who are looking to control the political narrative at any cost” (Olmstead, 2022, page 1). While I still maintain that schools should use caution and avoid the attack method when dealing with disinformation, I do think I would make a point of posting this press release in a prominent

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location on a school's website. We are educators who must utilize transformational leadership strategies to engage all parties involved in the common goal of educating children -- *not politicians*.

External Approach: Create a School, Family, and Community Partnership

Once transformational leadership, crisis communication management, and the non-existent strategy have been established as the overarching theories, educational leaders must begin the external approach by partnering with families and community members to build a team of individuals moving toward the shared goal of creating a positive, equitable school and community culture. While much of this study has centered on technology, educational leaders should be mindful that schools are a “people business,” and it will be the human bond with those both within and without the school that will manifest the advancement of common goals (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021).

Six Types of Parental Involvement

The legendary work of Carol Epstein's six types of parental involvement overlaps with the indicators of public relations and community involvement in “Linking Administrative Performance of Principals Vis-à-vis Public Relations and Community Involvement” to demonstrate that the conversations and attitudes expressed at home carry over into a child's learning at school (Sanders et al., 1998; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). According to Epstein, the six types of involvement are (1) helping families maintain home environments that support students; (2) communicating children's progress and school programs; (3) recruiting volunteers to help support school activities and functions; (4) providing ideas and information to help students to learn at home; (5) including parents in school decision making; (6) collaborating with the community to identify and integrate resources and services to support students, and the

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shared goal is to help each other to raise successful, healthy children (Sanders et al., 1998).

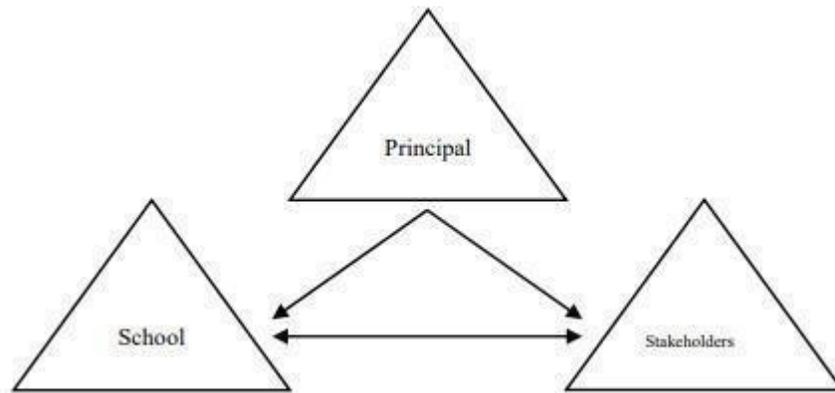
Epstein asserts that parents want to be involved in their children's education in varying ways, and children benefit from the involvement of their parents. Schools with high levels of parental support and involvement report higher levels of student comfort while attending school and higher academic achievement (Sanders et al., 1998). However, if parents have consumed negative disinformation about the school and the educators, parents may believe that schools are intentionally trying to manipulate, shame, or brainwash their children, and a total breakdown of the parental involvement framework occurs (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). Therefore, creating a good relationship with parents is a must.

The principal of a school often sets the tone for the entire school and facilitates communication among all stakeholders, so a principal who can build a team focused on building relationships and trust with the parents and community members will minimize the spread and belief in misinformation about the school (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021).

As illustrated in Figure 7: Principals Bridge the Gap of Communication, the school principal plays a vital role in bridging the communication gap that can form between the school and the various stakeholders, such as the families, businesses, community, and church leaders (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). Therefore, a principal who utilizes transformational leadership theory and works with stakeholders to build a positive relationship and messaging system can help to proactively showcase the positive achievements of educators and students while minimizing the spread of misinformation by keeping people informed and creating a sense of pride and community in one's school.

Figure 7

Principals Bridge the Gap of Communication



Note. (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021)

Create a Team Built on Trust

Since it is not possible for any one person to single-handedly run the daily operations of a school plus the many tasks involved in managing family and community partnerships, it is advisable to create a team of parents and educational leaders who fulfill authentic roles of family and community relationship building, hosting events and supplying the website and messaging system with creative content about the school, which will help to inspire trust among the school's stakeholders (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Mora, 2012). The team should be equally composed of staff and parents, with one staff member (who is not the principal) assigned to lead the parent and community partnerships. While most districts have mission statements and policies stating the desire to partner with families and communities, many do not have designated leaders or teams of people to make the goals a reality (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The educational leader of the partnerships will need excellent communication skills and the ability to remain transparent and logical, even when faced with a disinformation crisis (Coombs, 1995).

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In “Three Capabilities for Student-Centered Leadership,” Viviane Robinson asserts that when choosing a staff member to lead the partnership, leadership is not a heroic endeavor, but rather a balancing act in which an effective leader must be able to exhibit capability in applying relevant knowledge, complex problem solving, and relationship building (2011). In order for an educational leader to be effective, a strong collective capability across the three areas is desirable; therefore, the individual need not have vast, in-depth knowledge of all three areas (Robinson, 2011). While having good ideas is important, an effective leader must be able to put those ideas into action and make evaluations with up-to-date evidence (Robinson, 2011).

The trust among the partnership must be pervasive and consistent because inspiring trust in the school and its educators is part of the shared goal of the team. It is important to note that students and staff in high-trust schools make more academic and social progress than individuals in similar low-trust schools; therefore, the ability to not only know the principles of relationship building in an educational setting but also to apply the principles to daily practice within the school is a must (Robinson, 2011). In short, the people chosen to be in the partnership must exhibit a sincere commitment to building and maintaining confidence in the school and the school’s leadership.

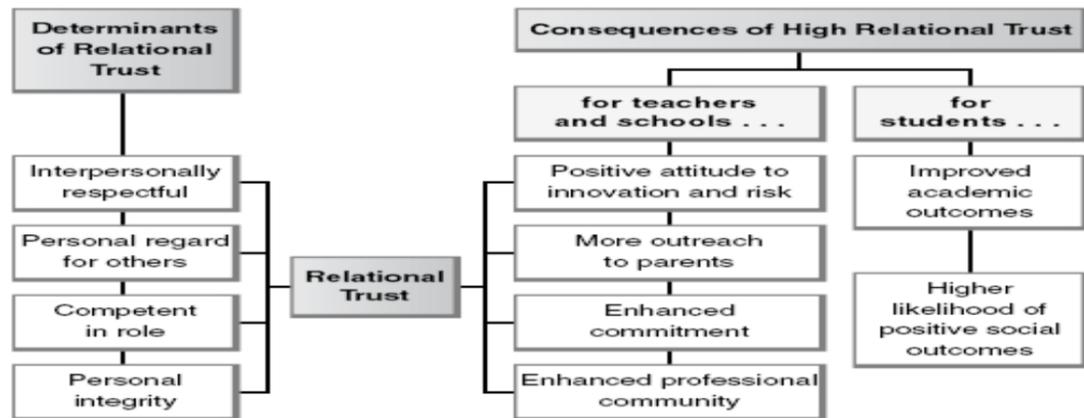
One of the most important shared goals of the School, Parent, and Community Partnership is to inspire and maintain trust by all stakeholders in the integrity and value of the school by contributing to the school’s website and messaging system, as well as appropriately responding to misinformation crisis situations (Robinson, 2011). Therefore, each member of the team will build relationships and submit content to the school website and messaging system that reinforces the value of trust in the educators and school. As illustrated in Figure 8: How Relational Trust Works in Schools, the determinants of trust, such as respect, personal regard,

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competence, and personal integrity, are bridged by relational trust. The end results of the relational trust benefit the entire school and stakeholders.

Figure 8

How Relational Trust Works in Schools



Note. (Robinson, 2011, p. 307)

Therefore, with the increase in trust in the schools and educational leaders, the community enjoys a “spillover effect” of pride in schools and community that deters the negativity of misinformation sharing and an increase in participation in school activities by students, parents, and community members (Robinson, 2011). An example of an appropriate response to a general negative accusation targeting schools that demonstrates a high degree of relational trust would be, “I am unsure of the situation you are talking about in other schools, but I can assure you that our teachers are not doing that *here!*” Notice that while the response does not argue the validity of the accusation for other areas, the speaker maintains and asserts confidence in their own school. When relational trust has been built among stakeholders, the willingness to believe and share misinformation is low (Robinson, 2011).

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Another vital component to the School, Family, and Community Partnership is enabling the school to maintain a presence in community organizations; therefore, a member of the team should be assigned to community organization outreach and membership (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013). It is important that the educational leaders build relationships with the same community organization and religious leaders whose voices are heard throughout the community because the more that parents, students, and community members view educators with those they trust, the more trust is instilled in the schools. Furthermore, community leaders have a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer to the educational experience of young people.

Parents Want More Involvement

Educational leaders should assign parents who are and are not on the partnership team authentic roles and responsibilities, and should invite them into the school often (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013). Students benefit from parental involvement during the school day because parents often have many talents, skills, and experiences to share that offer an enriching experience for students, and students who attend schools with high parental involvement demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement overall (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The outdated practice of only allowing parents to host social events and coordinate fundraising must be abandoned in order to embrace the idea of inviting parents and community members into our classrooms as partners in education. By school districts taking an active role in inviting parents and community members into the schools as tutors, mentors, guest speakers, and expert consultants, a true community is built, where individuals are less likely to believe and share misinformation about the school because they have had positive firsthand experiences in the schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013).

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Inviting parents to attend school events and to participate in the curriculum means inviting *all parents often and repeatedly*. It is no secret that parental involvement often declines at the middle and high school levels; however, the older students are at a critical age where they are forming opinions of the world around them (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013). The students in the upper grades and the entire school community benefit from widespread parent involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013). It is also important to involve parents of color and lower socioeconomic status.

Many schools have weak connections with families of color; however, a truly equitable learning environment should be a welcoming environment for all people and making the school a welcoming place for all individuals must be a priority (Brown, 2022; Yull et al., 2018). In the wake of the politically turbulent, racially-charged recent school years, it is understandable that many parents of color do not feel wholly comfortable walking into school buildings, considering that over 70% of educators in the United States are White, and many educators express the misconception that parents of color choose to be uninvolved with their children's education because they do not care (Brown, 2022; Yull et al., 2018).

A diverse team of parents, community members, and school staff can set the pace for an equitable school culture and dispel many of the incorrect assumptions that accompany CRT misinformation (Yull et al., 2018). However, the school must reconsider their practices to encourage all parents to become involved. The disengagement between schools and families of color is explained in "Reversing the Dehumanization of Families of Color in Schools: Community-Based Research in a Race-Conscious Parent Engagement Program."

School districts across the U.S. often maintain a stance of disengagement with families of color because deficit-model thinking has led to assumptions by school personnel that

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parents of color are unable to make meaningful contributions to their children's education. This perception of parents of color, coupled with the fact that a disproportionate number of students of color live in economically disenfranchised households, often with parents who have limited education, creates an environment where parents may feel less competent and sometimes intimidated when attempting to engage with school professionals (Yull et al., 2018, p. 333).

Because of these assumptions, it is important for educators to not only invite all parents but invite parents at times they can attend. Not all parents can attend meetings during the school day because of their work schedules, so being flexible and offering virtual options helps to alleviate the conflict. Educators need to provide clear, detailed communication on how parents becoming involved in the school is beneficial to their students' success (Brown, 2022). Most importantly, many parents of color have a wealth of experience and knowledge to offer that can enrich the learning experience of our students. The more that educators tap into that wealth of knowledge and invite families and community members into the learning process, the more the walls of racism and disinformation will disintegrate.

Internal Approach: Curriculum Review and Professional Development

While this study has focused on the external approach of minimizing the spread of misinformation about CRT, approaching the topic internally is equally important because the ongoing conversation about race has changed in this country, and it is possible that the curriculum, teaching strategies, and approaches to culturally sensitive topics must be addressed in all schools. In *Ethics is the Act of Seeing*, Don Heider points out that when people are taught to make ethical decisions, one of the first steps is to make sure that all information is present to make an informed choice (2020). Therefore, the ethical frameworks of the consequentialist and

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virtue must be applied to this dilemma in order to comply with restrictive laws and regulations that have been handed down by legislatures and school boards while preserving authentic curriculum in an equitable learning environment, and just as all decisions made by an educational leader, the best interest of children and care should be the guiding principle (Bass, 2018; Framework, 2021).

The consequences of today's actions on our learners must always be considered; therefore, the utilitarian approach with a focus on producing the most good should be applied to a curriculum review with the principal modeling the role of the ethical ally (Bass, 2018; Skeet, 2019). Kaplan and Owings, educators and authors of "Countering the Furor Around Critical Race Theory," advise that all educational leaders read the laws and guidelines that have been written by their state and local school boards and then discuss the implementation of these laws and guidelines with the superintendent before the start of a new school year (2021). Vague wording should be identified, and a clear understanding of the rules in play should be achieved so that educational leaders might advise their teachers on ways to best teach a rich, diverse curriculum without conflict within the school community (Kaplan & Owings, 2021).

Building community is important in order to produce the most good, so it is advisable that principals should create a team of administrators and teachers of social studies and language arts to assess their school's climate regarding CRT, as well as review the existing curriculum (Bass, 2018; Kaplan & Owings, 2021; Skeet, 2019). The team should discuss their perceptions of how the controversial topic of CRT seems to have impacted the students, parents, and teachers. It may be necessary to survey the entire staff to consider the following questions: Does your teaching staff have an accurate, applicable understanding of CRT? Does your staff have misconceptions or even fears regarding CRT? Does CRT seem to be a "hot-button" topic

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for your school? Does the existing curriculum include components of CRT? How is the theory taught? Principals should be sure to relate any questions or concerns to the superintendent and invite the superintendent's guidance, if needed.

Bipartisan Agreement Before Setting Shared Goals

An important facet of transformational leadership is being able to build a team, where many voices are heard, and create shared goals (Mora, 2012). Likewise, today's leaders are called upon to be both strategists for the organization and citizens with responsibilities to society (Skeet, 2018). Therefore, it is important that educational leaders model the utilitarian goal of producing the most good for all stakeholders within the laws and the virtuous goal of creating ethical learners (Skeet, 2018). In order to create shared goals regarding a review of curriculum within a school, certain basic agreements must be built as the platform upon which the goals may be created. The following list of understandings should be discussed among the team members and agreed upon before the shared goals are set. These understandings were largely derived from "How to Regulate Critical Race Theory in Schools: A Primer and Model Legislation" by James Copland and "Countering the Furor Around Critical Race Theory," by Leslie S. Kaplan and William A. Owings, educators and authors as a proposed representation of a bipartisan understanding and objective representation of the education of all children in as equitable an environment as possible.

Table 2

Bipartisan Understandings of CRT Education

Education on CRT should NOT:

- **Suffocate the marketplace of ideas.** However, all CRT education (just as all other forms of education) must be in accordance with the guidelines set by the local school board (Copland, 2021; Kaplan & Owings, 2021).

- **Determine or discourage classroom discussion of racism and race, past and current.**

Schools should not be encouraged to “whitewash” history by failing to adequately teach historical atrocities that were racially motivated. Copland, Senior Fellow and Director of Legal Policy Manhattan Institute Conservative Education Think Tank cautioned, “Although limiting such discussions does not appear to be the intent of the overwhelming majority of Critical Race Theory–inspired legislation introduced around the country, poorly drafted statutes could unintentionally deter appropriate instruction” (2021, p.6).

- **Base curriculum on individual student “distress” or “discomfort.”** Some students may become uncomfortable during the teaching of certain texts or historical lessons—subjective student or parent concerns should not have implicit “veto power” over curriculum (Copland, 2021; Kaplan & Owings, 2021).

Review and Revamp Curriculum

For all of the publicity that book burnings have received recently, the one fact that is seldom discussed is that schools in all cultures teach their nation’s history to educate their students in their society’s origins, principles, and government in an effort to instill pride, loyalty,

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and respect for their country and ancestors (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). The use of the Romantic tradition crosses most cultures to encourage citizens to love their country. Authors carefully include and exclude information to present a collective memory among citizens and present their country in a positive light. Therefore, when watching footage of angry parents burning books, one should consider that many times those parents have those learned archetype characters in their collective memories and experience extreme discomfort at any disruption in their learned Romantic history, and only one-sixth of Americans have had exposure to a college history class (Kaplan & Owings, 2021).

Education on Marginalized People: More Than One Month

When opening the curriculum up for review, educators should implement the study of the histories and accomplishments of all marginalized people and many approaches to the American experience throughout the traditional curriculum instead of simply dropping in a few histories of people of color during Black History Month (Farag, 2021). Furthermore, previous educational studies often focused on improving the educational experiences of students of color instead of how teachers can better educate all students (including students who are White) with a wide range of learning and experiences from many voices and many ethnicities.

Professional Development

It is understandable that given the political furor and misinformation that has been expended in the name of CRT that many educators would feel uncomfortable attending a professional development session that focuses on the topic; however, educational institutions either reproduce inequalities or correct inequalities. Diversity of thought is a critical element of decision-making bodies, and consequentialist reasoning dictates that there will be consequences to all decisions made (Brown 2022; Skeet, 2018). An equitable educational atmosphere is in the

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standards of quality education, and educators owe it to all students to help to create a culture of equity for all students (Frag, 2021).

When creating professional development that addresses CRT, the presentation should cover the history and definition of CRT, actual verbiage of laws and guidelines, methods to keep class discussions institutional instead of personal, and ways to keep the teaching age appropriate (Frag, 2021; Singleton & Hays, n.d.). By providing educators with a brief history and definition of CRT, as well as the laws and guidelines, much of the tensions that teachers may be feeling about the topic may dissipate.

The presentation should also include the concept that CRT centers on systems and structures and not the guilt of individuals while keeping discussions of race age appropriate. Therefore, no person who identifies as White should feel guilty that these institutions that were created before students were born exist (Frag, 2021). The age of the students should also guide the conversations. The focus of the conversations in the primary grades should be simply kindness and equality for all people while reserving the more graphic history and study of institutions for the teaching of older children (Singleton & Hays, n.d.). By discussing the entire history of an oppressive system, CRT can be viewed as a unifying force showing that racial divides and oppression hold all people back in different ways and inhibits the growth of an entire society. The focus of the conversations can be to improve society's institutions for all people.

Theoretical Framework Design

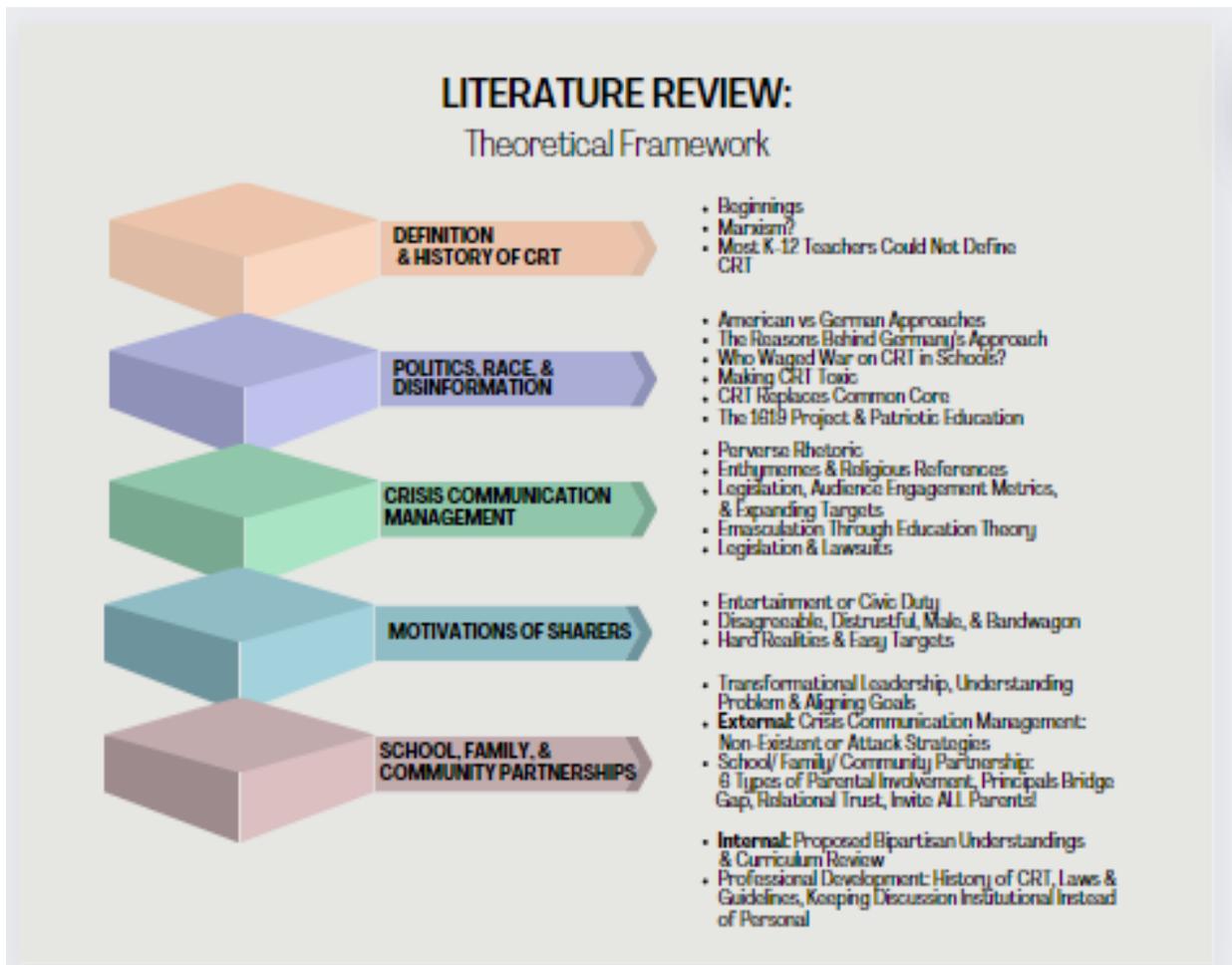
The following Theoretical Framework Diagram represented in Figure 9 outlines the theories that were presented in this chapter and their relationship to the disinformation campaign. The intention is that the reader may be able to understand and apply the principles of these

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theories to the CRT disinformation campaign and the intentional effects on American schools and curriculums.

Figure 9

Literature Review: Theoretical Framework



Conclusion

The only way to break the echo chambers of allegations is from all sides and by all means, both externally and internally – especially through in-person relationship building for the common interest of our children. The external approach of creating a School, Parent, Community Partnership is important and influential in disseminating and minimizing the damaging effects of disinformation to all aspects of a school's culture, and the most effective way to break the echo

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chamber of allegations is through positive in-person interaction with the school community to create a new “in-group” (Kim, 2019). According to “Directionality of information flow and echoes without chambers,” the negative messaging of disinformation creates a “spiral of segregation” in the user, who is convinced that they have obtained privileged information and are a member of the “in-group” who thinks like themselves (Kim, 2019, p. 18). Realistically, an individual’s thinking will not change easily after a steady diet of online disinformation; however, repeated positive exchanges coupled with positive online messaging from the school can suppress previously negative evaluations of schools and create a sense of belonging to the school community. In short, the more individuals break the cycle of consuming negative disinformation about educators and schools and have positive experiences, especially in-person experiences, the more likely they are to become supportive of the schools and less combative about educational issues.

Through transformational leadership and team building, educators can break the cycle of misinformation by using critically reflective practices to improve the curriculum. This critical insight will better equip teachers to inform the misinformed and discuss race in the classroom. While the CRT disinformation campaign has intentionally damaged the trust levels invested in our schools and our educators, repairing those levels of trust is possible with intentional and informed change. Therefore, educational leaders must stand on the solid ground of learning and the research to build relationships with families and communities while leading their staff in the same quest to logically, equitably unify people and curriculums to minimize the ongoing damage of misinformation to our educational system, and most importantly, our children.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

“Research design is the glue that holds the research project together”

(Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 158).

This study was designed to explore the statistical relationship between superintendents’ perceptions of CRT posts and allegations in relation to school, family, and community relationships as well as student behaviors. This mixed method study consisted of a non-experimental survey based on key variables gathered from existing research. The first part of the instrument included four demographic questions that focused on the school district where each participant was employed. The demographic questions included type of school, race of students, number of students qualifying for free lunch, and political affiliations of the residents in the communities the school districts serve. The remainder of the questionnaire included one checkbox question to select media consumption sources, three yes/ no questions, seven questions designed to assess the variables presented in the hypothesis based on the Likert scale. The survey then contained five qualitative questions to allow the participants to share their perceptions further. Very few participants answered the qualitative questions, so the qualitative portion of this study is limited. However, the study remains a mixed method study because it gathered and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data. The study was non-experimental because the participants’ perceptions could not be manipulated by the researcher (Belli, 2008). A word of caution is stated to the reader that the data is not generalizable because the participant sample was so small (only 14); however, the research data remains meaningful because it provides a snapshot of the perceptions of CRT and schools,

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

The research questions emerged from the theoretical framework and the review of literature. These questions were designed to determine administrators' levels of understanding and perceived changes as a result of CRT. The central question for the study was as follows: Do Ohio Superintendents think that CRT social media posts, allegations, and disruptions have changed school, family, and community partnerships? Do Ohio Superintendents think that CRT posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions have changed the number of student conflicts?

The following research questions were used to support the central question:

1. How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of understanding of CRT?
2. How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations regarding the use of CRT in the K-12 classroom?
3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions?
4. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts?
5. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and school, family, and community partnerships?

Hypotheses

H₀: There is no relationship between CRT social media posts and allegations and student conflicts and school, family, and community partnerships.

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H₁: There is a relationship between CRT social media posts and allegations and student conflicts and school, family, and community partnerships.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a mixed method design is a complex juggling act of post-positivism and interpretivism paradigms, as well as convergent parallel interpretation (Dawadi, et al., 2021). The positivism approach to research is best described as focusing on the objectivity of the research; however, post-positivism has a mild outlook on the research. While post-positivism encompasses the same principles of objectivity, the researcher must understand that there is room for subjectivity, as well (Dawadi, et al., 2021). Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used in the survey. The interpretivism paradigm is the belief that social interactions are subjective, and as a result, multiple realities can exist (Dawadi, et al., 2021). To apply interpretivism to this study, it is possible for a participant to report high levels of allegations and disruptions, yet write an answer for the open-ended question reporting that CRT allegations have not been an issue in their school district. It is for this reason that the convergent parallel interpretation was used on the data from the surveys. The convergent parallel interpretation is the gathering of the quantitative data in the survey as well as the qualitative data and then comparing the two, noting similarities and discrepancies of the two bodies of data (Dawadi, et al., 2021). I utilized both data sets to prove or disprove the hypotheses.

Participants and Data Collection

The trust among the partnerships of the schools, families, and communities must be pervasive and consistent because students and staff in high-trust schools make more academic and social progress than individuals in similar low-trust schools (Robinson, 2011). Therefore, I surveyed Ohio superintendents on their levels of understanding of CRT and preparedness to

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respond to allegations, as well as their perceptions of the impact of the allegations on student behavior and school, family, and community partnerships since discussions of CRT became prevalent in formal and informal media.

Ohio: Changing Demographics

Ohio's changing demographics of race, socioeconomic status, and politics makes the state the ideal microcosm that is representative of many of the changes occurring in the rest of the country currently (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Ohio, 2023). While Ohio still has a larger White population that is 5% larger than the National Average, the Black and Hispanic populations in the state are responsible for the majority of the state's population growth (Ohio, 2023).

However, the socioeconomics of Ohio is indicative of the wage gap taking place throughout the country with Blacks earning \$36,929 and Hispanics earning a median income of \$52,100; both subgroups are significantly under the median household income of \$62,300 (Ohio, 2023). The political trends of Ohio have been progressively leaning toward a predominantly Republican state that is able to heavily influence presidential elections (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021). To put these numbers into perspective, a superintendent, who has worked in education over the last decade would have witnessed the increase in the wage gap among Ohioans represented in the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch each year.

Participants and Justification of Sample Size

I attempted to survey all 613 superintendents in the state of Ohio; however, I could only obtain 210 email addresses from the Ohio Educational Directory System website. A total of 198 emails were received by Ohio superintendents, and 14 participants submitted the survey, which is 7.07 % of the total invited to respond to the survey after the initial distribution and two subsequent reminder distributions in the assigned time frame. G* Power Analysis is often used to

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determine the optimal sample size for a study before data collection begins (Field, 2018). I chose not to use G* Power Analysis or sample alignment for the study because the controversy and sensitivity which surrounds CRT could discourage participation. As a result, the anonymity of the participants was intended to encourage participation. While the number of participants who chose to respond to the survey was beyond the control of me, the choice to survey superintendents was intentional based on the fact that these educators are often the people most likely to answer CRT allegations and make the decisions that influence the entire school district.

It should also be noted that while larger sample sizes reduce sampling error, the reduction is actually at a decreasing rate (Taherdoost, 2017). In fact, the formulas often used to determine sample size of a given population essentially have no effect on how well the given sample will describe the population. According to F. Fowler, it is unusual for a population fraction to be considered important when deciding on sample size (Taherdoost, 2017). So, while every effort was made by me to obtain as many participants as possible, the given sample size will not wholly describe the population, regardless of the number of surveys submitted to me.

Research Design

I utilized the Ohio Educational Directory System (OEDS) to obtain the email addresses of the 210 superintendents of Ohio public school districts. Of the 210 surveys distributed via Youngstown State University Alchemer software, 198 were received by potential participants, and 14 participants (7.07%) responded to the survey. The study was a mixed method, non-experimental, one-time survey study using a five point Likert scale, and the data obtained from the survey was then imported into the IBM-SPSS software for analysis performing an ordinal logistic regression, factor analysis, and additive index tests for possible correlations between independent variables. The qualitative, open-ended questions were included in the survey to

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solicit additional opinions and perceptions from the participants. The study was considered a mixed method, non-experimental design because there was no manipulated variable, control group, or random assignment (Field, 2018). The study was approved by the Youngstown State University Institutional Review Board on April 25, 2023.

The focus of the study was to consider the statistical relationships between Ohio superintendents' level of understanding of CRT and perceptions of changes in school cultures and partnerships and the demographics of the participants and their school districts. The purpose of this study was to collect descriptive statistics to assess if relationships exist between the independent variables of demographics and the participants' levels of understanding and perceptions.

Instrumentation and Measurement

Survey Instrument, Scale, and Permissions

Interviews or questionnaires can be used for survey research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This study used a self-report questionnaire that was sent via email to all superintendents in the state of Ohio. A single-case, descriptive study design was used so that I could study the effects and perceptions of CRT posts and allegations on student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships. Survey questions were written based on constructs that had emerged in the literature review. The survey was composed of twenty multiple choice questions to be rated on the Likert scale and open-ended qualitative questions (Korb, 2012). The open-ended questions were designed to explore deeper themes and perceptions that may present themselves as the participants answer the questions. These questions were added to provide participants with the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and observations on the effects of CRT on schools. Demographic questions were also added to provide additional information and

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context to the data gathered from the participants. No scale was used in this study; therefore, instrument alignment was not necessary.

Permission and Consent Materials

The permission to conduct research and the list of all Ohio superintendents was obtained from the YSU IRB page. The informed consent materials were not necessary since the survey was distributed via email. By responding to the email survey, the participants had provided consent (Trochim, 2016). The software used to collect data was SurveyMonkey. Once the data was collected, I input the data into the IBM: SPSS Statistics for analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in data analysis refers to the extent that the measurement is repeatable when other conditions and different persons and occasions take place (Drost, n.d.). One way to implement instrument reliability is to write as clear directions as possible. For this reason, an opening statement was written before the survey indicating that all participants would remain anonymous, so that participants would feel at ease to express their opinions. According to Nunnally (1978) a reliability of at least .90 is desirable (Drost, n.d.)

Validity

External validity is determined by the ability to generalize the results to other persons or places (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The external validity was affected by the sample size in this study. Because the sample size was fairly small, including only 14 superintendents, the external validity is low. However, the small sample may not be generalizable to all people in upper levels of educational management because this study only focused on superintendents in Ohio and did not include those working in other positions in educational institutions. According to Trochim

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and Donnelly (2008), threats to external validity may include, “. . . people, places, and time” (p. 36). This study only focused on one state on a specific population of individuals.

Furthermore, internal validity focuses on the, “. . . approximate truth about inferences regarding cause-effect or causal relationships” (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 158). This study observed and analyzed existing patterns present within the data. While no study can state that alternative explanations do not exist, it is not reasonable for this study to state with 100% certainty that the only factors involved are social media posts and allegations about CRT. According to Trochim and Donnelly (2008), “. . . the most straightforward way to rule out a potential threat to validity is simply to argue that the threat in question is not a reasonable one” (p. 233). Therefore, the series of ordinal logistic regression, factor analysis, and additive index tests could help to prove that a relationship existed between the variables.

Data Analysis & Analytic Strategy

Variables

The variables for this study were chosen based on the hypotheses and the research questions. Since quantitative research is deductive, the survey was written based on the variables needed to seek answers to the research questions (Newman & Covrig, 2013). The dependent variables in this study were the participants’ perceived level of understanding of CRT and the respondents’ estimated number of social media posts or comments from residents in their school district regarding CRT.

The dependent variable of the participants' perceived level of understanding of CRT measured the superintendents’ self-evaluation of their own comprehension of CRT as the concept applies to K-12 education. Over 60% of educators reported that they did not have a clear understanding of CRT prior to 2020, according to a study conducted by Farag (2021). Therefore,

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current educational leaders' perceived level of understanding of CRT was an important variable when analyzing the data reported by the participants. The participants rated their own level of knowledge of CRT by selecting options that indicated coursework taken, reading scholarly articles, and engaging in discussion, which then converted to ratings of excellent, above average, average, below average, or very poor on the Likert scale.

In addition, there was a second dependent variable, which measured the respondents' estimated number of social media posts or comments from residents in their school district regarding CRT. Since maintaining awareness of the communication stream that surrounds any organization is a vital component of leadership, the superintendents' estimation of the number of number of social media posts or comments from residents in their school district regarding critical race theory is indicative of the frequency of the misinformation messaging aligned with the Crisis Communication Management, Motivations of Sharers, and School, Community, and Family Partnerships theories (Coombs, 1995; Chadwick et al., 2018). The participants were asked to estimate the number of social media posts or comments from residents in their school district regarding CRT as not even one, 1-3 posts or comments, 4-7 posts or comments, 7-10 posts or comments, and over 10 posts or comments.

The control variable was the superintendents' perceived level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to in-depth questioning and allegations regarding CRT. The participants' perceived level of level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond functioned as an important control variable because if the superintendent already had proactive communication networks in place to minimize the spread of negative posts and allegations within their organization, their perceived level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management would be rated higher than one who did not have a network in

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place (Coombs, 2014). Frequency tables were used to draw correlations between the superintendents who rated themselves with an excellent or above average level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management and the dependent variable of frequency of posts as well as the independent variables regarding allegations, disruptions, and student conflicts.

The first set of independent variables were based on the demographics of the school districts where the participants were employed and the superintendents' reporting of the frequencies of allegations, disruptions, and student conflicts. The type of district variable was divided into the categories of Urban, Rural, and Suburban. The race demographics were divided into the categories of students of color and students who are White. The participants were asked to estimate the percentage of each race category of students in the district where they were employed. The socioeconomic makeup of the school district was divided into the categories of the percentage of students within the district who qualify for free or reduced lunch (less than 10%, 25% or less, 50% or less, 75% or less, and over 75%.) The reporting of the dominant political affiliation of the residents in the communities served by the participants' school districts was categorized by Democrat, Republican, Independent, even mix of Republican and Democrat, and unsure. Frequency tables were used to investigate possible correlations between the demographics of the school districts and the dependent variable of frequency of posts as well as the independent variables regarding allegations, disruptions, and student conflicts.

The second set of independent variables of the participants' estimated number of negative questions and allegations posed to superintendents by parents and community members about CRT in the last three years were designed to allow a reporting of the frequency of the occurrence of events. Because schools that are able to build strong partnerships with parents and community

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members enjoy higher student achievement, the overall condition of the relationships among these groups are important variables (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The participants were surveyed on their recollection of allegations about CRT posed by parents and community members over the last three years in separate questions to allow differentiation of stakeholders and behaviors. The participants were given the options of not even one question/ allegation, 1-3 negative questions/ allegations, 4-7 negative questions/ allegations, 7-10 negative questions/ allegations, and over 10 negative questions/ allegations. Frequency tables were used to investigate possible correlations among all variables.

The third set of independent variables of the participants' estimated recollection of the number of CRT allegations occurring at school board meetings and other public events and the number of school board meetings or school events that have been interrupted or become confrontational concerning CRT misinformation in the last three years were designed to allow a reporting of the frequency of the occurrence of events. For the variable of the number of CRT allegations occurring at school board meetings and other public events, the participants were given the options of not even one question/ allegation, 1-3 negative questions/ allegations, 4-7 negative questions/ allegations, 7-10 negative questions/ allegations, and over 10 negative questions/ allegations. For the reported number of school board meetings or school events that have been interrupted or becoming confrontational concerning critical race theory misinformation in the last three years, the participants were given the options of not one, 1-3 occasions, 4-7 occasions, 7-10 occasions, and over 10 occasions. Frequency tables were used to investigate possible correlations among all variables.

The independent variables of number of student to student conflicts and the estimation in changes to school, family, and community partnerships were the true thrust of the research

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project. If a breakdown in the partnership of the families, schools, and communities occurs, the results of that breakdown can be seen in a decline in student learning and behaviors (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Therefore, the number of student to student conflicts could be influenced by a lack of trust and negative messaging heard by the students at home and in the community. The reported trend of student to student conflicts over the last three years' variable was reported using the options decreased significantly, decreased slightly, no change, increased slightly, and increased significantly.

The independent variable of school, family, and community partnerships was the indicator of the atmosphere of the learning environment in schools. "School culture is dictated by rational, emotional, organizational, family and community, and alignment conditions" (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2001). Therefore, the superintendents' summation of any changes that occurred in school, family, and community partnerships in the last three years was a snapshot of the daily conditions of schools. The estimation of changes to school, family, and community partnerships was reported using no change, some negative change, a fair amount of negative change, severe negative change, and very severe negative change. All variables of the survey were considered and calculated in a series of analyses to seek the possible correlations to the variables of student conflicts and school, family, and community partnerships.

The final independent variable was the qualitative variable regarding the participants' opinions and perceptions regarding misinformation and CRT was used as an anecdotal addition to the quantitative data. The parallel convergent approach of comparing the qualitative responses to the quantitative data to interpret the application of this information to the hypothesis was used (Precision Consulting, 2018). While the quantitative data provided the numbers behind the

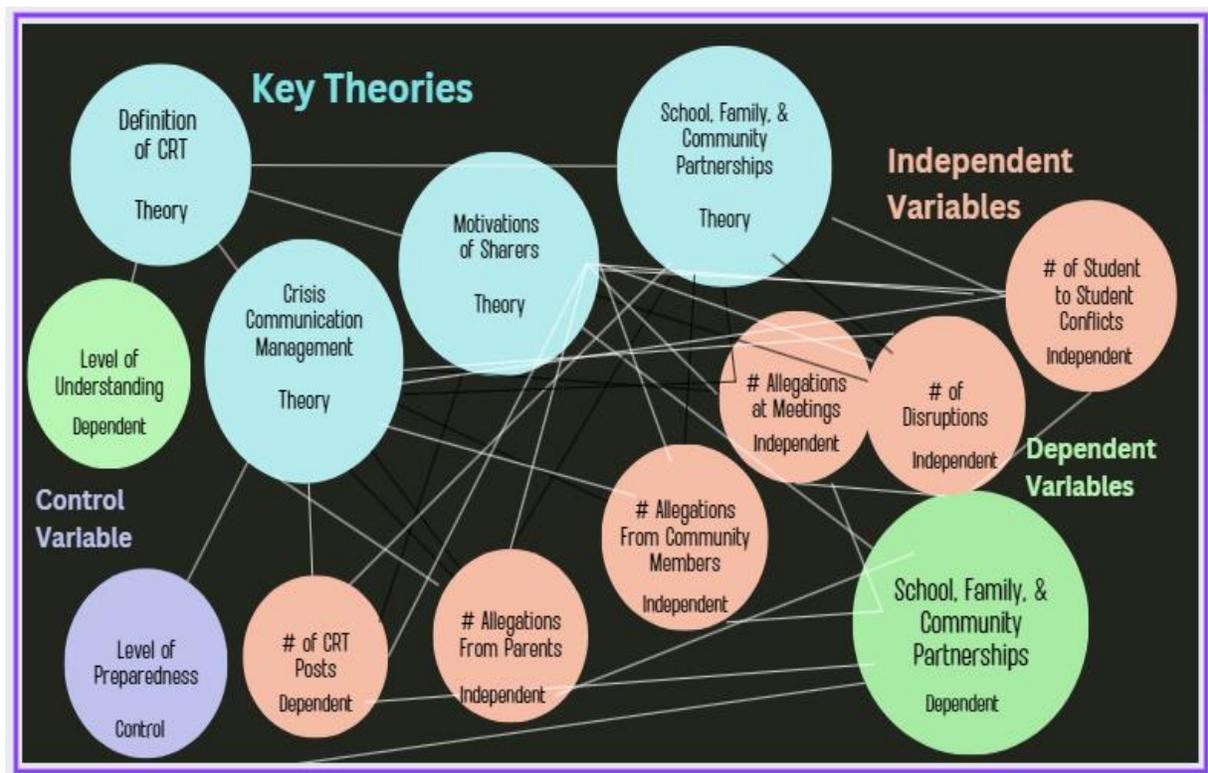
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variables allowing me to draw conclusions, the qualitative responses provided the participants with a voice to complement the interpretations of the quantitative data.

The Key Theories and Variables of Study, Figure 10, demonstrates the alignment and interconnections of the key theories and the variables. The definition of CRT is the theory behind the participants' level of understanding of CRT. Furthermore, crisis communication theory, motivations of sharers and school, family, and community partnerships are the theories that overarch the rest of the variables. However, the school, family, and community partnerships variable is shown as larger than the other variables on the figure because it is the most important and cumulative of the variables because the partnership often dictates the school culture and quality of education.

Figure 10

Key Theories and Variables of Study



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Table 3

Variable Alignment

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework	<p>Definition and History of CRT</p> <p>Motivations of Sharers</p> <p>School/ Family/ Community Partnerships</p> <p>Crisis Communication Management</p>
Research Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of understanding of CRT? 2. How do Ohio superintendents rate their own level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations regarding the use of CRT in the K-12 classroom? 3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents’ perceived level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions? 4. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts? 5. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and school, family, and community partnerships?
Propositions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ohio superintendents can lack the education and training needed to proactively respond to CRT allegations. 2. School, family, and community partnerships have been negatively affected by CRT allegations. 3. Student behavior has been negatively affected by CRT allegations.
Hypothesis	<p>Null H₀: There is no relationship between CRT social media posts and allegations and students conflicts and school, family, and community partnerships.</p> <p>Alt H₁: There is a relationship between CRT social media posts and allegations and student conflicts and school, family, and community partnerships.</p>

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Table 4

Study Variable Labels & Levels of Measurement

Type of Variable D=dependent I=independent C=control	Variable Name (use name on the data set)	Variable Label (use label on the data set)	Level of Measurement N=nominal O=ordinal I-R=interval-ratio B=Binary L=Likert Scale
I	Type of District	TDIST	N
I	Race of District	RACE	N
I	Socio-Economics of District	ECO	N
I	Politics of District	POL	N
D	Superintendents' Perception of Critical Race Theory Allegations' Influence on School, Family, and Community Partnerships	SCHP	L
D	Superintendents' Understanding of CRT	UNDCRT	L
C	Level of Preparedness	PREP	L
D	# Social Media Posts Observed	#SOC	L
I	# Allegations from Parents	#ALLP	L
I	# Allegations from Community Members	#ALLCM	L
I	# Allegations at Meetings	#ALLM	L
I	# Disruptions at Meetings	#DISR	L
I	# Student Conflicts	#SCONF	L

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Data Analysis

The study data was collected through the secure online platform SurveyMonkey and then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet. The excel spreadsheet was then uploaded to SPSS, which is a statistical analysis program. The data sets were analyzed and compared using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Inferential statistics are used to describe, show, and summarize the basic features of a dataset, while descriptive statistics demonstrate the attributes of an identified distribution (Trochim et al., 2016). Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the distribution of the number of posts and allegations in reference to the demographics of the school districts. Inferential statistics was used to compare the number of posts and allegations between districts according to demographic groupings. An ordinal logistic regression test, followed by a factor analysis and additive index, will be conducted on the data.

Factor Analysis

The next test, Factor Analysis, is a method of reducing the data, so that one might seek the underlying variables in the observed variables (Trochim et al., 2016). The following variables were used in the analysis.

- (a) The strength of the relationship between the superintendents' level of understanding of CRT (UNDCRT) and level of preparedness to respond to allegations (PREP). The analysis sought to answer if the superintendents' level of understanding of CRT strengthens the participants' level of preparedness to answer allegations using Crisis Communication Management.

The data was checked for heteroskedasticity, which is essentially when the standard deviations of a predicted variable are not constant either as related to time periods or different values of an

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independent variable (Trochim et al., 2016). Outlier detection and factor analysis was also used to determine outliers and variability among observed, correlated variables (Trochim et al., 2016).

Additive Index

Another analysis was the additive index, which is a set of models that are nonparametric and express unknown linear transformation of the predictor variables (Trochim et al., 2016).

Since the first step of the additive index was choosing the variables that will be included in the test, the following variables were used in the additive index to create the new variable

Allegations.

- a) # of social media posts (#SOC)
- b) # of allegations by parents (#ALLP)
- c) # of allegations by community members (#ALLCM)
- d) # of allegations at meetings (#ALLM)
- e) School, family, and community partnerships (SCHP)

Another additive index was run to create the new variable UNDPREP. The following variables were used.

- (a) The superintendents' level of understanding of CRT (UNDCRT)
- (b) The level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management (PREP)

Once the mean of each correlation was established, the hierarchy of the correlations were analyzed and method alignment was performed. By using these aspects of the analysis, a parallel convergent approach was used to consider the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended questions. The parallel convergent approach was used to compare and interpret the quantitative and qualitative data, looking for areas of convergence and divergence between the two data sets (Precision Consulting, 2018). In short, I was seeking the parallels and discrepancies between the

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story told by the numbers submitted on the Likert scale and the participants' open-ended, narrative answers on their perceptions.

Correlation Matrix

A correlation matrix is a technique used to evaluate the relationship between two variables in a set of data (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The correlation matrix can help to establish the interrelationship or interdependency between variables. A correlation matrix was performed to research possible answers to research question #3: Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and preparedness to respond to questioning and allegations and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions? On a scale of 0-1, a correlation of .7 or higher is considered a high correlation (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The following variables were used in the Correlation Matrix.

- (a) The possible correlations between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and the independent variables of the number of allegations from parents (#ALLP), number of disruptions at meetings (#DISR), and number of allegations from community members (#ALLCM). The analysis sought to answer if the number of posts correlated to the number of allegations.
- (b) The possible correlation between the superintendents' understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management (UNDPREP) and Allegations.
- (c) The possible correlation between misinformation as an issue (MIS) and school, family, and community partnerships (SCHP).

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A matrix is considered strong if the relationship between two variables has an r value larger than 0.7 (Trochim, 2008).

One-Way ANOVA Tests

One-way ANOVA tests are an analysis of variance to determine if the mean of two samples are significantly different (Trochim et al., 2016). The one-way ANOVA was the ideal test for the following data analysis because the test could determine if different levels of a factor have a measurable effect on a dependent variable (Trochim et al., 2016). For example, the tests were designed to measure if the variations of political affiliations, economic status, or type of school districts had a statistical effect on the number of allegations reported.

- a) Politics of district (POL) and # of social media posts observed (#SOC)
- b) Type of district (TDIST) and # of social media posts observed (#SOC)
- c) Economics of district (ECON) and # of social media posts observed (#SOC)
- d) # of student conflicts (#SCONF) and # of social media posts observed (#SOC)

The test of the homogeneity of variances was run, and the Levene statistic was analyzed.

Ordinal Logistic Regression

Ordinal logistic regression Analysis is designed to determine the reason-result relationship between the independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s) (Trochim et al., 2016). An ordinal logistic regression analysis was run in SPSS to assess the strength of the relationships between the following dependent variables and the independent variables with an explanation of the correlation to be explored. The following variables were tested.

- a) # of social media posts observed (#SOC)
- b) School, family, and community partnerships (SCHP)

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After the ordinal logistic regression test, a factor analysis and additive index will be conducted on the data. The key bivariate relationships is a technique used in statistics to determine the existence of relationships between two variables (Trochim et al., 2016). By examining the frequencies of the key bivariate relationships in the regression model, the relationship between the variables can be determined. Another characteristic that was examined in the data was the goodness of fit, which was the extent that the observed data matched the values expected by the theory. The effect size was also examined, which was the value that measured the strength of the relationship between variables. (Trochim et al., 2016). Collinearity is when independent variables in the regression model express a linear relationship, which can be analyzed in the ordinal logistic regression test (Trochim et al., 2016). Once the ordinal logistic regression analysis was complete, a factor analysis could be performed.

Delimitations, Limitations, & Assumptions

While it is the intention of all researchers to fully investigate their topic, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions must be constructed in order to accomplish the exploration within the assigned time frame, sample selections, and methodology linked to the research questions (Research Philosophy, n.d.; Scope and Delimitations, 2020).

Delimitations

The delimitations that were set by me were that the participants surveyed were only in Ohio and currently working as superintendents; the study also focused only on allegations regarding CRT. The delimitations were set in order to make the study relevant to the scope and research questions presented (Scope and Delimitations, 2020). The first delimitation of the sample only being taken from Ohio did not provide the full picture of the occurrences and effects taking place in every state in the country. Furthermore, Ohio is densely populated and culturally

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diverse, thus providing a fair, varied sampling. Yet, it should be noted that the results could vary from state to state.

The participants' sample was also limited to only superintendents and did not include teachers and principals. While the perceptions of teachers and principals are certainly valuable and could be the topic of further research, the scope of the study was an assessment of educational leaders' understanding of CRT and level of preparedness to respond to allegations. Because it is usually the superintendent asked to publicly and privately respond to allegations, they are most likely able to answer the survey questions fully and with the most first-hand experience.

The survey did not cover other topics of negative social media posts and allegations targeting schools. While there have been more topics of allegations that focus on schools currently, CRT has been the most prevalent considering the ongoing legislation and other restrictive steps that have been introduced because of the CRT allegations (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Furthermore, the disruption of school board meetings, book banning, and new restrictive legislation that has included schools teaching sexuality and gender identity has maintained public outrage and activism (Perry, 2022). In short, while CRT has not been the only allegation that schools currently face, it has been one of the most divisive allegations that schools must contend with in the United States currently (Farag, 2020; Kaplan & Ownings, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021).

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Limitations

Because limitations are issues with the study that are beyond the researcher's control, it is important to acknowledge these limitations in reference to the study (Research Philosophy, n.d.). The limitations of this study included the participants' willingness to complete the survey openly and honestly, participants' potential biases and abilities to self-evaluate, and the lack of existing research.

The first limitations of the study were the participants' willingness to first complete and return the survey and then their willingness to be open and honest about their opinions on CRT and subsequent topics. Superintendents have often been required to wear many hats during long, busy days. Returning a survey may not have seemed important to this educational leader. However, the survey was purposely made brief to not take up too much of the participants' time. Furthermore, because CRT has become a hotly contested topic at all levels, the superintendents may have felt an aversion to answer the questions openly and honestly. However, the preface to the survey indicated that the survey was to remain anonymous, in hopes of eliciting honest responses.

Another limitation was that the participants may possess their own biases toward the topic or the inability to adequately assess their own levels of knowledge and preparedness. Since the survey contained quantitative questions requesting the number of times events occurred, the objective nature of the questions should counterbalance the potential biases that the participants may have had. As far as the limitations of the superintendents' inability to assess their own levels of knowledge and preparedness, once again the quantitative nature of the questions requesting the number of times events occurred should have acted as a counterbalance for the participants' potential inabilities.

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The lack of existing research on the effects of CRT allegations was because these issues have only been raised since 2020 (Frag, 2020; Kaplan & Ownings, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). However, the research on school, family, and community partnerships and crisis communication management was applicable to all circumstances and forms of allegations.

Assumptions

A review of the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions is necessary to shape the decisions that the researcher makes throughout the research process (Research Philosophy, n.d.). An ontological assumption is based on the concept that there is one defined reality that is measurable and observable. In this study, the ontological assumption was that the number of posts, allegations, and student conflicts could be counted. The assumption was that the superintendent was both aware of and willing to accurately communicate the numbers of the events specified in order to provide quantitative data on the realities of their school district.

Likewise, the epistemological assumption is the idea that knowledge is quantifiable and objective (Research Philosophy, n.d.). An epistemological assumption for this study was that the participants' levels of knowledge and preparedness could be objectively measured by the participant. The post-positivist and interpretive approaches came into play in this assumption. While the post-positivist approach dictated that the knowledge could be measured objectively, the interpretive approach was that the assessment could only be gained through experience and understanding the meaning of the process. Therefore, I was hopeful that the qualitative, open-ended question of the survey would provide additional insight into the assumption.

The axiological assumption is the construct that the researcher's biases play a role in the construction of the questions and the interpretation of data (Research Philosophy, n.d.). In this

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study, the axiological assumption was that I was able to construct quantitative questions requesting the numbers of occurrences of social media posts, allegations, and student conflicts that would inform me of the current conditions of school, family, and community partnerships and student conflicts.

The methodological assumption is the idea that valid knowledge is obtained through research which requires objective analysis and measurement (Research Philosophy, n.d.). In this study, the methodological assumption was that the scores constructed on the survey using the Likert scale combined with the open-ended question would provide the knowledge of the partnerships and student behaviors in Ohio currently. Once again, the combination of the post-positivist and the interpretive approaches were needed. While the scores provided the numbers to prove or disprove the hypotheses, it was the narrative answers in the open-ended question that provided the deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

Research Ethics

When Congress passed the National Research Act in 1974, one of the most influential outcomes of the law was the *Belmont Report*, which was generated by a national commission to analyze ethical research practices and develop recommendations for studies involving behavioral and biomedical research using human participants (Trochim et al., 2016). The Belmont Report outlined three main principles for research involving human subjects: respect for persons, justice, and beneficence; these three principles have been upheld in this study through a variety of procedures.

Human Subjects Issues

Respect for Persons, Justice, and Beneficence

The respect for persons principle dictates that human subjects are to be considered autonomous, independent individuals, who are well protected, especially those considered to be vulnerable populations (Trochim et al., 2016). Vulnerable populations are considered to be anyone without full control of their decision making. Since this study focused on Ohio superintendents sharing their perceptions on CRT, a highly sensitive topic that has caused detriment to the careers of educators across the country recently, the participants in this study were considered vulnerable persons. Because the superintendents were considered a vulnerable population, careful planning and execution took place to keep their identities anonymous in the study.

According to The Belmont Report, in order for the respect for persons requirement to be met, participants must make an informed decision regarding the study by being well-informed with information, comprehension, and voluntariness, meaning that the person has been provided procedures, purpose, risks, benefits, alternatives, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, a brief statement was written in the opening letter accompanying the survey informing participants of the steps taken to ensure their anonymity.

The participants were recruited through the use of the Ohio Department of Education Management Information System (EMIS) to obtain the list of all Ohio superintendents' email addresses. The email addresses were then paired with the school district IRN (identifier) in an excel spreadsheet and all identifying information was deleted, such as the email address that included a participants' name from the spreadsheet. Then the spreadsheet was uploaded into

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Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to analyze the data as it pertained to the hypotheses.

The requirements of justice and beneficence must also be met to conduct ethical research (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, justice is established when the researcher chooses a sample not out of convenience, but because they can provide the best possible data. Because superintendents were often the center of response to allegations, these participants could provide the most accurate data. In addition, because all of the superintendents in the state of Ohio were asked to participate in the study, no one was excluded. Beneficence is essentially how the study will impact the participants' lives and their risk of harm. Because the superintendents remained anonymous, their risk of harm was minimal. Furthermore, because the survey was conducted through email, a consent form signed by the participants was not necessary because their consent is implied by choosing to respond to the email (Trochim et al., 2016).

Secure Data Management Procedures

All data collected including spreadsheets, written notes, and document review data was stored in a locked filing cabinet at Youngstown State University Beeghly College of Education for three years minimum. After the minimum of three years, the documents will be shredded in accordance with Youngstown State University policy. All digital files and personal notes were destroyed after the data analysis. These procedures were in compliance with Youngstown State University and the American Psychological Association.

Summary

The research intended to examine a possible statistical correlation between Ohio superintendents' perceived level of knowledge of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management. The research also intended to examine possible statistical

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correlations between the number of social media posts and allegations about CRT and student behavior, as well as the school, family, and community partnerships. While the research could not prove causation, nor rule out other variables of influence, the study could provide a basis for other studies on CRT, student behavior, and school, family, and community partnerships.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

“Data! Data! Data!” he cried impatiently. “I can’t make bricks without clay!” (Doyle, 1892)

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed method, non-experimental study was to explore educational administrators' understanding and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to allegations of CRT. The participants' perceptions of the impact of social media posts and allegations about CRT on student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships was analyzed. CRT descended from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which was originally created by a group of law teachers, practitioners, and students, who felt that the law protected class and hierarchy in the United States; CRT emerged in response to the belief that CLS underestimated race as a form of oppression (Cole, 2012). The concept did not become part of the conversation among educators until 1995 when Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate presented CRT to the educational research community as a tool for considering systemic educational inequities (López, et al., 2021). Since the 1990s, CRT has been used by educational scholars as an analytical tool and theoretical framework to examine issues in education and academic research. The outcome of this study could provide educational leaders with the needed information to better prepare proactive responses to CRT allegations as well as other school-targeted allegations while building and maintaining positive relationships with all stakeholders. Additionally, the findings of this study are presented as they relate to the research questions:

1. How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of understanding of CRT?
2. How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of Crisis Response Management and preparedness to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations regarding the use of CRT in the K-12 classroom?

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3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and preparedness to respond to questioning and allegations and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions?
4. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts?
5. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and school, family, and community partnerships?

Data was collected in accordance with the Youngstown State University's Internal Review Board's conditions.

Online Survey

An online survey was sent via email to the Ohio superintendents identified in the Ohio Educational System (OEDS) database. Data was collected using the secure, online platform SurveyMonkey. The data obtained from the survey was then imported into the IBM-SPSS software for analysis performing an ordinal logistic regression, factor analysis, and additive index tests for possible correlations between independent variables. The qualitative, open-ended questions that were included were intended to obtain additional input from the participants. The study was a mixed method, non-experimental design because there was no manipulated variable, control group, or random assignment (Trochim & Donnelly, 2016).

Hypotheses

H₀: There is no relationship between CRT allegations and student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships.

H₁: There is a relationship between CRT allegations and student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships.

Sampling and Data Collection

The targeted participants in the study included 613 Ohio superintendents in the Ohio Educational Directory System (OEDS) database. However, only 210 Ohio superintendents' email addresses were available through the OEDS website. Using nonprobability, convenience sampling, the participants were limited to the state of Ohio. The voluntary survey was sent electronically to the 210 superintendents listed in the OEDS database and two follow-up emails were sent as reminders of the study. The survey contained demographic questions about the participants' school districts, but not the participants. The emails were sent from my YSU address to the participants. The emails contained a link to the confidential survey created in the SurveyMonkey platform, which started with the consent form. After the consent form was completed, participants completed the school district demographic questions and then the quantitative questions that used the Likert Scale or yes/ no answers. The survey also contained qualitative questions. All responses were collected in the digital platform, SurveyMonkey. The survey remained open to participants' responses for a total of three weeks.

It should also be noted that I made efforts to mitigate the non-response bias by sending two follow-up reminders to the participants to mitigate this limitation. Out of the 198 emails received by the superintendents, 14 (.07 %) participants submitted their surveys. However, it should be noted that a total of 29 emails (15%) were opened by participants who agreed to the Consent Waiver and then did not complete and submit the survey. Therefore, of the 29 participants who agreed to participate, only 48% of those participants completed and submitted the survey. It is notable that more than half (52%) of the participants who agreed to the study refused to complete the survey once the full survey indicating the topic of the study was

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revealed, which led me to question the reasons behind the participants' refusal to complete the survey.

The generalizability of the study is a concern when considering the rate of non-response and the study's external validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2016). However, it should be noted that while the participant sample is small, a variety of school districts are represented in the study, thus fortifying the external validity of the research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The study includes both suburban and non-suburban schools that vary in the number of students eligible for free lunch, thus comprising variety in the sample. The study had a non-response rate of 92.93%. In this study, 29 participants (14.65% of 198 surveys received) completed the Informed Consent Form, but 15 participants did not complete the survey. The response rate was 7.07 %, and the predicted response rate had been 2-10%.

Demographics

The survey collected information on the demographics of the school districts where the participants worked and the participants' news media sources to provide additional understanding and possible influences on the data collected. The participants were asked to choose the type of school district, where they were employed. The options were urban, rural, and suburban. As indicated in Figure 11, one school district (7.14%) was urban, eight school districts (57.14%) were rural, and five school districts (35.71%) were suburban.

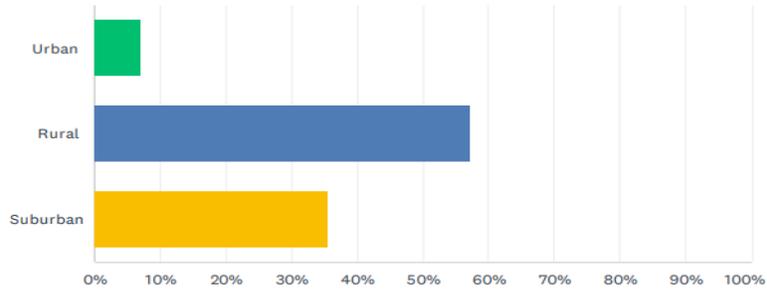
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Figure 11

Participants' School Districts

Q2 Describe the type of school system where you are employed.

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Urban	7.14%	1
Rural	57.14%	8
Suburban	35.71%	5
TOTAL		14

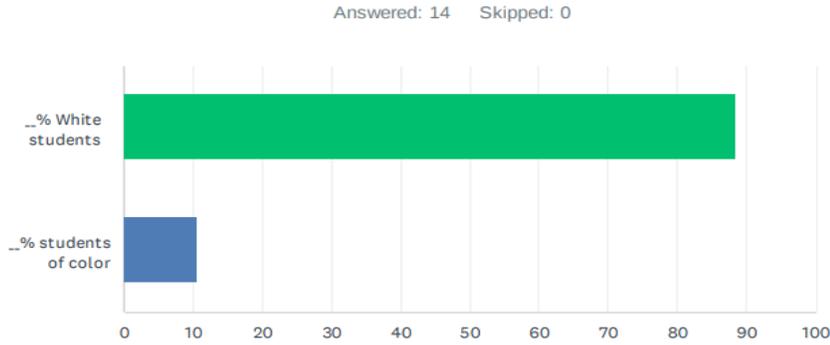
In Figure 12, the race demographics of the school districts surveyed are represented; the participants were asked to estimate the percentage of White Students and the percentage of Students of Color in their school districts.

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Figure 12

Race Demographics of School Districts

Q3 Please provide the approximate race demographics of the students where you are employed.



ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
__% White students	89	1,240	14
__% students of color	11	149	14
Total Respondents: 14			

An average of 89% of the students attending the 14 school districts were reported by the participants to be White and 11% were Students of Color.

As illustrated in Figure 13, the survey collected data on the socioeconomic demographics of the school districts, which was represented in Figure 13. The participants were asked to estimate the percentage of the students in their school districts who qualified for free lunch based on the categories of less than 10%, 10-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, and above 70%.

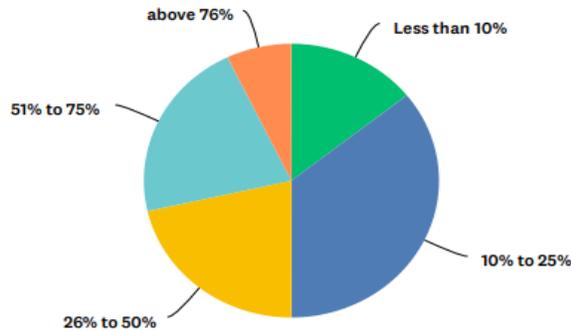
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Figure 13

Students Qualified for Free Lunch

Q4 Approximately how many students qualify for free lunch in your school system?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 10%	14.29%	2
10% to 25%	35.71%	5
26% to 50%	21.43%	3
51% to 75%	21.43%	3
above 76%	7.14%	1
TOTAL		14

The participants were asked to report the predominant political affiliations of the residents of the school districts where they were employed, as illustrated in Figure 14. The survey options were Democrat, Republican, Independent, I am Unsure, and Even Mix.

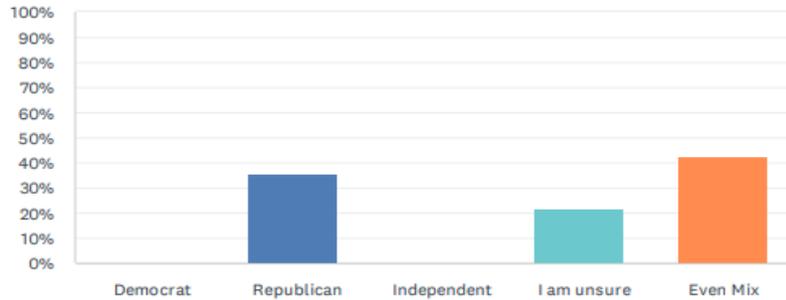
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Figure 14

Predominant Political Affiliation of Residents

Q5 What is the predominant political affiliation of the residents in the communities your school systems serve?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0

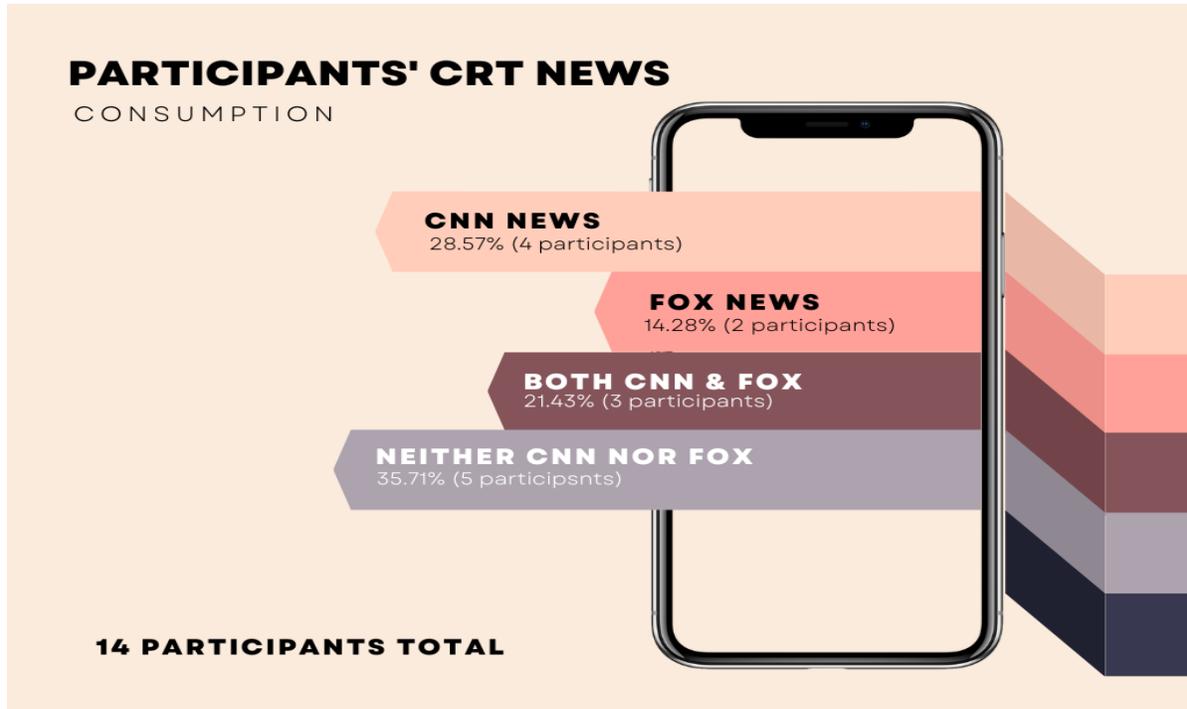


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Democrat	0.00%	0
Republican	35.71%	5
Independent	0.00%	0
I am unsure	21.43%	3
Even Mix	42.86%	6
TOTAL		14

The participants were asked to report their own preferences for news media consumption on CRT. The participants were asked to indicate the media outlets that address CRT. The survey listed the following options, and the participants were to check all that apply: CNN, FOX NEWS, MSNBC, NBC News, ABC News, CBS News, News Week, NPR, PBS News Hour, Time, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian, The American Spectator, Boston Herald.

Figure 15

Participants' News Media Consumption That Addresses CRT



The participants only indicated CNN, FOX, BOTH CNN AND FOX, AND NEITHER CNN NOR FOX on their surveys. Four (28.57%) stated they watched CNN, two (14.28%) indicated they watched Fox News, three (21.43%) chose both CNN and Fox, and five (35.71%) claimed to watch neither CNN nor Fox News channels.

Descriptive Statistics

The following variables were tested and analyzed to determine possible statistical significance and correlations in reference to the research questions. Each statistical test measured the correlations or statistical significance based on the data of each variable to seek possible answers to the research questions.

Research Question #1

How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of understanding of CRT?

The participants were asked to check all options of exposure to CRT that applied to them to categorize their understanding of CRT. The answers were based on the Likert Scale, where the participants checked off options indicating their levels of exposure to CRT. For example, completion of graduate coursework where 50% or more of the class contained a curriculum that focused on CRT was worth 5 points, while the option of having read four or more scholarly articles on CRT was worth 3 points. The participants' answers were then added to produce an overall rating of the participants' level of understanding: excellent (score of 5 points or more), above average (score of 4 points), average (score of 3 points), below average (score of 2 points), and very poor (score of 1 point and below). The overall results of this test as depicted in Figure 16: Participants' Understanding of CRT were determined through simple averaging. The benefits of averaging are that the calculations are simple and easy to use in further analyses (Trochim et al., 2016).

To further illustrate the survey's options and Likert scale rating classification, the following options were on the survey. Participants were to check all that apply. However, the participants were not able to see the point values as illustrated here.

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Table 5

CRT Exposure Options and Likert Point Values

Please check all that apply.

- a. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or more of the curriculum focused on critical race theory. (5)
 - b. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or less of the curriculum focused on critical race theory. (4)
 - c. I have read 4 or more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT. (3)
 - d. I have read 1-3 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT. (2)
 - e. I have viewed 3 or more scholarly documentaries on CRT. (3)
 - f. I have viewed 1-2 scholarly documentaries on CRT. (2)
 - g. I have read 3 or more articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (2)
 - h. I have read 1-2 articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (1)
 - i. I have viewed 3 or more news reports from a variety of news networks on critical race theory. (2)
 - j. I have viewed 1-2 news reports from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (1)
 - k. I have engaged in conversations with others about critical race theory. (1)
 - l. I have read social media posts on critical race theory. (1)
 - m. I have not read articles on critical race theory. (0)
 - n. I have not watched news programs on critical race theory. (0)
- **Excellent:** Score of (5) or more
 - **Above Average:** Score of (4)

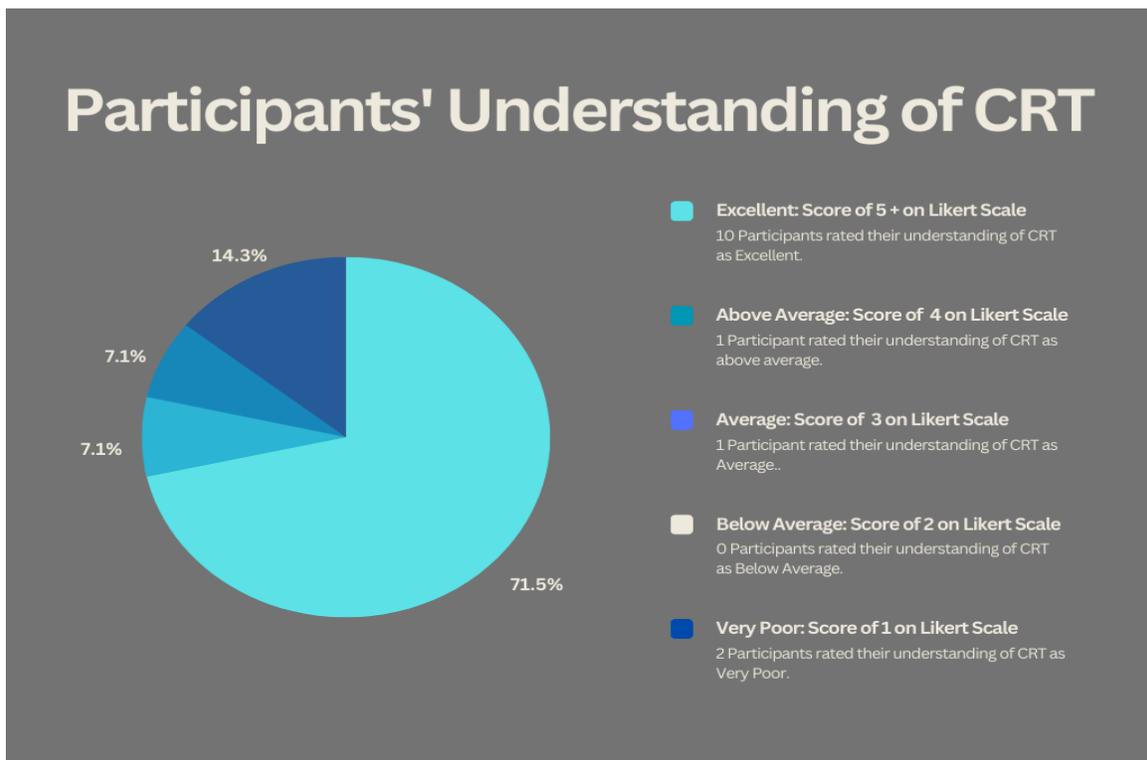
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- **Average:** Score of (3)
 - **Below Average:** Score of (2)
 - **Very Poor:** Score of (1) and below
-

The participants' answers were then totaled and classified according to the Likert scale point values.

Figure 16

Participants' Level of Engagement in Learning About CRT



A total of 10 participants (71.5%) rated their understanding as excellent. The above average and average categories had one participant each, (7.1%) for each level. Two participants (14.3%) rated their level of understanding as very poor.

Research Question #2

How do Ohio superintendents rate their own engagement in Crisis Management

Communication to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations regarding the use of CRT in the K-12 classroom?

The participants were asked to check all options of exposure to Crisis Communication Management and the options were then totaled according to the Likert scale to categorize their level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to allegations. The answers were based on the Likert Scale, where the participants checked off options indicating their levels of exposure to crisis communication training. For example, completion of graduate coursework in crisis communication management was worth 5 points, while the option of having read four or more scholarly articles on crisis communication management was worth 3 points. The participants' answers were then added to produce an overall rating of the participants' level of understanding: excellent (score of 5 points or more), above average (score of 4 points), average (score of 3 points), below average (score of 2 points), and very poor (score of 1 point and below).

To further illustrate the survey's options and Likert scale rating classification, the following options were on the survey. Participants were to check all that apply. However, the participants were not able to see the point values as illustrated here.

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Table 6

Crisis Communication Management Options and Point Values

Please check all that apply.

- a. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or more of the curriculum focused on critical race theory. (5)
- b. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or less of the curriculum focused on critical race theory. (4)
- c. I have read 4 or more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT. (3)
- d. I have read 1-3 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT. (2)
- e. I have viewed 3 or more scholarly documentaries on CRT. (3)
- f. I have viewed 1-2 scholarly documentaries on CRT. (2)
- g. I have read 3 or more articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on CRT. (2)
- h. I have read 1-2 articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (1)
- i. I have viewed 3 or more news reports from a variety of news networks on CRT (2)
- j. I have viewed 1-2 news reports from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (1)
- k. I have engaged in conversations with others about critical race theory. (1)
- l. I have read social media posts on critical race theory. (1)
- m. I have not read articles on critical race theory. (0)
- n. I have not watched news programs on critical race theory. (0)

- **Excellent:** Score of (5) or more

- **Above Average:** Score of (4)

- **Average:** Score of (3)

- **Below Average:** Score of (2)

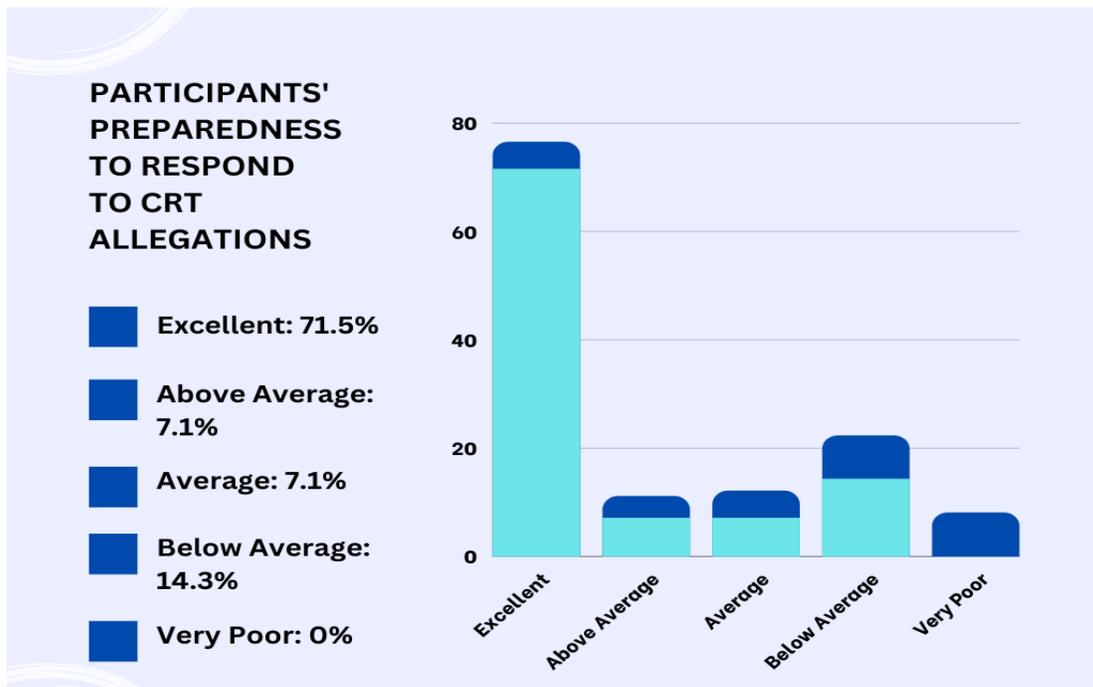
- **Very Poor:** Score of (1) and below

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The participants' answers were then totaled and classified according to the Likert scale point values.

Figure 17

Participants' Engagement in Crisis Management Preparations to Respond to CRT Allegations



A total of 10 participants (71.4%) estimated their level of preparedness to be excellent. The above average and average categories contained one participant for each level (7.1%) each. Two participants (14.3%) reported their level of preparedness to be below average, and zero participants reported that they were in the very poor category.

Research Question #3

Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to questioning and allegations and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions?

Factor Analysis

A factor analysis is a method of reducing the data, so that one might seek the underlying variables in the observed variables (Trochim et al., 2016). The rationale for using the factor analysis test is that this method can help identify variables with the same information and may be used to identify hidden dimensions or constraints that may not be apparent through direct analysis (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, since Research Question #3 contained multiple similar variables, such as frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions, the factor analysis test could seek the possible correlations among the variables, as well as variables that contain the same information.

In this study, I performed a factor analysis seeking a possible correlation between the participants' perceived understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to allegations. The factor analysis was run using the variable of understanding of CRT (#UNDCRT) as well as the variable of level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management (#PREP). I used varimax rotation and the coefficients were sorted by size. The data was checked for heteroskedasticity, which is essentially when the standard deviations of a predicted variable are not constant either as related to time periods or different values of an independent variable (Trochim et al., 2016). Outlier detection and factor analysis

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were also used to determine outliers and variability among observed, correlated variables (Trochim et al., 2016).

Table 7

Factor Analysis of Understanding CRT and Preparedness Variables

Communalities	Initial	Extraction
UNDCRT	1.000	.589
PREP	1.000	.589

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Total Variance Explained		Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.178	58.891	58.891	1.178	58.891	58.891
2	.822	41.109	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Component Matrix	Component 1*
UNDCRT	.767
PREP	.767

Note. *1 components extracted

The participants' reported level of understanding of CRT had a strong correlation to the participants' reported level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management. Therefore,

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the score of .767 could indicate that the participants who have experienced extensive coursework and exposure to knowledge about CRT have also completed extensive training in Crisis Communication Management. As a result of the coursework and training, these participants rated their understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to allegations at a higher level than those who have not experienced coursework and training in these categories.

However, a closer look at the survey responses of the participants who rated themselves low in the category of understanding CRT may be indicative of the confusion surrounding CRT and the hesitancy demonstrated by educators to be associated with the concept. Three participants marked options on the survey that equaled a score of 0-1 on the Likert Scale, indicating that their level of understanding of CRT was average or poor. However, these same participants rated their engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to CRT allegations with a Likert score of 5, indicating excellent.

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Table 8

Participants' Individual Ratings on Understanding CRT & Preparedness

UNDCRT	PREP
4	2
5	5
3	5
5	5
1	3
5	4
0	5
5	5
5	2
1	5
5	5
5	5
5	5
5	5

Note. Highlighted data indicates conflicting results.

The dichotomy of these scores leaves me to question if these participants were truly ignorant of the concept of CRT or if the participants were simply hesitant to have any association with the term.

Correlation Matrix

A correlation matrix is a technique used to evaluate the relationship between two variables in a set of data (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The correlation matrix can help to

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establish the interrelationship or interdependency between variables. A correlation matrix was performed to research possible answers to Research Question #3: Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to questioning and allegations and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions? On a scale of 0-1, a correlation of .7 or higher is considered a high correlation (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

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Table 9

Correlation Matrix of Social Media Posts, Allegations, and Disruptions

		#SOC (Social Media Posts)	#ALLP (Allegations by Parents)	#ALLCM (Allegations by Community Members)	#ALLM (Allegations at Meetings)
#ALLP	Pearson Correlation	.711**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004			
	N	14			
#ALLCM	Pearson Correlation	.803**	.865**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		
	N	14	14		
#ALLM	Pearson Correlation	.744**	.657*	.674**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.022	.008	
	N	14	14	14	
#DISR	Pearson Correlation	.722**	.768**	.822**	.757**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.001	<.001	.002
	N	14	14	14	14

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Since all variables had a correlation score over .7 to the variable Social Media Posts (#SOC), there appears to be a very high correlation between Social Media Posts about CRT and

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the reporting of allegations and disruptions. Furthermore, it should be noted that the correlation between the variables Allegations by Community Members and Allegations by Parents is the highest with a score of .865, which could indicate that in the communities where the spread of misinformation was high among the community members, it was also high among the parents. Possibly the most notable finding was the strong correlation of the variable Disruptions at Meetings (#DISR) and all other variables tested, which could indicate that the meeting disruptions were closely correlated with the presence of negative social media posts and allegations, especially the allegations from those individuals who did not have children in the school district with a correlation score of .822.

Additive Index

The additive index is a set of models that are nonparametric and express unknown linear transformation of the predictor variables (Trochim et al, 2016). Since the first step of the additive index was choosing the variables that would be included in the test, the following variables were used in the additive index: UNDCRT, PREP, #SOC, and #ALLP. UNDCRT and PREP were combined to create the new variable, which was named UNDPREP, and #SOC and #ALLP were combined to create the new variable named Allegations. The rationale for combining the variables was that the variables which were combined contained the same information, thus the combination would yield simpler, easier to understand data.

A One-Way ANOVA Test was then performed to create correlation matrix for the new variables, UNDPREP and Allegations, as seen in Table 10: Correlation Matrix for UNDPREP and Allegations.

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Table 10

Correlation Matrix for UNDPREP and Allegations

Allegations

UNDPREP	Pearson Correlation	.071
	Sig (2-tailed)	.808
	N	14

In order to determine statistical significance, there must be a score below .05 p-value, which means that there is only a 5% chance that the results occurred due to chance (Trochim et al., 2016). In this test, there was a weak positive correlation; however, the score was not close to being significant. Therefore, an interpretation of the weak positive correlation could be presented that the participants' perceived level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management did not significantly correlate with the number of allegations reported in the school district.

One-Way ANOVA Tests

One-way ANOVA tests are an analysis of variance to determine if the mean of two samples are significantly different (Trochim et al., 2016). The one-way ANOVA was the ideal test for the following data analysis because the test can determine if different levels of a factor have a measurable effect on a dependent variable (Trochim et al., 2016). For example, the tests were designed to measure if the variations of political affiliations, economic status, or type of school districts had a statistical effect on the number of allegations reported.

A One-way ANOVA test was run using the POL and Allegations variables, which is illustrated in Table 11: Politics and Allegations. The possible answers on the survey for the

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politics variable were Democrat, Republican, Even Mix of Democrat and Republican, Independent, and Unsure.

Table 11

One-Way ANOVA Politics and Allegations

Allegations	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Republicans	5	.3131484	1.28786778	.5759198	-1.2859506	1.9122475	-.96340	2.44579
Even Mix Dem and Repub	5	-.0160618	.98463032	.44034006	-1.2386418	1.2065182	-.96340	1.62022
I am unsure	4	-.3713583	.69387108	.34693554	-1.4754621	.7327454	-.96340	.62055
Total	14	.0000000	1.00000000	.26726124	-.5773828	.5773828	-.96340	2.44579

ANOVA

Allegations	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1.043	2	.522	.480	.631
Within Groups	11.957	11	1.087		
Total	13.000	13			

ANOVA Effect Sizes

Allegations		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Allegations	Eta-squared	.080	.000	.332
	Epsilon-squared	-.087	-.182	.211
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	-.080	-.167	.199
	Omega-squared Random effect	-.039	-.077	.110

Note. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

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When the test of the homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of .384 based on the mean of allegations was produced. Due to the small sample size, demonstrating a correlation between the political standing of the majority of residents in a school district and the number of allegations was inconclusive. However, the most interesting aspect of the data is that while not one school district reported a majority of Democrat residents, 5 of the 14 participants reported that their residents were predominantly Republican. This data supports the research presented in Chapter Two regarding the growing number of Republican voters in the state of Ohio (Cuff, 2022).

Social Media Posts and School District Types

A One-way ANOVA Test was also run using the variables #SOC and TDIST. The possible answers on the survey for the TDIST variable were urban, rural, and suburban. The data collected for the One-way Anova test is depicted in Table 12: Type of District and # of Social Media Posts. The types of school district categories were then collapsed into two categories, which were suburban and non-suburban because the urban and rural districts produced similar results, and then analyzed with the variable social media posts (#SOC).

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Table 12

OneWay ANOVA Type of District and # of Social Media Posts

#SOC	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Non-Suburban	9	1.3889	2.80377	.93459	-.7663	3.5441	.00	8.50
Suburban	5	4.4000	5.17687	2.31517	-2.0279	10.8279	.00	10.00
Total	14	2.4643	3.91479	1.04627	.2040	4.7246	.00	10.00

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances

#SOC		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
#SOC	Based on Mean	6.854	1	12	.022
	Based of Median	2.212	1	12	.163
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.212	1	11.057	.165
	Based on trimmed mean	6.514	1	12	.025

ANOVA

#SOC	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	29.143	1	29.143	2.056	.177
Within Groups	170.089	12	14.174		
Total	199.232	13			

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ANOVA Effect Sizes

		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
#SOC	Eta-squared	.146	.000	.459
	Epsilon-squared	.075	-.083	.414
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	.070	-.077	.396
	Omega-squared Random effect	.070	-.077	.396

Note. a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

b. Negative but less biased estimates are retained, not rounded to zero.

It should be noted that the non-suburban schools only had a mean of 1.3889 social media posts while the suburban districts had a 4.4000 mean score of social media posts. When the test of the homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of 6.854 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the type of school district was produced. That being stated, the higher number of social media posts in the suburban districts was noted.

Economics and Social Media Posts

Another One-Way ANOVA test was run using the variables ECO and Social Media Posts, which is represented in Table 13: One-way ANOVA Economics and Number of Social Media Posts. The possible answers on the survey for the ECO variable were less than 10% students on free lunch, 25% or less of students on free lunch, 50% or less of students on free lunch, 75% or less of students on free lunch, and over 75% of students on free lunch. Out of 14 school districts, 2 (14.29%) school districts indicated that less than 10% of their students qualified for free lunch. The largest category was the 5 (35.71%) school districts that indicated 10-25% of students qualified for free lunch. Three (21.43%) of the school districts surveyed

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stated that 26-50% of their students qualified for free lunch and 3 (21.43%) indicated that 51-75% of their students qualified for free lunch. Finally, 1 school district (7.14%) stated that over 76% of their students qualified for free lunch. For clarity, the researcher collapsed the economic data into two categories: 10 school districts indicated that 50% or less of their students qualified for free lunch and 4 school districts indicated that more than 50% of their students qualified for free lunch.

Table 13

One-Way ANOVA Economics and Number of Social Media Posts

# of SM Posts	Descriptives				95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Min	Max
50% or Less of Students on Free Lunch	10	3.2500	4.40486	1.39294	.0990	6.4010	.00	10.00
Over 50% of Students on Free Lunch	4	.5000	1.00000	.50000	-1.0912	2.0912	.00	2.00
Total	14	2.4643	3.91479	1.04627	.2040	4.7246	.00	10.00

ANOVA

# of SM Posts	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	21.607	1	21.607	1.460	.250
Within Groups	177.625	12	14.802		
Total	199.232	13			

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ANOVA Effect Sizes

		95% Confidence Interval		
		Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Number of SM Posts	Eta-squared	.108	.000	.423
	Epsilon-squared	.034	-.083	.375
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	.032	-.077	.357
	Omega-squared Random- effect	.032	-.077	.357

Note. a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

b. Negative but less biased estimates are retained, not rounded to zero.

It should be noted that the schools with less than 50% of students on free lunch had a mean of 3.25000 social media posts while the schools with more than 50% of students on free lunch had a .5000 mean score of social media posts. When the test of the homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of 8.880 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the economic status of the school district was produced. That being stated, the higher number of social media posts in the school districts with less than 50% of the students on free lunch was noted.

The demographic variable of RACE was not used in a One-Way ANOVA test because the data collected indicated that a mean of 89% of students in the school districts surveyed were White and 11% students of color, which is an insufficient sample to show variations. The demographics of the school districts in this survey aligned with the existing research stating that while Ohio’s demographics are changing, the state still has a larger White population than the National Average (Ohio, 2023).

Research Question #4

Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts?

The first analysis explored the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC), which was the factor, and the descriptive variable of student conflicts (#SCONF). The analysis sought to answer Research Question #4: Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts? The variable #SOC was measured on the following Likert Scale: 1: Not even one, 2: 1-3 posts or comments, 3: 4-7 posts or comments, 4: 7-10 posts or comments, and 5: Over 10 posts or comments. The #SCONF variable was measured in 1: Yes, 2: No on the survey. The question that was posed to the participants was as follows: Has the number of student to student conflicts (verbal, physical, or in writing) that have occurred in your school district increased in the last 3 years? In the interest of ease of understanding and explaining the results, the #SCONF had to be recoded to Yes: 1 and No: 2. The results of the One-way ANOVA are presented in Table 14: One-Way ANOVA Social Media Posts and Student Conflicts.

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Table 14

One-Way ANOVA Social Media Posts and Student Conflicts

#SCONF	Descriptives				95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Min	Max
Not Even One	8	1.88	.354	1.25	1.58	2.17	1	2
1-3 Posts or Comments	3	1.33	.577	.333	-.10	2.77	1	2
7-10 Posts or Comments	1	1.00					1	1
Over 10 Posts or Comments	2	2.00	.000	.000	2.00	2.00	2	2
Total	14	1.71	.469	.125	1.44	1.98	1	2

ANOVA

#SCONF	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1.315	3	.438	2.844	.092
Within Groups	1.542	10	.154		
Total	2.857	13			

ANOVA Effect Sizes

#SCONF		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
	Eta-squared	.146	.000	.459
	Epsilon-squared	.075	-.083	.414
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	.070	-.077	.396
	Omega-squared Random-effect	.070	-.077	.396

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Note. a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

b. Negative but less biased estimates are retained, not rounded to zero.

It should be noted that the schools that reported not even one social media post had a mean of 1.88 increase in student conflicts while the districts with 10 or more social media posts had a mean of increase of 2.00. When the test of the homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of 2.155 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was produced. Because of the small sample size, an alpha .1 was used as the threshold to determine significance. Therefore, the correlation between the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was considered statistically significant. This statistical significance was justified because the small sample size reduced the chance of a type two error. By raising the alpha from .05 to .1, there was a reduction in the possibility of a type two error, yet it increased the possibility of a type one error.

Research Question #5

Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and school, family, and community partnerships?

Binary Logistic Regression

Binary logistic regression analysis is designed to determine the reason-result relationship between the independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s) (Trochim et al., 2016). One of the main advantages of the ordinal logistic regression is that the test can handle ordered outcomes, such as the ordered reported numbers of social media posts and the ordered numbers of reported student conflicts. A Binomial Logistic Regression test is an ordinal logistic regression test that estimates the probability of the target variable, which is assigned only two values, 0 or 1 (Trochim et al., 2016).

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Therefore, the binomial logistic regression analysis explored the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC), which was the dependent variable, and the independent variable of student, parent, and community partnerships (SCHP). The analysis sought to answer Research Question #4: Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts? Once again, the variable #SOC was measured on the following Likert Scale: 1: Not even one, 2: 1-3 posts or comments, 3: 4-7 posts or comments, 4: 7-10 posts or comments, and 5: Over 10 posts or comments. The #SCHP variable was measured in 1: Yes, 2: No on the survey. The question that was posed to the participants was as follows: Do you think that CRT social media posts and allegations have caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in your school district? Again, in the interest of ease of understanding and explaining the results, the #SCHP had to be recoded to Yes:1 and No:0, which was then renamed #SCHP_R. The results of the Ordinal Regression Analysis are presented in Table 15: Effects of CRT Social Media Posts on School Partnerships.

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Table 15

Effects of CRT Social Media Posts on School Partnerships

		B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1*	#SOC	1.223	.599	4.177	1	.041	3.399
	Constant	-4.408	1.944	5.142	1	.023	.012

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: #SOC

School Partnerships and Social Media Posts Cross tabulation

		#SOC						
		Not Even One	1-3 Posts or Comments	7-10 Posts Or Comments	Over 10 Posts or Comments	Total		
SCHP_R	no	Count	8	2	1	0	11	
		% within #SOC	100.0%	66.7%	100.0%	0.0%	78.6%	
	yes	Count	0	1	0	2	3	
		% within #SOC	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%	21.4%	
Total		Count	8	3	1	2	14	
		% within #SOC	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

The parameter estimates were not possible because the variations for school partnerships could not be estimated, so the variable must remain ordinal. Furthermore, statistical power cannot be requested in SPSS for this test. With a small sample size, .01 can be used as the cutoff to determine statistically significant results (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, the score of .041

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could be used to determine that the correlation was statistically significant. However, the more telling result is the Exp (B) score of 3.399. The score of 3.399 was the most significant score of the study because it essentially meant that the participants who reported a higher number of negative CRT posts were three times more likely to report the answer yes to the question of whether they think that CRT social media posts and allegations had caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in their school district.

When a correlation matrix was run using the variables of misinformation and school partnerships, the results showed a statistical significance between the two variables. The participants were asked the yes/ no question if misinformation about CRT was an issue in their district. The superintendents were also asked the yes/no question if they thought that CRT allegations had caused damage to the school, family, and community partnerships in their district.

Table 16

Correlation Matrix Between Misinformation and School Partnerships

		MIS	SCHP
MIS	Pearson Correlation	1	.782**
	Sig (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	14	14
SCHP	Pearson Correlation	.782**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	<.001	

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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Since a p value is considered significant at the .01 level, a score of .782 was considered a very high significant score. Therefore, the correlation of .782 showed a statistically strong significant correlation between the participants' answers that misinformation about CRT was an issue at their place of employment and the answer that CRT allegations had changed school, family, and community partnerships.

Qualitative Analysis: Giving Voice to the Participants

Because the sample of 14 participants in this study is so small, it is not possible to generalize the conclusions drawn from the data. Yet, recurring trends were presented in the participants' answers. Of the fourteen participants, only seven chose to respond to the qualitative, open-ended questions; however, the small sample of qualitative answers did provide consistent themes regarding communicating with stakeholders. Among the participants' responses were themes regarding honesty and transparency when answering CRT allegations, confusion among those who accuse the school of teaching CRT, negative effects of social media on student behavior, and the influence of politics on school partnerships. The resounding message of the importance of being forthright with stakeholders was explained by one participant, "Be honest and tell the truth. Most people don't know what CRT is to begin with. I speak privately to people about it and debunk the rumors." The participants' approach to speaking with people privately is an effective strategy, especially in smaller school districts. Yet, the private conversations can only reach so many people. It seems that the one-on-one approach combined with purposeful messaging and engagement in Crisis Communication Management strategies would prove to reach a much wider audience.

One participant pointed out that many of those who spread misinformation about CRT were confused about the definition of concept, as well as the application of the theory. The

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participant stated, “People who are vehemently against CRT are also the people who appear to have difficulty defining what it is. The ignorance seems to further the political divide among community members.” The participant’s description of people who vehemently opposed CRT seems indicative of the strong emotions that are often incited by the bombastic word choice used in CRT messaging. The superintendent who stated this quote touched on the important point that the messaging is propelled by politics and causes a division within communities.

Furthermore, the participants expressed frustration with the effects of political messaging on school, family, and community partnerships. One participant commented, “People can find a political issue with anything. They can and will make ‘Mountains out of mole hills’ if they dislike your school system.” The participant’s observation that the allegations are often truly motivated by people who have a pre-existing belief that the school is bad or that they do not like the school. The CRT accusations become yet another reason to support their pre-existing opposition to the schools. The observation in this quote also supports the idea that CRT messaging is a political issue and not necessarily an issue of educating students.

Finally, a participant summed up their evaluation of CRT messaging and schools that the political verbal combat is counterproductive for the entire country. “CRT has become a political talking point, just like abortion and gay marriage by the Republican Party. It does our country zero good when political parties engage in this type of behavior.” The participant’s comparison of CRT to abortion and gay marriage is timely when one considers that when the audience engagement metrics of CRT messaging began to wane, the messaging pivoted to include accusations of teachers teaching gender identity and sexuality (Kaplan, 2021). While these Ohio superintendents have reported their observations of the effects of political messaging first-hand, the end result of the allegations and legislation has yet to be seen.

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The negative effects of social media on students' behavior was also discussed. One participant disagreed that student behavior was influenced by CRT messaging. "I do not think it is CRT related - it is verbal/written unkindness or disrespect. The ability to write/say whatever one wants via social media is damaging." While a different participant checked yes to the question regarding CRT posts negatively influencing student behavior and further explained, "Social media is the direct cause of most of our issues. While we tend to have very few physical altercations, the number of verbal attacks on one another through technology is higher than normal." Based on these participants' answers, it appears that bullying among students has increased, and these participants point the increase to negative social media messaging that is CRT related or not.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the results from the mixed method, non-experimental study, which explored educational administrators' understanding and perceived level of preparedness to respond to allegations of CRT. The participants' perception of the impacts of CRT posts and allegations on student behaviors, as well as school, family, and community partnerships were analyzed. Ohio Superintendents were the target population for the study, and the sample was drawn from fourteen public school districts in Ohio. Using nonprobability, convenience sampling, the participants were limited to the state of Ohio.

The survey collected information on the demographics of the school districts where the participants worked and the participants' news media sources to provide additional understanding and possible influences on the data collected. The participants were asked to describe the type of school district where they were employed, given the options of urban, rural, and suburban. One school district (7.14%) was urban, eight school districts (57.14%) were rural,

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and five school districts (35.71%) were suburban. The race demographics of the school districts were represented; an average of 89% of the students attending the fourteen school districts were White and 11% were students of color. Out of fourteen school districts, two (14.29%) school districts indicated that less than 10% of their students qualified for free lunch. The largest category was the five (35.71%) school districts that indicated 10-25% of students qualified for free lunch. Three (21.43%) of the school districts surveyed stated that 26-50% of their students qualified for free lunch and three (21.43%) indicated that 51-75% of their students qualified for free lunch. Finally, one school district (7.14%) stated that over 76% of their students qualified for free lunch.

Of the school districts surveyed, zero school districts indicated that the majority of their residents were Democrats or Independents, five school districts (35.71%) stated that the residents of their districts were predominantly Republicans, three (21.43%) of participants indicated that they were unsure of the political affiliations of the residents, and six (42.86%) of the participants stated that the residents of their school districts were an even mix of Democrats and Republicans. The participants' preferences for news media consumption, where four (28.57%) stated they watched CNN, two (14.28%) indicated they watched Fox News, three (21.43%) choose both CNN and Fox, and five (35.71%) claim to watch neither CNN nor Fox News channels.

The first research question sought to determine the Ohio superintendents' self-rating of the understanding of CRT. A total of ten participants (71.5%) rated their understanding as excellent. The above average and average categories had one participant each, which was 7.1% for each level. Two participants (14.3%) rated their level of understanding as very poor.

The second research question sought to determine the participants' self-evaluation of their engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to CRT allegations. A total

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of ten participants (71.4%) marked options on the survey that equaled a score of 5 or more on the Likert Scale, indicating that their level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management was excellent. The above average (Likert score of 4) and average (Likert score of 3) categories contained one participant for each level (7.1%) each. Two participants (14.3%) reported their engagement in Crisis Communication Management to be below average (Likert score of 2), and zero participants reported that they were in the very poor category (Likert score of 1 or below).

The third research question sought to determine if a statistically significant correlation existed between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and preparedness to respond to questioning and allegations and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions. The first factor analysis yielded a finding that the participants' reported level of understanding of CRT had a strong correlation to the participants' reported level of preparedness. Therefore, the score of .767 could indicate that the participants with a high level of coursework and exposure to knowledge about CRT had also completed extensive training in crisis communication management. In addition, the participants who rated their understanding of CRT at a higher level mostly rated their level of preparedness to respond to allegations at a higher level than those who have not experienced coursework and training in these categories. However, three participants rated themselves a 0-1, indicating that their level of understanding of CRT was average or poor, and these same participants rated their level of preparedness to respond to CRT allegations with a score of five, indicating excellent.

A correlation matrix was also performed to research possible answers to Research Question #3. Since all variables have a correlation score over .7 to the variable Social Media Posts (#SOC), there appeared to be a very high correlation between Social Media Posts about CRT and the reporting of allegations and disruptions. Furthermore, it should be noted that the

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correlation between the variables Allegations by Community Members and Allegations by Parents was the highest with a score of .865, which could indicate that in the communities where the spread of misinformation was high among the community members, it was also high among the parents. Possibly the most notable finding was the strong correlation of the variable Disruptions at Meetings (#DISR) and all other variables tested, which could indicate that the meeting disruptions were closely correlated with the presence of negative social media posts and allegations, especially the allegations from those individuals who did not have children in the school district with a correlation score of .822.

One-Way ANOVA tests were run using the number of social media posts in correlation with school districts' economics and type of school district. It should be noted that the schools with less than 50% of students on free lunch had a mean of 3.25000 social media posts while the schools with more than 50% of students on free lunch had a .5000 mean score of social media posts. The One-Way ANOVA Test using the variables of Number of Social Media Posts (#SOC) and Type of School District (TDIST) noted that the non-suburban schools have a mean of 1.3889 social media posts while the suburban districts have a 4.4000 mean score of social media posts.

A One-Way ANOVA was run to explore the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and the reported increase in student conflicts (#SCONF). It should be noted that the schools that reported not even one social media post had a mean of 1.88 increase in student conflicts while the districts with 10 or more social media posts had a mean of increase of 2.00. When the test of the homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of 2.155 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was produced. Because of the small sample size, an alpha of .1 was

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used as the threshold to determine significance. Therefore, the correlation between the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was considered statistically significant.

The binomial logistic regression analysis explored the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and student, parent, and community partnerships (SCHP). With a small sample size, .01 can be used as the cutoff to determine statistically significant results (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, the score of .041 could be used to determine that the correlation was statistically significant. However, the more telling result was the Exp (B) score of 3.399. The score of 3.399 was the most significant score of the study because it essentially meant that the participants who reported a higher number of negative CRT posts were three times more likely to report the answer yes to the question of whether they think that CRT social media posts and allegations had caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in their school district.

The final correlation matrix was run using the variables of Misinformation about CRT (MIS) and School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SCHP). The correlation score of .782 did show a statistically significant correlation between the participants' answers that misinformation about CRT was an issue at their place of employment and the answer that CRT allegations had changed school, family, and community partnerships.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

“Action is the only remedy to indifference: the most insidious danger of all”

(Wiesel, 1986).

Introduction

The focus of the research was to survey the level of understanding of CRT of superintendents in Ohio, as well as their perceptions of their engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to allegations. The survey also measured the participants’ estimated number of CRT social media posts, allegations, and disruptions of school events. The objectives of the research were to explore the possible statistical correlations between the participants’ levels of understanding of CRT and engagement in Crisis Communication Management and the number of posts, allegations, and disruptions. The study also explored the number of posts and allegations in school districts and possible statistical correlations to school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors.

This final chapter will conclude the study by listing the Summary of Findings in relation to the research questions and discussing the value of the study’s contribution to the body of knowledge of education with references to the Literature Review presented in Chapter II. The chapter will also examine the Conclusions drawn from the research based on the research questions. The Discussion section will include interpretations, understandings, and analyses of the study’s findings, as well as the study’s limitations, threats to validity, and generalizability. The Suggestions for Future Research will pose new questions with regards to the study, as well as suggestions for alterations to the study that could provide different results and insights. Finally, the comprehensive Summary section will present the data collection, findings, analysis,

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and interpretations. The Summary section will be broken down by the theoretical framework presented in Chapter III with connections drawn to the study's findings.

Summary of Findings

The study's data produced several findings that aligned with the research questions and theoretical framework to examine the real questions that have echoed through my subconscious during the many hours spent researching and analyzing data. *Have the accusations of CRT changed the partnership of America's schools and families? Have CRT accusations changed the students' behavior toward one another? In short, are schools and students suffering as a result of today's politics and negativity?* I do not propose that I will present absolute answers to these questions. However, I will present data combined with theory and research to maintain the assertion that sometimes when people are hesitant to answer difficult questions, it is more important than ever that the questions should continue to be asked. Once again, please keep in mind that only 14 participants answered the survey; therefore, these findings are not generalizable.

The Summary of Findings discusses the study's results and the interpretations of the data. This section will address the small sample size of the study and possible reasons for the low response rate. The demographics of the participants' school districts will also be discussed. The findings will be organized by the research questions with references made and connections to the existing literature and theories.

Sample Size

The targeted participants in the study were the 613 Ohio superintendents; however, of the 613 Ohio superintendents, only 210 superintendents listed their email addresses on the OEDS website. The anonymous survey contained demographic questions about the participants' school

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districts, but not the participants. It should also be noted that I made efforts to mitigate the non-response bias by sending two follow-up reminders to the participants to mitigate this limitation. Out of 210 emails sent to the participants, six (2.9%) were undeliverable as a result of incorrect email addresses. Six (2.9%) emails were returned by their respective school districts because the district software identified the emails as SPAM. Therefore, 198 emails were received by the superintendents, and 14 were submitted, which created a response rate of 7.07 %, and the predicted response rate had been 2-10%. The study had a non-response rate of 92.93 %.

There were a variety of reasons that participants did not complete surveys, such as lack of interest, too many obligations or forgetfulness; however, given the sensitive nature of the topic of this research, it is possible that superintendents were hesitant to respond because so much media has centered on the topic (Fan & Yan, 2010). Considering CRT has become a topic of contention in many school districts, it is possible that many of the superintendents were hesitant or unwilling to share their views on the topic.

The most notable aspect of the survey response rate was the fact that more than half (52%) of the participants who agreed to the study by completing the Consent Form then refused to complete the survey once the full survey indicating the topic of the study was revealed. Of the 29 participants who completed the Consent Form, only 14 of those participants completed and submitted the survey. Therefore, the question must be asked as to the reasons behind the participants' refusal to complete the survey once the topic of CRT became the focus of the survey questions.

It is possible that the superintendents were hesitant or unwilling to share their views on CRT because of the negative media surrounding the topic and recently introduced legislation in Ohio and across the country. Currently, 19 states have anti-CRT laws (Waxman, 2022).

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According to the article, “Anti-‘Critical Race Theory’ Laws Are Working,” which appeared in TIME Magazine, many educators report that they are struggling to provide their students with historical context in regards to current events because they worry that speaking about race and racism in the classroom could cost them their jobs (Waxman, 2022).

These educators may be justified to worry about the backlash associated with CRT, and that worry could be the reason that the 52% of the superintendents who agreed to the study refused to complete the survey. While Ohio has yet to pass a law on Anti-CRT, Ohio House Bill 103 is pending in the Ohio Statehouse and Senate Bill 83 recently passed the Ohio Senate. Both bills would greatly change how history is taught in Ohio schools (McClory, 2023). House Bill 103 promises to create a nine-member task force who would create the standards for the K-12 social studies curriculum, thus possibly entirely changing what is being taught. The nine-member task force would be appointed by Ohio’s governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Ohio Senate. The task force would heavily rely on “American Birthright: The Civics Alliance’s Model K-12 Social Studies Standards” documents for the re-construction of the K-12 social studies curriculum, even though the National Council for the Social Studies claims that the documents do not align with social studies standards and best practices (McClory, 2023).

Meanwhile, Senate Bill 83 would require college students to take selected American history classes and threaten the jobs of professors, who are perceived as showing bias regarding any topics considered politically controversial. Bill 83 lists issues such as diversity, equity, inclusion programs, foreign policy, marriage, abortion, immigration, and climate change as controversial, and a professor perceived as demonstrating bias on these topics could be fired

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(Slawson, 2023). Governor Ron DeSantis recently signed a similar bill in Florida (Slawson, 2023).

It is also possible that proposed legislation is not the only factor for Ohio superintendents to be hesitant to share their view. The ethnic and political makeup in Ohio is becoming a dichotomy of a growing non-White population and far-right conservatives (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio, 2023). While the Hispanic and Black populations have propelled Ohio's population growth, Ohio still has a larger White population than the National Average (Ohio, 2023). On the political front, even after losing the 2020 election, Donald Trump's endorsement of far-right candidates still influenced voters (Cuff, 2022). Racially motivated hate crimes have also risen in Ohio from 216 in 2019, to 304 in 2020, and 299 in 2021 (U.S., 2023). The 2022 hate crimes statistics have not been released yet, but an increase in hate crimes of more than 10% across the United States is predicted (Faruvar, 2023).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Ohio superintendents might be leery of speaking out when they have been carefully responding to CRT allegations amid shifting demographic trends and increased violence. Therefore, the generalizability of the study is a concern when considering the rate of non-response and the study's external validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2016). However, it should be noted that while the participant sample is small, a variety of school districts are represented in the study, thus fortifying the external validity of the research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2016).

Research Question #1

How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of understanding of CRT?

Overall, Ohio superintendents rated their understanding of CRT highly. The participants checked all options that applied to their training in CRT; the answers were then rated on the

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Likert scale to produce the categories listed. Ten participants (71.5%) marked options on the survey that equaled a score of 5 or more on the Likert Scale, indicating that their level of understanding of CRT was excellent. The above average (Likert score of 4) and average (Likert score of 3) categories had one participant each, (7.1%) for each level and two participants (14.3%) rated their level of understanding as very poor (Likert score of 1 or below), which indicated that the participants answered that they had not taken graduate coursework, read scholarly articles, or viewed three or more news reports from a variety of news networks on CRT.

Research Question #2

How do Ohio superintendents rate their own level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations regarding the use of CRT in the K-12 classroom?

When asked to rate level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations on CRT, the participants checked all options that applied to their training in Crisis Communication Management; the answers were then rated on the Likert scale to produce the categories listed. Ten Ohio superintendents (71.4%) marked options on the survey that equaled a score of 5 or more on the Likert Scale, indicating that their level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management was excellent. The above average (Likert score of 4) and average (Likert score of 3) categories contained one participant for each level (7.1%) each. Two participants (14.3%) reported their engagement in Crisis Communication Management to be below average (Likert score of 2), and zero participants reported that they were in the very poor category (Likert score of 1 or below).

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Therefore, 78.5% of participants checked survey options that indicated that they were above average or excellent regarding their ability to respond to CRT allegations, which means that the participants had taken graduate coursework, read scholarly articles, or viewed three or more news reports from a variety of news networks on CRT.

Research Question #3

Is there a statistically significant correlation between the superintendents' perceived level of understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to questioning and allegations and the frequencies of social media posts, allegations, and meeting disruptions?

The Correlation Matrix of Social Media Posts, Allegations, and Disruptions indicated that all variables have a correlation score over .7 to the variable Social Media Posts (#SOC). There appeared to be a very high correlation between Social Media Posts about CRT and the reporting of allegations and disruptions. Furthermore, it should be noted that the correlation between the variables Allegations by Community Members and Allegations by Parents was the highest with a score of .865, which could indicate that in the communities where the spread of misinformation was high among the community members, it was also high among the parents. Possibly the most notable finding was the strong correlation of the variable Disruptions at Meetings (#DISR) and all other variables tested, which could indicate that the meeting disruptions were closely correlated with the presence of negative social media posts and allegations, especially the allegations from those individuals who did not have children in the school district with a correlation score of .822.

A series of ANOVA tests were conducted to measure if the variations of political affiliations, economic status, or type of school districts had a statistical effect on the number of

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allegations reported. Due to the small sample size, demonstrating a correlation between the political standing of most residents in a school district and the number of allegations was inconclusive. However, while not one school district reported a majority of Democrat residents, 5 of the 14 participants reported that their residents were predominantly Republican. Therefore, the research stating that there has been a growing number of Republican voters in the state of Ohio has been supported by this data.

A One-Way ANOVA Test was also run using the variables #SOC and TDIST. The types of school district categories were then collapsed into two categories, which were suburban and non-suburban and then analyzed with the variable social media posts. It should be noted that the non-suburban schools had a mean of 1.3889 social media posts while the suburban districts had a 4.4000 mean score of social media posts. That being stated, the higher number of social media posts in the suburban districts was noted.

When I ran the One-Way ANOVA test seeking a correlation between socioeconomic status and social media posts. The test yielded a mean of 3.2500 for schools with 50% or less of the students on free lunch and a mean of .5000 for schools with over 50% of the students on free lunch. That being stated, the higher number of social media posts in the school districts with less than 50% of the students on free lunch was noted.

Research Question #4

Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and the number of student conflicts?

A One-Way ANOVA explored the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT and the number of student conflicts. The schools that reported not even one social media post had a mean of 2.00 student conflicts. When the test of the

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homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of 2.155 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was produced. Due to the small sample size, an alpha of .1 was used as the threshold to determine significance. Therefore, the correlation between the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was considered statistically significant.

Research Question #5

Is there a statistically significant correlation between the estimated number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions and school, family, and community partnerships?

The binomial logistic regression analysis explored the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT and student, parent, and community partnerships. With a small sample size, .01 can be used as the cutoff to determine statistically significant results (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, the score of .041 can be used to determine that the correlation was statistically significant. However, the more telling result was the Exp (B) score of 3.399. The score of 3.399 was the most significant score of the study because it essentially meant that the participants who reported a higher number of negative CRT posts were three times more likely to report the answer yes to the question of whether they think that CRT social media posts and allegations had caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in their school district.

A correlation matrix was run using the variables of misinformation and school partnerships. The data showed the correlation of .782, which is considered a very high significant score.

Conclusions

Understanding of CRT & Level of Preparedness to Respond to Allegations

Because Research Questions 1 & 2 are closely related in analysis, the conclusions drawn were correlated to one another for the purposes of clarity of understanding. In this study, I performed a factor analysis seeking a possible correlation between the participants' perceived understanding of CRT and level of preparedness to respond to allegations. The score of .767 in the principal component analysis could indicate that the participants who have experienced extensive coursework and exposure to knowledge about CRT have also completed extensive training in Crisis Communication Management. Therefore, the participants with more coursework and training in the two categories rate their understanding of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to respond to allegations at a higher level.

A closer look at the participants' responses when rating themselves on these two categories may also be indicative of the confusion surrounding CRT and the consequential hesitancy demonstrated by educators. Three participants rated themselves a 0-1, indicating that their level of understanding of CRT was average or poor. However, these same participants rated their level of preparedness to respond to CRT allegations with a score of 5, indicating excellent. The dichotomy of these scores left me to question if these participants were confused about the concepts or questions. Another possibility was that social media and misinformation messaging have created a level of taboo deformation regarding the concept of CRT to the degree that the participants are inclined to deny any association with the term.

The study participants' reports of low ratings of knowledge of CRT and high ratings of engagement in Crisis Communication Management to prepare to respond to allegations were conflicting. In the spring of 2022, when this study began, 38 states had introduced anti-CRT

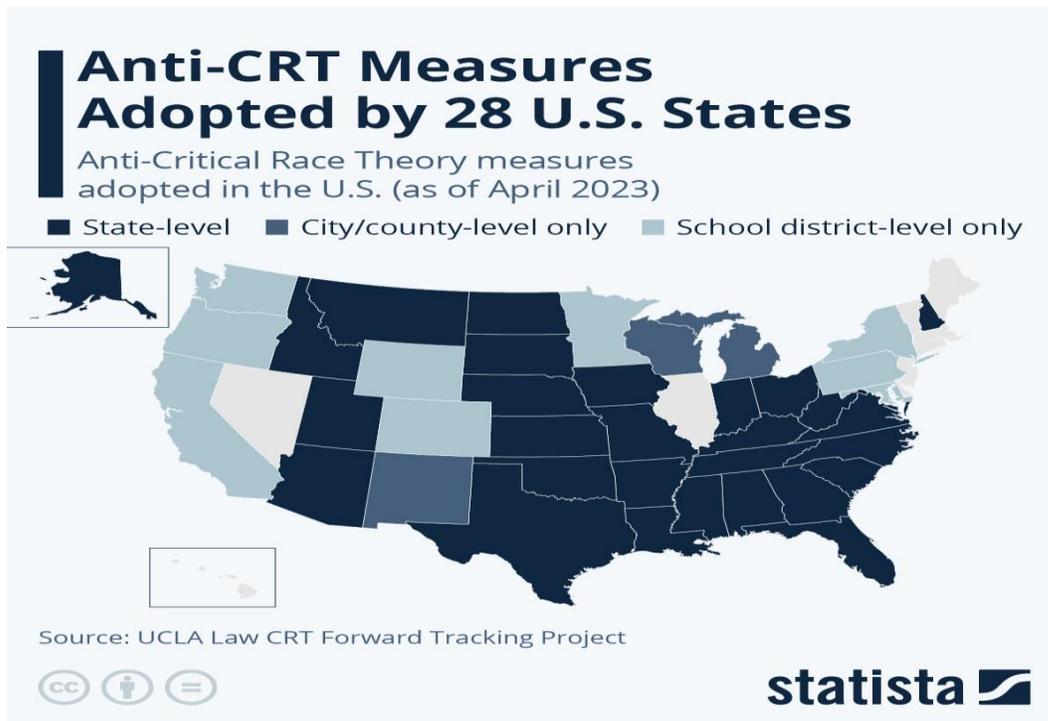
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legislation (Stout et al., 2022). By the spring of 2023, 44 states had introduced anti-CRT legislation. Today, every state except Delaware has introduced anti-CRT legislation (Waxman, 2023).

In “Exclusive: New Data Shows the Anti-Critical Race Theory Movement Is 'Far from Over.” Olivia Waxman recently reported that between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2022, federal, state, and local governments introduced a total of 563 anti-CRT measures across the country — and 241 (nearly half) of those measured were adopted or enacted (2023). Of the 563 anti-CRT measures listed, 242 (41%) quote a line from President Donald Trump’s executive order that defines a “‘divisive concept’ as a teaching that ‘an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex’” (Waxman, 2023). One look at the most recent map illustrates the expedient growth of the opposition to CRT, especially when held in contrast to Figure 6: Where CRT is Under Attack (Schwartz, 2021).

Figure 18

Anti-CRT Measures Adopted by 28 U.S. States



Note. (Buchholz, 2023)

While 28 states have now taken some form of statewide action, such as resolutions, or letters from attorney generals, 16 states have adopted anti-CRT legislation (Buchholz, 2023; Waxman, 2023). In predominantly blue states, the anti-CRT measures often take place at the local and school district level (Waxman, 2023).

Demographics and Responding to CRT Allegations

Research Question #3 is possibly the most multi-faceted and complex of the research questions presented because a superintendent must not only have a thorough understanding of CRT and the preparedness to respond to allegations, an educational leader must also be mindful

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of the politics, type of district, and economics that often influence the accusers and must shape the superintendents' responses.

Correlation Among Social Media Posts, Allegations, and Disruptions

In the correlation matrix, a strong correlation is present between social media posts about CRT and the reporting of allegations and disruptions. The highest correlation occurred between Allegations by Community Members and Allegations by Parents with a score of .865, which could indicate that where the spread of misinformation was high among community members, it was also high among the parents.

The very strong correlation among the variables Social Media Posts, Allegations, and Disruptions aligns with the motivations of sharers theory presented in this study. The two most common reasons people share misinformation is to entertain or to inform out of a sense of civic duty (Chadwick et al., 2018). In addition, the two most common personality traits of those who share misinformation are attention-seeking and low agreeability (Buchanon, 2020).

The Motivations of Sharers Theory aligns with the highest correlation that occurred between the variables Allegations by Community Members and Allegations by Parents with a score of .865 because the two groups of people who are the most likely to share misinformation are uneducated men in their 20s and men in their 50s and older, regardless of their level of education; both groups are most often men who score lower in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and higher in Extraversion and Neuroticism (Buchanon, 2020; Chadwick et al., 2018). People who have a high level of disagreeability often experienced difficulty when they were students following rules and procedures (Buchanon, 2020). Therefore, individuals who did not have a positive educational experience may feel that sharing a misinformed post about CRT is their civic duty, especially if the post aligns with their own beliefs and prejudices.

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Possibly the most notable finding was the very strong correlation of the variable Disruptions at Meetings and all other variables tested, which could indicate that the meeting disruptions were often incited by the presence of negative social media posts and allegations, especially the allegations from those individuals who did not have children in the school district with a correlation score of .822. This finding aligned with the motivations of those who share misinformation theory because the bandwagon effect has often been amplified when bots were used in social media posts (Buchanan, 2020). The bots are a network of computers that quickly share posts to make it appear that many people agree with the post. People with highly disagreeable personalities are especially susceptible to the bandwagon effect because they often want affirmation from others, even though many times they claim to enjoy standing alone in their beliefs (Buchanan, 2020). Therefore, people who have been exposed to an echo chamber of misinformation about CRT are often already emotionally charged and combative when they arrive at school board meetings (Buchanan, 2020; Hayes, 2021).

Using the variables UNDCRT, PREP, #SOC, and #ALLP yielded a weak positive correlation that was not close to being significant. Therefore, the participants' perceived level of understanding of CRT and preparedness does not significantly correlate with the number of allegations reported in the school district. These findings align with the theories of motivations of sharers and crisis communication management presented in this study. A superintendent's knowledge of CRT and level of engagement in Crisis Communication Management is not enough to minimize the spread of misinformation. Without a proactive crisis communication plan focused on minimizing the spread of misinformation about a school district, parents who have been exposed to an echo chamber of misinformation about the school online have been conditioned to believe a narrative of information that has been on replay in their heads from the

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unnatural flow of information via social media (Kim, 2019; Søe, 2021). A purposeful plan to educate all stakeholders about the content of the curriculum and create school, family, and community partnerships must be implemented to counteract the negative spiral of misinformation.

Politics and Allegations

While the correlation between politics and allegations was inconclusive due to small sample size, the residents of the school districts in the study also lacked variety politically. Not one school district reported a majority of Democrat residents, 5 of the 14 participants reported that their residents were predominantly Republican. The changing political demographics of Ohio has made the state a microcosm of the politically-motivated conflicts within school districts that are occurring across the country (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021).

The small number of participants willing to complete a survey about CRT and Ohio's rapid change from a traditionally Democrat state to one that is predominantly Republican may be a result of the changing educational policy (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021). As examined in Chapter II of this study, the political debate of Common Core Standards did not incite the angry cultural flashpoint focused on schools that media coverage of CRT has produced (Cain, 2022). Pursuing the culture wars has been a successful political tactic that has provided energy to the Republican base (Cain, 2022).

Type of District and Allegations

In this study, the non-suburban schools had a mean of 1.3889 social media posts about CRT while the suburban districts had a 4.4000 mean score of social media posts about CRT. The answer to why the suburban school districts had so many more social media posts about CRT than the non-suburban school districts may lie in the changing demographics of the suburbs.

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Historically, suburbs were predominantly White; however, suburbs are becoming increasingly diverse both racially and politically (Frey, 2022; White et al., 2023). Many racial groups now call the suburbs home; in fact, the majority of young people in the suburbs are now children of color (Frey, 2022). The flexibility of today's work from home arrangements has allowed many people to move into the suburbs and further from their place of employment (Frey, 2022; White et al., 2023). As a result of these factors, the suburbs across the United States have become more racially, economically, and politically diverse, and this diversity has accelerated since the beginning of the pandemic, when many people moved away from densely populated areas (White et al., 2023).

Because the suburbs are now swing districts politically, both the Republican and Democratic parties often target campaign advertisements and messaging toward suburban voters because they recognize that suburban residents are often the swing votes (White et al., 2023). The rural areas of Ohio, like many other states, have been predominantly Republican while the urban areas have been mostly Democratic (Sosnick, 2022).

The authors of "Political Battles in Suburbia" conducted a nationwide survey of school superintendents of rural, suburban, and urban areas to learn how the participants' experiences may differ during these politically polarized times (White et al., 2023). The superintendents in the suburbs reported the highest number of contentious political environments, concerns about the spread of inaccurate information about the schools, disputed school board elections, combative school board meetings, and increased Freedom of Information Act requests (White et al., 2023). The study conducted by White et al. also concluded that the suburban superintendents reported the highest levels of concern for the physical well-being and mental health of their administrators, faculty, and staff members as a result of the toxic political environments (2023).

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Economics and Allegations

A One-Way ANOVA test seeking a correlation between socioeconomic status and the number of social media posts about CRT was run. The test yielded a mean of 3.2500 for schools with 50% or less of the students on free lunch and a mean of .5000 for schools with over 50% of the students on free lunch. This data is similar to the findings of the correlation between social media posts about CRT and the type of school district. According to the Ohio Department of Education, over 50% of the students qualify for free lunch in a total of 375 school districts (2023). Of the 375 Ohio school districts with over 50% of the student population qualifying for free lunch, 320 of those districts are rural and 55 are urban, and zero are suburban school districts (Typology, 2023). Political activists and strategists target their messaging to residents in the suburbs, especially the wealthier suburbs (White et al., 2023). Wealthy voters equal campaign contributions, and those voters predominantly live in the suburbs (Cain, 2022). Public schools are funded by the taxpaying public; essentially, the residents own the school, which makes education an easy target for politically-motivated misinformation (Cain, 2022). Therefore, the high number of social media posts reported by suburban school districts with more money could be the end product of political strategists purposely targeting the high-income, predominantly White suburbs with the most disinformation about the schools to gain political support.

Race

The demographic variable of RACE was not used in a One-Way ANOVA test because the data collected indicated that a mean of 89% of students in the school districts surveyed were White and 11% students of color, which is an insufficient sample to show variations. While the demographics of the school districts in this survey did align with the research presented stating

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that Ohio still has a larger White population than the national average, it is also possible that the data was skewed because the majority of the participants worked in rural school districts (Frey, 2022; Ohio, 2023). However, considering that nearly one-third of the children under the age of one in Ohio are minorities, the yet to be answered question remains. What will be the long-term effects of the political culture wars and anti-CRT legislation on school curriculums and students in five years when nearly one-third of the students sitting in Ohio's kindergarten classrooms are children of color? (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio, 2023).

Allegations and Student Conflicts

The One-Way ANOVA explored the strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and the number of student conflicts (#SCONF). It should be noted that the schools that reported not even one social media post had a mean of 2.00 student conflicts. When the test of the homogeneity of variances was run, a Levene statistic of 2.155 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was produced. Because of the small sample size, an alpha of .1 was used as the threshold to determine significance. Therefore, the correlation between the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts was considered statistically significant.

Today, 20% of all K-12 students in the United States reported being bullied both in and out of school (Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022). Race was the leading factor that determined the students who were bullied, and Black students were significantly more likely to be bullied than all other races (Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022). According to the Office of Juvenile Justice Prevention in 2020, 11,129 hate crimes were committed by 6,780 known persons affecting 11,472 victims (Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022). Of the 6,780 people committing these

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crimes, 739 (10.9%) of the offenders were juveniles, and 1,078 (9.4 %) of the 11,472 victims were children under the age of 18 (Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022). Of the 11,129 hate crimes that were committed, 901 (8.1%) of the hate crimes occurred in schools.

Just as adults can be subjected to echo chambers of disinformation, children are even more likely to be exposed to CRT misinformation and racist ideology and lack the fully developed reasoning skills to determine authenticity of the information they consume (Anspach, et al., 2020; Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Kim, 2019). While the conversations about race conducted in children's homes often shape their views, online exposure to misinformation can be even more influential on a child's development (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021). Considering that over 95% of American children between the ages of 12 to 17 have access to social media and the Internet, the increased messaging of CRT misinformation and online hate could indicate an upward trend in the harassment of youth of color by their classmates (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021).

The prevalence of cyberbullying is significantly higher among ethnic and racial minority youth; members of the LGBTQ community are significantly more likely to be bullied than their heterosexual, cisgender peers in school (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Bullying, 2021). Harassment of students for their sexual orientation and gender identity has seen the greatest increase as the culture wars have expanded to include a flood of disinformation and legislation centered around schools teaching sexuality and gender identity using audience engagement metrics (Green & Longoria, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Perry, 2022).

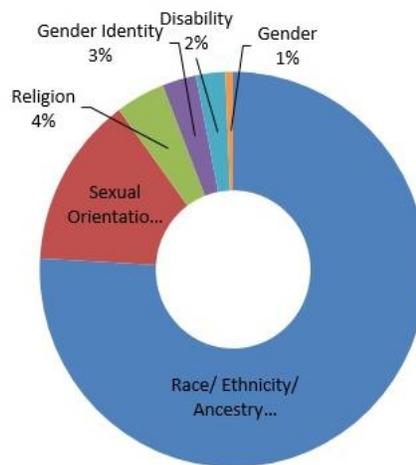
Juvenile Victims of Hate Crimes by Bias Motivation, race and ethnicity have become the predominant identifying factor for victims of online harassment with sexual orientation and

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gender identity the second and third most prevalent identifying factors (Bullying, 2021; FBI, 2020b). The bullying is often internalized, considering that students who have been bullied are three times more likely to attempt to commit suicide when compared to their cisgendered and straight peers who have been bullied (Bullying, 2021). The statistically significant correlation between the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts in this study aligned with the findings from the Trevor Project that bullying was lowered and reported significantly lower suicide attempts by LGBTQ students in LGBTQ-affirming schools (Bullying, 2021). The dangers present to students who are LGBTQ both externally and internally seem to be higher in states that have followed Florida's lead of "Don't Say Gay" Laws, that disallow schools to be LGBTQ affirming and spread disinformation regarding sexuality and gender in classroom teaching for political gain (Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022).

Figure 19

Juvenile Victims of Hate Crimes by Bias Motivation



Note. (FBI, 2020b)

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Furthermore, by employing audience engagement metrics, political strategists have continued beating the drum of CRT for the last three years, and many parents have expressed that the allegations and conflicts about CRT have distracted school districts from protecting children in these marginalized groups and emboldening the perpetrators of the harassment (Heyward, 2022; Kennedy, 2023; Kingkade, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Mitchell, 2023; O’Kane, 2022). Audience engagement metrics is the study of an online story’s decrease in audience interest measured by the number of clicks over time; therefore, the story needs to change over time to arouse new interest in order to maintain one’s audience in political endeavors (Kozhamkulova, 2021).

In Ohio, the emboldening of the bullies seems to have become prevalent as stories of a “Whites Only” and students at football games wearing blackface have made headlines, thus, inspiring families and community members to organize to create advocacy groups who work to support schools and counteract anti-CRT allegations and legislation (Heyward, 2022; Kelly, 2023; Kennedy, 2023; Mitchell, 2023; O’Kane, 2022). News headlines that seem to have been pulled from 1960s newspapers have become more common, such as when students at Colerain High School posted signs above water fountains that read “Whites Only” and “Blacks Only” (O’Kane, 2022). While the signs were immediately removed by educators and the perpetrators punished, social media posts of the signs above the water fountains remained online long afterwards.

Charity Brown Griffin, a licensed school psychologist and assistant professor of psychological sciences at Winston-Salem State University explained that students of color attending mostly White schools are more likely to experience racial slurs and be socially excluded. (Heyward, 2022). “For Black students, many of them in these predominantly white

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spaces don't feel affirmed”(Heyward, 2022, para. 9). The pervasive lack of affirmation felt by students of color can affect their ability to learn and thrive in an educational environment.

Similarly, a number of Stow-Munroe Falls High School students attended a home game against Massillon Jackson High School wearing blackface (Mitchell, 2023). Superintendent of Stow-Munroe Falls City Schools Tom Bratten later made a statement that the students' blackfaces were meant to be spirit wear, but at the same time said the school district “does not condone the use of blackface by anyone for any reason as it is patently offensive and reinforces historically racist stereotypes” (Mitchell, 2023, para. 5). After the blackface incident became public, a group of parents and community members took action. The newly-formed advocacy group, Stow Collaboration for Change, has been created to empower change to counteract racism by becoming involved in the leadership of public education and recruit diverse personnel to schools (Mitchell, 2023).

It is not surprising that incidents such as the ones described in this study have incited parents and community members to act by creating advocacy groups focused on counteracting anti-CRT allegations and legislation in an effort to provide support for schools to teach accurate history and foster supportive school cultures for all students (Heyward, 2022; Mitchell, 2023). After a group of students posted racist videos in Jackson Township, Ohio, the students of Jackson High School staged a protest and parents formed a student board to educate the school and community on the divisive nature of racism (Kennedy, 2023).

Cleveland State University Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Executive Director of the Diversity Institute, Ronnie Dunn explained that the recent racist actions of students should not be surprising because of the inaccurate history of race that is being presented to young people. “It starts with our politicians that are now defending, justifying and trying to rewrite

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history, and preclude the teaching of history and issues around race and racial discrimination, and all of this anti-race rhetoric that they're espousing" (Mitchell, 2023, para .5). Stories, such as the ones presented in this study are indicative of the fallout of the tense academic climate of school districts because of CRT messaging and allegations that have not only increased student to student conflict, but also caused superintendents to be forced to manage crisis communication instead of being able to focus on teaching and learning.

CRT Allegations and Student, Family, and Community Partnerships

The correlation matrix using the variables of misinformation and school partnerships showed a correlation of .782, which is a statistically strong significant correlation between the participants' answers that misinformation about CRT is an issue at their place of employment and the answer that CRT allegations had changed school, family, and community partnerships. A *p* value is considered significant at the .01 level, a score of .782 is considered a highly significant score. Each participant who indicated that misinformation was an issue in their district was also highly likely to indicate that CRT allegations had changed school, family, and community partnerships.

Therefore, the gap in knowledge that has been filled with this research is the statement of today's reality that the spread of misinformation about CRT has negatively impacted school, family, and community partnerships, and this current attack is unlikely to be the last politically motivated attack on schools. Educational leaders must assess the impact of the culture wars on their own district and utilize transformational leadership to boldly and proactively create crisis communication strategies that will help to minimize the spread of misinformation about their schools and build the positive relationships among all stakeholders that will ensure the equitable

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educational experience that all students deserve (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Kaplan & Owings, 2021; Tadle-Zaragosa, & Sonsona, 2021).

Partnerships

Schools and educators are easy targets for politically motivated disinformation; CRT will probably not be the final disinformation attack because parents will often react with emotion when they feel their children are at risk (Ujjifusa, 2021). Schools also do not have the large staff and budget to designate a public relations department, and the restrictive laws that target teachers and ban entire areas of exploration will prove to be challenging for educators for many years to come. Remaining silent is simply not an option (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Walker, 2023; Ujjifusa, 2021).

Strong school, family, and community partnerships are the best solution to minimize the spread of misinformation and student-to-student conflicts (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021). Children will often form their beliefs about violence and parrot the behaviors of the adults around them when relating to their peers. According to *Child and Adolescent Online Risk Exposure: An Ecological Perspective* (2021), the more positive experiences that children enjoy at school at the start of the year, the less likely they are to report cyber victimization and poor academic performance by the end of the school year. When students report feelings of an unfair or unsafe school environment and inequitable distribution of resources, they are more likely to report incidents of cyber victimization, and thus, poor academic performance (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021).

Assess Your School's Climate

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study was that each educational leader should assess the climate of their school district when creating a proactive crisis communication

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plan (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Educational leaders need to assess the climate of their school regarding CRT. The conflicts are often most heightened in the purple communities (meaning suburbs that could swing Democrat or Republican,) where political strategists have targeted the most messaging about CRT (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Walker, 2023). Likewise, a school district experiencing rapid demographic changes, namely where the number of White students has decreased by 18% or more since 2000, were over three times more likely to report local anti-CRT campaigns than school districts with a lack of enrollment change (Merod, 2022). By understanding the climate of a school district, educational leaders are better able to employ transformational leadership and crisis communication strategies to choose the appropriate response, manage messaging and focus on relationship building with all stakeholders (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Tadle-Zaragosa, & Sonsona, 2021).

Transformational Leadership, Crisis Communication, and Partnerships

The combination of transformational leadership theory, crisis management communication, and Carol Epstein's six types of parental involvement fill the gap in educational research by providing practical practices and strategies for educational leadership, who must proactively respond to CRT misinformation and continue to build positive school, family, and community partnerships (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Tadle-Zaragosa, & Sonsona, 2021). Therefore, the two-pronged external team-building strategy with families and community members and internal curriculum review and professional development provide educational leaders with proactive strategies of information management and relationship building that can minimize misinformation sharing, further develop the expertise of teachers, enhance curriculum, and maintain positive school and community cultures (Coombs, 1995; Olmstead, 2022). The external strategy should include bold, strategic messaging designed to educate all stakeholders

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that the school's rich, diverse curriculum addresses racial disparities and teach students to be critical thinkers, who are able to contribute to an equitable democratic society (Hodge et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the internal strategy of providing a rich, varied curriculum, and inviting the participation of all families to school events can minimize online victimization and create an environment of trust among all stakeholders that counteracts and minimizes the spread of misinformation (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021).

Discussion

This study reinforced and built upon the existing research on CRT, Crisis Communication, Motivations of Sharers, and School, Family, and Community Partnerships while introducing new ideas regarding responding to allegations, demographics, targeted political messaging, and the effects of the messaging on student behaviors and partnerships. While research and literature on CRT and Crisis Communication have been established for multiple decades, the educational leaders' confusion and hesitancy to respond to CRT allegations were new areas of educational research. Likewise, research on Ohio's changing demographics has been established for some time, yet the dynamic of political activists targeting certain Ohio suburbs with CRT messaging is a new concept that builds upon the current research. Finally, the effects of the CRT allegations on student behavior and school, family, and community partnerships presented in this study were new findings. The combination of the existing and new research illustrates the overall conclusion that educational leaders must take a proactive approach to Crisis Communication about CRT to preserve their schools as safe places for all children to learn with the support of families and communities.

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Educational Leaders' Confusion and Hesitancy to Respond to CRT Allegations

The findings of this study indicated educational leaders' confusion and hesitancy regarding their understanding of and ability to respond to allegations of teaching CRT (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujjifusa, 2021; Waxman, 2023). This study contained participants who reported a poor understanding of CRT, yet these same participants claimed that their level of preparedness to respond to CRT allegations was excellent. The misinformation spread about CRT has created confusion regarding what CRT is and is not for many Americans, including those in education. The chaos surrounding CRT has been consistent and intentional because much of the messaging and media that has been circulated was created by political activists distorting the perception of CRT to include any attempt by a school district to instill racial or gender equity, thus forcing children to dislike each other (Morgan, 2022). However, CRT has become an example of taboo deformation, which occurs when a concept is deemed inappropriate to discuss in public (Buchanon, 2021). Therefore, educational leaders may deny any association with the concept out of fear of becoming targets of accusations. Educational leaders' hesitancy to respond to CRT allegations undermines the schools' responsibility to provide an equitable education to all students and leaves students, parents, and community members relying on social media and television to answer their questions about CRT (Morgan, 2022).

Ohio's Changing Demographics, Politics, and Schools

Ohio's increase in people of color has caused the state to become a target for political activists who spread disinformation about CRT and schools; suburban districts with changing demographics become the focus areas for CRT allegations because they are often the swing communities for voting (Cain, 2022; Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Frey, 2022; White et al., 2023).

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Considering nearly one-third of the children under the age of one are minorities in Ohio, the current trend toward a non-White populace in the Buckeye State is predicted to continue (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio, 2023). Therefore, post-industrial Ohio is progressively leaning toward a predominantly Republican state that can heavily influence presidential elections because Ohio wields 18 votes in the electoral college (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021).

Because many people of color now live in the suburbs, schools in these communities are experiencing rapidly changing demographics and increased political messaging (Frey, 2022). Suburban schools are the focus of political messaging because the suburbs are often political swing vote districts (White et al., 2023). Therefore, it is not surprising that suburban superintendents have reported the highest number of contentious political environments, allegations toward the schools, disputed school board elections, combative school board meetings, increased Freedom of Information Act requests, and overall toxic environments (White et al., 2023). Residents of wealthy suburbs experience the most political messaging by political activists in pursuit of votes and campaign contributions (Cain, 2022; White et al., 2023).

Ohio's microcosmic demographic shift is indicative of America's changing populace across the country and schools' impending challenges to meet students' needs (Cain, 2022; Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Frey, 2022; White et al., 2023). Educational leaders' awareness of the political climate and messaging in their school communities is an essential first step to preserving the academic curriculums, equitable learning environments, and partnerships of our schools (Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Therefore, education leaders' ability to communicate effectively is essential in not only proactive relationship building today, but also in establishing inclusive school cultures for the nearly one-third non-White students who will be attending the schools of tomorrow (Cárdenas & Kelley, 2012; Ohio, 2023).

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Increased Online Conflict = Increased Face-to-Face Conflict in Schools

Increased online conflict and negative messaging in a school district often leads to an increase in face-to-face conflict. Educational leaders should be aware that there is a prevalent pattern of the bullies becoming emboldened by a high frequency of posts (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023a; Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Children who are subjected to echo chambers of disinformation about CRT and racist ideology online or at their kitchen tables with family members are less likely than adults to differentiate truth from fiction because their reasoning skills are not fully developed (Anspach et al., 2020; Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Kim, 2019).

The Emasculation Through Education Theory has been exhibited in new ways as extremist groups post celebrations of white boy summer and baseless accusations that the FBI or CIA have orchestrated mass shootings to entice young, new members to their organizations (Hayes, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Seitz, 2022). Emasculation Through Education Theory was a disinformation campaign during the Vietnam War designed to discourage young men from attending college and serving in the war instead (Green & Longoria, 2021). Today, the Emasculation Through Education Theory concept has been used by political activists to target schools to gain support for anti-LGBTQ legislation by alleging that educators intentionally influence young men to become less masculine and more effeminate (Green & Longoria, 2021). In fact, The Department of Homeland Security has issued multiple warnings that these hate groups' posts are challenging their young recruits to violence toward immigrants, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ community (Seitz, 2022). In fact, hateful extremist rhetoric

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was cited as the reason behind the racially motivated attacks in Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and El Paso (Seitz, 2022).

Educational leaders must be aware that hate speech creators intentionally recruit teenagers online, and students who live in political messaging target areas are the most likely to view extremist group content (Hayes, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Seitz, 2022). The extremist groups adopt the same tactics on social media that Islamic State terrorists use when trolling for new recruits such as coded speech and algorithm tracking (Seitz, 2022). Despite the ideological differences, both supporters of Islamic State and white supremacists attract followers using a similar narrative (Etehad, 2019). The narrative of both populations is that there is an existential crisis occurring and violence is the only way to preserve their way of life (Etehad, 2019). Both groups target young men who lack a sense of community and who feel marginalized and alienated (Buchanon 2020; Etehad, 2019). While Islamic State recruits are able to rally around identified leaders, white supremacist groups are intentionally fragmented and secretive; however, even the secrecy of white supremacist groups has declined in recent years (Etehad, 2019; Seitz, 2022).

Both Islamic State and white supremacist groups employ a staircase model for recruitment (Etehad, 2019). People start on the bottom floor and remain there if they are content with conditions of their lives; however, the second floor is entered when people who feel discontent often search for solutions online, which changes their algorithm to reflect their feelings of frustration (Etehad, 2019). If the online user shows signs of a desire to blame others for their discontent, it is at that point that the groups will begin online messaging to test for participant interactions, which is the third floor. Once the participant has started interacting with the group's messaging, they are susceptible to recruitment to the group, who then suggest the use

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of violence. The participant then enters the fourth floor once they have been recruited. The more involved the participant becomes with the extremist group, the less that can be done to prohibit the individual from the fifth floor, which is violence against their perceived target (Etehad, 2019; Seitz, 2022). Both groups now rely more on online forums and social media to recruit young members, disseminate information, and inspire violence than in-person contact with individuals. It is for these reasons that educational leaders must be aware of the online messaging that occurs within their school district.

Therefore, students who live in communities targeted by political activists for increased CRT messaging are more likely to view racist ideology online because their algorithm has tagged them as susceptible to racially-motivated speech (Seitz, 2022). Apps, such as Instagram, are then used by extremists to amplify their content and direct followers to new accounts by employing audience engagement metrics. The creators of online hate rhetoric not only target young followers, but then the posts are timed with current events. For example, during Pride month, the Emasculation Through Education Theory posts escalate to call for violence toward the LGBTQ community (Hayes, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Seitz, 2022).

Today, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity are the most prevalent identifying factors of victims of bullying (Bullying, 2021; FBI, 2020b). Considering the statistically significant correlation between the number of social media posts about CRT in a school district and the reported increase in student conflicts, the practical implication for educational leaders is that the mental health and safety of students is more at risk in school districts that have been targeted with anti-CRT messaging (Bullying, 2021; Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022). Simply stated, educational leaders are charged with the safety and well-being of the students in their schools; therefore, focused actions must be taken to be aware of the political

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and social climate of their school district and then minimize the spread of misinformation to maintain the schools as a safe haven for learning (Buchanan, 2020; Coombs, 1995; Ujifusa, 2021).

Educational Leaders Must Take a Proactive Approach to Crisis Communication

Educational leaders must take a proactive approach to crisis communication that includes internal and external approaches to maintain positive school, family, and community partnerships (Buchanan, 2020; Hayes, 2021; Kim, 2019; Søe, 2021). The practical implication for all educational leaders is that CRT will not be the last communication crisis presented to schools, and educational leaders must formulate and implement their crisis communication plans from the beginning of their employment at a school district (Buchanan, 2020; Coombs, 1995; Ujifusa, 2021).

While the reality is that superintendents working in districts with a high number of social media posts about CRT have noticed that the misinformation has damaged school, family, and community partnerships, the only way to restore those relationships is through in-person interactions and positive messaging (Buchanan, 2020; Hayes, 2021; Kim, 2019; Søe, 2021; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). While much of this study has focused on technology, educators need to remember that schools are first and foremost a people business. In short, the practical implication is that the task to change the narrative and perception of schools will fall on the educational leaders to preserve quality education for all students. A systematic positive online messaging strategy combined with crisis communication will only accomplish so much. The echo chambers of misinformation about schools will most effectively be shattered by in-person, positive interactions with all stakeholders and the reassurance that the school is place

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where all children can thrive (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013; Robinson, 2011; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021).

Suggestions for Improvement

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by asserting that educational leaders must work with teachers, students, parents, and community members to implement a two-pronged strategy to build relationships and maintain the integrity of our schools (Sanders et al., 1998; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). By applying the theories of Crisis Communication Management, Carol Epstein's six types of parental involvement, and proposed bipartisan understandings of CRT education, schools can proactively maintain transparency with all stakeholders and ensure a safe, comfortable learning environment for all students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Mora, 2012). The two-pronged approach includes an external, focused messaging, team-building strategy composed of educators, families, and community members. The internal approach includes a curriculum review and professional development aimed at informing school employees of proactive strategies of information management and relationship building that will minimize misinformation sharing, further develop the expertise of teachers, and enhance curriculum. As schools in the United States continue to become culturally, racially, economically, and linguistically diverse, reaching out to families has become more important than ever because positive interactions and trust built between the school and families help to minimize spread and belief in negative misinformation viewed online (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Tadle-Zaragosa, & Sonsona, 2021).

External Approach

Creating a team of educators and parents to build and maintain positive relationships with families and communities while minimizing the sharing of misinformation about the school can

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be a solid platform upon which an equitable school environment can thrive. Educational leaders must begin the external approach by partnering with families and community members to build a team of individuals moving toward the shared goal of creating a positive, equitable school and community culture (Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). The team of parents and educational leaders should fulfill authentic roles of family and community relationship building, hosting events and supplying the website and messaging system with creative content about the school to inspire trust among the school's stakeholders (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Mora, 2012). The team should be equally composed of staff and parents, with one staff member (who is not the principal) assigned to lead the parent and community partnerships. The educational leader of the partnership must possess excellent communication skills and remain logical, even when facing belligerent accusations (Coombs, 1995). A member of the team should be assigned to community organization outreach and membership to broaden the reach of the team's positive messaging and support of the school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Gordon & Louis, 2013). Once the team has been built, the misinformation crisis within the school district must be assessed to determine the team's next steps (Social Media, 2010).

Assessing the political and social climate of the school district and the likelihood that the community has been targeted with focused political messaging is the first step (Coombs, 2014). Once the likelihood of focused political messaging has been determined, the team must scan social media for negative comments, determine the importance of the person spreading the misinformation, and forecast the negative messages' potential for spread (Social Media, 2010). The initial steps of the action plan must also incorporate being seen by creating an online movement directly addressing the misinformation and contacting the sources who are launching the complaints with an approach of educational engagement (Social Media, 2010). All members

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of the team must be instructed on the need for transparency on the part of the schools to dispel misinformation.

The only appropriate response strategy to CRT allegations is the “non-existence strategy” because schools are defending themselves against messaging that teachers are trying to brainwash and shame children for their racial identity (Coombs, 1995). Schools should not deny teaching sensitive topics, such as race and oppression; however, schools should educate others that intentional public shaming and brainwashing are not a part of the curriculum. The first two micro-strategies of the non-existence strategy are clarification and further explanation of the lack of crisis (Coombs, 1995). The communication team’s focus is to debunk and deny the misinformation while describing the actual daily learning taking place and include evidence to support their position (Coombs, 2014).

A school’s website should be the epicenter for answers in a school community. Therefore, the communication team should devise a campaign, contest, or drive to encourage students, parents, and staff to visit the school’s website frequently. Once website frequency has been established, a statement denying negative teaching strategies and further explaining the school’s stance on CRT should be strategically placed on the site providing a transparent, easily understood message to dispel misconceptions (Coombs, 2014). The statement should be true, specific, provide additional explanation, difficult to argue against, and use straightforward wording (Coombs, 1995, 2014).

Internal Approach

Educational leaders should read the laws and guidelines that have been written by their state and local school boards and discuss these laws and guidelines with the superintendent before the start of a new school year. Vague wording should be identified, and a clear

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understanding of the rules in play should be achieved so that educational leaders might advise their teachers on ways to best teach a rich, diverse curriculum without conflict within the school community (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). The educational leader's explicit response and interpretation of vague wording in the laws and guidelines should be put into writing and not left up to interpretation or memory.

A team of administrators and teachers of social studies and language arts should assess their school's climate regarding curriculum and CRT and review the existing curriculum (Bass, 2018; Kaplan & Owings, 2021; Skeet, 2019). Many educators have described that allegations of teaching CRT has had a chilling effect on the classroom (Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022). A survey should be distributed to determine the staff's understanding, possible misconceptions, or fears regarding CRT. Then, principals should relate questions or concerns to the superintendent and invite the superintendent's guidance, if needed. When reviewing the curriculum, the accomplishments and histories of marginalized people should be taught throughout the traditional curriculum instead of simply teaching a few people of color during Black History Month (Frag, 2021).

Based on the answers submitted in the staff survey, a professional development session that focuses on diversity of thought and an equitable educational atmosphere may be necessary (Frag, 2021). The professional development should cover the history and definition of CRT, verbiage and written interpretations of laws and guidelines, and strategies to keep class discussions institutional instead of personal (Frag, 2021; Singleton & Hays, n.d.). The professional development could include a study of German schools' approach to teaching about the Holocaust, which now includes conversations about cultural and religious diversity, tolerance, human rights, and the need for democracy (Vitale, 2019). The goal of the professional

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development is to provide educators with a brief history and understanding of CRT, as well as the laws and guidelines in order to dissipate the chilling approach to teaching American history that may exist. Therefore, teachers may employ instructional strategies that educate students on the infringement of all humans' rights and the importance of refusing to be a silent bystander to human rights violations (Farag, 2021; Panchenko, 2019; Singleton & Hays, n.d.).

Limitations and Generalizability

The methodological limitations were that this study was only focused on Ohio and the superintendents employed during the 2022-2023 school year. The sample size was only 14 participants. When a sample size is too small for the alpha level and analysis, the study can show reduced statistical power and significance (Trochim et al., 2016). Therefore, the alpha threshold to determine significance was modified to reduce the possibility of Type Two Errors (Trochim et al., 2016). In addition, a small sample size increases the risk of the sample being unusual by chance and not representative of an entire population (Trochim et al., 2016). Because of the small sample size, this study is not generalizable, but rather a case study snapshot to provide insights and information about CRT and schools.

The time frame of the study was also a limitation because schools have only been experiencing CRT allegations for three years. The lack of pre-existing research on the effects of CRT allegations on student behaviors and partnerships was a limitation because I could not refer to additional studies for data and best practices. The limited timeframe and the timing of the survey could also have affected the results of the study (Trochim et al., 2016). Because the survey was distributed and submitted during the summer months, the participants' recollections of allegations and conflicts may have been reported as less than during the duration of the school year when most issues arose. However, I framed the questions to ask the participants'

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recollections of the entire school year to mitigate the limitations of the time framing and timing of the study.

Threats to Validity

Sampling Error

The target population of this study was Ohio superintendents. The homogenous sample was chosen because the study explored the impressions and perceptions of the superintendents on CRT allegations and the effects on student behaviors and partnerships. However, the homogenous sample may have affected the data of the study. Because the sample was only superintendents, there was a higher likelihood of similarities in their answers. Potential data collection bias exists in all research ((Trochim et al., 2016). Data collection bias occurs when certain groups are over or underrepresented in the data collection process (Trochim et al., 2016). Superintendents, who work in the same state, often attend the same training and belong to the same professional organizations. Because the sample was only focused on Ohio, it is possible that the superintendents had experienced similar professional development and training, thus causing a lack of variety in their answers regarding level of understanding and preparedness. The fact that the participants work in a variety of types of school districts and located many miles away from one another was a mitigating factor to the sampling error threat to validity.

The low response rate was another threat to external validity. I attempted to increase the response rate with reminder emails to the participants during the time that the survey was open. However, the sensitive nature of the topic could be a factor that influenced the low response rate. While anonymity was stated in the opening letter, participants may have also had concerns about remaining anonymous when completing the survey.

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Analysis bias is also possible in all research (Trochim et al., 2016). The most common analysis bias is confirmation bias, where the researcher uses the participants' responses to confirm an existing belief or hypothesis (Trochim et al., 2016). In this study, the threat of confirmation bias was minimized by researching and presenting both sides of CRT allegations and seeking the input of many readers and interpreters of the data analysis. This study was not the product of one researcher. Rather, this study had been thoroughly reviewed and tested by the members of the researcher's dissertation review board and the Youngstown State University Internal Review Board.

Type I and Type II Errors

Type I and Type II errors are threats to conclusion validity and encompass the conclusions drawn based on the data. The Type I error is a false positive, where the researcher states a relationship between variables when the relationship does not exist (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016). These errors occur when each analysis is treated independently of the others while multiple analyses have been conducted. In this study, $p < .05$. ANOVA tests were run on the type of districts, politics, and economic status of the school districts and the number of social media posts observed. There were no statistically significant findings, and multiple analyses were not conducted. Therefore, concerns regarding Type I errors have been minimized.

A Type II error is a threat to conclusion validity that is a false negative, which is finding no relationship when one does exist (Trochim et al., 2016). The lack of statistical significance does not necessarily mean that the null hypothesis is true (Trochim et al., 2016). In this study, a Type II error was a concern because of the low response rate and homogeneous population. The response rate of the study was 7.07%. However, variations in the answers did exist, thus

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minimizing the possibility of a Type II error. By considering the variations in answers and variables of the sample including homogeneity and size, the null hypothesis cannot be accepted.

Suggestions for Future Research

During the last three years of early mornings, late nights, and seemingly endless weekends at my computer researching, writing, and contemplating the effects of misinformation about CRT on student behavior and partnerships, I harbored a secret hope that by the time I would be writing the final sections of this study, CRT allegations would be a distant memory for educators. Yet, as I write these final sections, the allegations, legislation, and misinformation that are now called the Culture Wars have only grown in frequency and magnitude. Therefore, I am suggesting future research that focuses on geography, mental health, curriculums, advocacy, and effects on students (Bullying, 2021; Pendharkar, 2022; Perry, 2022).

Suggestion #1

A larger study could be conducted using the same variables as this study on superintendents from across the country seeking answers to the same research questions, as well as drawing correlations regarding the data and geographical locations. A larger study encompassing more participants from a variety of states could be an important contribution to educational research because the larger study would address the limitation of the small sample size of this study. While this study does encompass different types of school districts, the sample is small and from only one state. The larger study could explore the correlations between the geographical location of a school district and the number of reported allegations. The larger study could also include a search for correlations between predominantly Democrat or Republican states and the number of posts and allegations focused on schools to seek possible correlations between the political leanings of the residents of school districts and the number of

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allegations. The larger would address the limitation of this study, which was the lack of variety in political predominance reported.

Suggestion #2

A future study could be conducted on the effects of CRT misinformation and restrictive legislation on the mental health and academic success rates of students of color and members of the LGBTQ community. The study could survey students on their reports of bullying and mental health status in correlation with the number of allegations and posts about CRT in the school district. The study could be a combination of a Likert scale survey completed by the participants reporting on their mental health and academic success rates, as well as qualitative questions based on the students' reactions to CRT posts and allegations. The future study could be important because while many of the allegations and restrictive legislation have centered on students of color and members of the LGBTQ community, I came across very little information or studies that addressed how these factors have affected these students.

Suggestion #3

Another future study could be conducted on the physical well-being and mental health of administrators, faculty, and staff members because of the toxic political environments in school districts that have been targeted by political messaging. Again, the variables of the number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions would be correlated with the educators' reports of their own physical and mental well-being. The study could be a combination of a Likert scale survey completed by the participants reporting on their mental and physical health, as well as qualitative questions based on the participants' reactions to CRT posts and allegations. The future study could be an important contribution to the educational research and knowledge base by providing statistical insight into the effects of the allegations and legislation on the mental and physical

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health of the employees of the schools. The future study could also examine the effects, if any, that the allegations and legislation have had on teacher retention and shortages. The future study could address the limitation of this study, which did not explore school employees' mental and physical health.

Suggestion #4

Since this study was not able to test correlations using race because many of the participants worked at predominantly White school districts, this limitation could be addressed by a future study conducted on school districts that are multicultural. Testing the number of CRT posts and allegations in correlation to the racial makeup of the school districts could yield statistically interesting results. The data from the questions on race and number of allegations could then be correlated with the reported effects on student behavior and school, family, and community partnerships. The future study could be a valuable contribution to the educational body of knowledge because it would provide data concerning the frequency of postings and allegations in multicultural settings, as well as draw correlations between the variables of race, allegations, student behaviors, and partnerships that could help educational leaders to proactively prepare their crisis communication plan.

Suggestion #5

Another recommended study that could be conducted could be focused on the efficacy of parent and community groups formed to counteract CRT misinformation and legislation when partnered with the schools. Of course, the challenge of this study would be that a measurement of the number of CRT posts and allegations in correlation with student behaviors and school partnerships would need to be taken before the forming of the advocacy group and then another measurement would need to be taken after the advocacy group had been implemented for at least

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one year. During that year, the advocacy group would hold talks and create direct messaging educating parents and community members about what CRT is and is not, as well as answer questions about the schools. The second survey would then be distributed after one year of the advocacy groups' interventions to test the number of CRT posts and allegations in correlation with student behaviors and school partnerships. The future study could address the limitation of the current study, which did not test the efficacy of parent organizations on the spread of misinformation and allegations.

Suggestion #6

A final suggestion for future research would be to explore the Research Question: Have the social media posts and allegations regarding CRT in schools streamed down to the students? In other words, are students who see CRT misinformation online or discussed in their homes more likely to share the CRT posts online? What are the motivating factors of students who share CRT posts? Are the motivations of students the same as the motivations of adults? Are the students who live in political messaging target areas more likely to share CRT misinformation? Does the sharing of CRT misinformation online affect the students' behaviors in and out of school?

Summary

This study sought to explore Ohio superintendents' level of understanding of CRT and level of preparedness to respond to allegations. The objectives of the study were to explore possible statistical correlations between the participants' levels of understanding of CRT, preparedness to respond, and the number of CRT posts, allegations, and disruptions. The study also explored the number of posts and allegations in school districts and statistical correlations to

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school, family, and community partnerships and student behaviors. The Summary section will be broken down by the theoretical framework with connections drawn to the study's findings.

Definition of CRT & Crisis Communication Management

The participants' reported level of understanding of CRT had a strong correlation to the participants' reported level of preparedness. The score of .767 in the principal component analysis could indicate that participants who have experienced extensive coursework and exposure to knowledge about CRT have also completed extensive training in crisis communication management. However, three participants indicated their level of understanding of CRT was average or poor and their level of preparedness to respond to CRT allegations as excellent. It is possible that misinformation about CRT has caused taboo deformation regarding the term, which would be reason for participants to deny any association with CRT. The final conclusion drawn regarding the participants' levels of understanding and preparedness is that the increasingly conservative political landscape of Ohio combined with ongoing anti-CRT legislation across the country has caused educators to often deny or remain silent when confronted with allegations about CRT in schools (Buchholz, 2023; Waxman, 2023). Without a proactive crisis communication plan focused on minimizing the spread of misinformation about a school district, parents who have been exposed to an echo chamber of misinformation about the school online have been conditioned to believe a narrative of information that is on replay in their heads from the unnatural flow of information via social media (Kim, 2019; S e, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative that educational leaders familiarize themselves with all demographic factors of their school district to prepare their crisis communication plan to counteract the negative spiral of misinformation.

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Motivations of Sharers

The motivation of sharers of CRT is combined with multiple factors, such as the type of school district and economic status of communities to influence the number of CRT allegations in a school (Buchanon, 2020; Chadwick et al., 2018). Non-suburban schools had a mean of 1.3889 social media posts about CRT while the suburban districts had a 4.4000 mean score of social media posts about CRT. It should also be noted that the schools with less than 50% of students on free lunch had a mean of 3.25000 social media posts while the schools with more than 50% of students on free lunch had a .5000 mean score of social media posts.

The motivations of sharers theory states that people often share misinformation to entertain or to inform out of a sense of civic duty (Buchanon, 2020; Chadwick et al., 2018). The likelihood of sharing misinformation is then compounded if the post is based on the sharers' pre-existing beliefs and they possess a high degree of attention-seeking and low agreeability (Buchanon, 2020). The bandwagon effect and use of bots to share a post multiple times are often factors in sharing misinformation because people with highly disagreeable personalities are especially susceptible to the need for affirmation (Buchanan, 2020). Therefore, people who have been exposed to an echo chamber of misinformation about CRT that intentionally misleads consumers of information to believe that many people are in agreement are often already emotionally charged and combative when they arrive at school board meetings (Buchanon, 2020; Hayes, 2021). Finally, the echo chamber of misinformation about the school has been present because political activists employ studies of people's algorithms and audience engagement metrics to purposely target residents in demographically-changing affluent suburbs (Kim, 2019; S e, 2021).

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Because the suburbs have become more racially, economically, and politically diverse, these communities are often the swing votes during political campaigns; therefore, political activists target the people who live in these areas with increased political messaging (White et al., 2023). In addition, educational leaders in these communities report the highest number of concerns about inaccurate information being spread about the schools and contentious political environments (White et al., 2023). The wealthy suburbs have become even more of a target for political activists' messaging in an effort to gain campaign contributions (Cain, 2022). The quest for contributions combined with a history of schools acquiescing to the demands of wealthy, white residents has placed a target for negative messaging on the schools located in these wealthy suburbs by political activists seeking votes and monies (Cain, 2022). As a result of these factors, school leaders in these communities must remain even more vigilant in their efforts to clearly and boldly communicate with stakeholders regarding allegations of CRT while purposefully maintaining positive relationships with parents and community members (Cuff, 2022; Fahey, 2021; Walker, 2023; Ujifusa, 2021).

Politics, Race, Disinformation, and Student Behavior

In this study, schools that reported less than one CRT social media post had a mean increase of 1.88 in student conflicts while districts with ten or more social media posts had a mean of increase of 2.00. The Levene statistic of 2.155 based on the mean of the number of social media posts and the reported increase in student conflicts deemed the correlation statistically significant. Schools are not only seeing an increase in student conflicts, but the severity of the conflicts and bold nature of the bullies has also increased (Anspach, et.al., 2020; Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Kim, 2019). Race is reported as the leading factor that determines students who are bullied in and out of school, while sexual orientation and gender identity is the

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second determining factor (Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023a). Black students are significantly more likely to be bullied than all other races (Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022). In addition, sexual orientation and gender identity are significantly more likely to be bullied than their heterosexual, cisgender peers in school (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Bullying, 2021).

While the number of hate crimes committed has continued to rise over the last three years, it has become evident that children are subjected to echo chambers of disinformation online and among their adult family members but often lack the fully developed reasoning skills to determine authenticity of the information they consume (Anspach, et.al., 2020; Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Kim, 2019). Today, over 95% of American children between the ages of 12 and 17 have access to social media and the Internet, and the algorithms of these young people can make them targets for increased messaging of CRT misinformation and online hate, much like adults (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021; Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). Likewise, the harassment of students for their sexual orientation and gender identity has increased the most as the culture wars have expanded to include disinformation and legislation centered around schools teaching sexuality and gender identity using audience engagement metrics (Green & Longoria, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Perry, 2022).

Meanwhile, many parents have expressed that the allegations and conflicts about CRT have distracted school districts from protecting members of marginalized groups and emboldened the perpetrators of the harassment (Heyward, 2022; Kennedy, 2023; Kingkade, 2021; Kozhamkulova, 2021; Mitchell, 2023; O’Kane, 2022). Extreme instances of racially-motivated harassment, such as students posting “Whites Only” signs above drinking fountains and wearing blackface to football games have made headlines recently (Heyward, 2022; Kelly,

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2023; Kennedy, 2023; Mitchell, 2023; O’Kane, 2022). One of the most disturbing aspects of these acts is that many of the bullies do not exhibit fear for the consequences of their actions. Parent advocacy groups have been created to enact change and counteract CRT misinformation and restrictive legislation (Mitchell, 2023). The unfortunate reality is that the furor over CRT has forced educational leaders to perilously navigate the allegations and restrictive legislation instead of focusing on providing a quality education for all learners.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

The partnerships among school, family, and community members have been damaged in many school districts by CRT allegations, and a number of the allegations have been inspired by political activists, not parents of students (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). In this study, a very strong correlation between Social Media Posts about CRT and the reporting of allegations and disruptions existed. The proverbial smoking gun of the entire study was that the school districts that reported a high number of allegations from community members also had a high number of meeting disruptions. Therefore, the correlation score of .822 indicated that many of the explosive meeting disruptions that are occurring at school board meetings have actually been launched by individuals who did not have children in the schools and were often working to promote a political agenda by using disinformation about the schools to gather followers (Camera, 2021; Erin, 2021; Lopez, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021). In fact, the participants who reported a higher number of negative CRT posts were three times more likely to report the answer yes to the question of whether they think that CRT social media posts and allegations have caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in their school district.

Yet, schools and educational leaders are not without avenues to pursue while navigating the storms of these challenging times. Educational leaders must approach a proactive two-

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pronged communication strategy in their school districts with the same verve and energy exhibited by political advocates for their causes. The external approach should encompass building a team of educators and parents, who assess the political atmosphere of the community, create direct, clear messaging, and dispel the myths of CRT allegations (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Mora, 2012). The communication team must also function as a constant current of positive messaging about the great things taking place in the school through the school's website and social media platforms that causes parents to remark how grateful they are that their children attend the school (Yull et al., 2018). The team must also invite all families into the school and invite them often. The echo chambers of misinformation must be shattered from all sides and especially through relationship building in person (Kim, 2019; Sør, 2021).

The second prong of the avenue to preserve the integrity of education is to review the curriculum and create a professional development based on the needs of the staff (Frag, 2021; Kaplan & Owings, 2021). The curriculum must be reflective of America today, not the romanticized vision of what America once was. A wide variety of historical figures and authors of all ethnicities should be intertwined with the traditional curriculum throughout the school year so seamlessly that students will become familiar with the many voices and narratives that created our heritage (Frag, 2021; Kaplan & Owings, 2021). The staff should be surveyed to assess their educational needs and fears regarding CRT. Based on the results of that survey, teachers can learn the history and definition of CRT, details of legislation (if applicable), and strategies to maintain a professional atmosphere during class discussions on sensitive topics (Frag, 2021; Singleton & Hays, n.d.). The communication team and the professional development may not stop the allegations against schools, but these efforts may minimize the damage and start to restore the vital partnerships needed to provide a quality education to all students.

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The time for educational leaders to take action is now to preserve the curricula, integrity, and equitable safe havens of the school room, the cornerstone of the belief that education is a *right* to all children (Brown, 1954). If each educational leader partners with fellow educators, parents, and community members to proactively form a communication team and employ external and internal plans of action that boldly and clearly respond to allegations people may be less likely to share allegations and misinformation because they are less likely to have a pre-existing distrust and dislike in the schools (Buchanon, 2020; Hayes, 2021; Kim, 2019; Søre, 2021; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). The transparent, overarching goal of the communication team is to inspire pride and confidence in the local schools (Buchanon, 2020; Hayes, 2021; Kim, 2019; Søre, 2021; Tadle-Zaragosa & Sonsona, 2021). Educational leaders must also arm teachers with knowledge and strategies to warm the chill and fear that now permeates many history and language arts classrooms (Farag, 2021). Leaders of education must help teachers develop strategies that inspire our learners to recognize violations of human rights both past and present without guilt, shame, or indifference, but rather, compassion, courage, and a willingness to advocate for others (Farag, 2021; Panchenko, 2019; Singleton & Hays, n.d.).

It has been three years since an angry mom accosted me in the school parking lot about CRT, a concept that I could not define before 2020. The interaction on that cold, fall morning sparked my three-year journey of discovery to explore the history and spread of misinformation about CRT, as well as the effects of CRT messaging on students' behaviors and school partnerships. The explanations and conclusions that were uncovered during this study were not always pleasant and sometimes disturbing. Elie Wiesel once advised, "Action is the only remedy to indifference: the most insidious danger of all" after shedding light on many of the world's darkest atrocities (1986). As in the past, scholars and the teachers must shed light on the

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injustices and ugly truths that we simply cannot afford to ignore for the sake of future generations. Just as many blistered hands toiled to build this country were all shades of light and dark, there shall one day be young, eager faces all shades of light and dark in classrooms looking to their teachers seeking answers to tomorrow's questions and yesterday's histories.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

Tue 4/25/2023 9:11 AM



Apr 25, 2023 9:10:57 AM EDT

Jane Beese

Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2023-236 CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

Dear Dr. Jane Beese:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

JB

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

APPENDIX B: DRAFT IRB REQUEST FROM CAYUSE

Submission Type: Initial Date: 4-17-2023

IRB #: 2023-236

Title: CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

Creation Date: 3-17-2023

Status: Unsubmitted

Principal Investigator: Jane Beese

Getting Started About Youngstown State University IRB and Cayuse IRB

All research projects conducted under the auspices of Youngstown State University that involve the use of living human subjects, samples or data obtained from them, directly or indirectly, with or without direct consent, must receive approval from the Institutional Review Board before the project can begin.

Cayuse IRB is an interactive web application. As you answer questions, new sections relevant to the type of research being conducted will appear on the left-hand side. Therefore not all numbered sections may appear. You do not have to finish the application in one sitting. All information can be saved.

For more information about the IRB regulations and procedures, please refer to the IRB Handbook.

Getting Started All YSU faculty, students, and staff who are involved with human subjects research must complete training through the CITI Program (INSTRUCTIONS for registering and completing training).

New investigators should consider beginning the online training course up to two weeks prior to the submission of an IRB Protocol or grant application, and prior to beginning the planned research project

Throughout the submission, you will be required to provide the following:

- Research instruments (surveys, questionnaires, or other instruments)
- Detailed Study Information
- Informed Consent Forms, if applicable
- Waiver of Informed Consent Form, if applicable
- Study Recruitment Information

Approval letters from other sites where research will be conducted, if applicable

Youngstown State University IRB You may not begin your research project and recruitment of subjects until a formal approval letter from the chair of the IRB has been received.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

The IRB meets as needed during the regular academic year. Please submit the application as soon as possible.

*required

I have read the information above and I am ready to begin my submission.

✓ Yes

*required Is this a student-conducted study /project? All students conducting a study/project are required to list their faculty advisor(s)/Principal Investigator (PI) in the YSU study personnel section.

✓ Yes

No

*required What is your status at Youngstown State University?

Faculty

✓ Student

*required

Undergraduate Student

✓ Graduate Student

Staff

Youngstown State University Study Personnel List all YSU study personnel involved in the conduct of this study.

If you cannot find a person in the people finder, please contact the IRB Office immediately at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

*required

Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Provide the name of the Principal Investigator or the Faculty Advisor for student-conducted studies.

Name: Jane Beese

Organization: Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Address: One University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555-0001

Phone: 330-941-2236

Email: jbeese@ysu.edu

*required

Primary Contact

Provide the name of the Primary Contact of this study.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Name: Deanna Jordan

Organization: Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Address: One University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555-0001

Phone:

Email: dljordan01@student.yzu.edu

*required

Student Investigator(s)

Provide the name of the Student Investigator(s) for this study.

Name: Deanna Jordan

Organization: Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Address: One University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555-0001

Phone:

Email: dljordan01@student.yzu.edu

Co-Investigator(s) Provide the name(s) of Co-Investigator(s) for this study.

*required

Non-Youngstown State University Personnel

Yes

No

*required

Sponsor Will this study be supported by an external agency?

Yes

No

Study Dates Provide the anticipated study start and end dates.

*required

Start Date 05-22-2023

*required End Date 12-18-2023

Submission Information

*required

Where will this study/project take place? Location of research

Youngstown State University

Other facility

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Multiple other facilities

*required

What type of study/project is this submission?

Type of research Research Study/Creative Investigation

A research study or creative investigation is a project that uses systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (45 CFR 46.102(d)).

Clinical Trial

Single Patient, Treatment Use, Continued Access Drug/Device Study

Emergency (or Compassionate) Use of Investigational Drug or Device

*required

Will this study/project ONLY use pre-existing data?

Pre-existing data means the data existed before or was collected prior to the study/project was proposed for a purpose other than the proposed study/project. (For purposes of a grant, this refers to data collected prior to the time the study/project was proposed.)

Select no if the study includes a combination of pre-existing and new data.

Yes

No

*required Does the study/project meet the exemption criteria? The study/project involves: (check all that apply)

pregnant women, fetuses, prisoners, mentally ill or incapacitated subjects

survey or interview procedures with children, minors less than 18 years old

observation of children in settings where the investigator(s) will participate in the activities being observed

deception

more than minimal risk to the human subject

potential harm to subjects if the data or identifiable information is revealed or disclosed

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Harm to subjects means that any disclosure of the human subject's responses outside this study/project could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or can be damaging to subjects? financial standing, employability, or reputation. collection of sensitive data (illegal activities, or sensitive themes such as sexual orientation, sexual behavior, undesirable work behavior, or other data that may be painful or very embarrassing to reveal, such as death of a family member, memories of physical abuse)

collection of data, documents, records or specimens from subjects after the submission of this study/project

collection of data, documents, records, or specimens labeled or recorded in such a manner that subjects can be identified, directly or indirectly through identifying links ((i.e., demographic information that might reasonably lead to the identification of subjects' name, phone number, or an code number that can be used to link the investigator's data to the source record, medical record number or hospital admission number)?

✓ none of the above

*required

The study/project meets the exemption criteria Provide a description of the study/project, including:

- how the participants will be identified and recruited,
- the procedures to which human subjects will be exposed,
- the method for data collection and analysis,
- the method for obtaining informed consent that will minimize coercion or undue influence.

Participants

The researcher will utilize the Ohio Educational Directory System (OEDS) to distribute surveys to the 615 superintendents of the 615 public school districts. The 615 surveys will be distributed via Youngstown State University Alchemer software. The participants will be exposed to an electronic survey in the email. The survey will be created in SurveyMonkey and elicit responses via a form submission. Questions were created based on the theories presented in the research. The survey will utilize various response types on the Likert five-point scale and open ended questions. The participants' identities will remain anonymous.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study data will be collected through the secure online platform SurveyMonkey and then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet. The excel spreadsheet will then be uploaded to SPSS, which is a statistical analysis program. The data sets will be analyzed and compared using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Inferential statistics are used to describe, show,

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

and summarize the basic features of a dataset, while descriptive statistics demonstrate the attributes of an identified distribution (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the distribution of the number of posts and allegations in reference to the demographics of the school districts. Inferential statistics will be used to compare the number of posts and allegations between districts according to demographic groupings. An ordinal logistic regression test, followed by a factor analysis and additive index, will be conducted on the data.

Ordinal Logistic Regression

Ordinal Logistic Regression Analysis is designed to determine the reason-result relationship between the independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s) (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). An ordinal logistic regression analysis will be run in SPSS to assess the strength of the relationships between the following dependent variables and the independent variables with an explanation of the correlation to be explored.

1. The strength of the relationship between the superintendents' level of understanding of CRT (UNDCRT) and level of preparedness to respond to allegations (PREP). The analysis will seek to answer if the superintendents' level of understanding of CRT strengthens the participants' level of preparedness to answer allegations. 2. The strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and the independent variables of the number of allegations from parents (#ALLP) and number of allegations from community members (#ALLCM). The analysis will seek to answer if the number of posts correlates to the number of allegations. 3.

The strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and the independent variables of the participants' perception of school, family, and community partnerships (SCHP). The analysis will seek to answer if the number of posts influences the school, family, and community partnerships. 4. The strength of the relationship between the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC) and the independent variables number of student conflicts (#SCONF). The analysis will seek to answer if the number of posts influences the number of student conflicts.

After the ordinal logistic regression test, followed by a factor analysis and additive index, will be conducted on the data. The key bivariate relationships are a technique used in statistics to determine the existence of relationships between two variables (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). By examining the frequencies of the key bivariate relationships in the regression model, the relationship between the variables can be determined. Other characteristics that will be examined in the data are the goodness of fit, which is the extent that the observed data matches the values expected by the theory will also be examined. The effect size will also be examined, which is the value that measures the strength of the relationship between variables will also be analyzed (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). Collinearity is when independent variables in the regression model express a linear relationship, which will be analyzed in the ordinal logistic

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

regression test (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). Once the ordinal logistic regression analysis is complete, a factor analysis will be performed.

Factor Analysis. The next test, Factor Analysis, is a method of reducing the data, so that one might seek the underlying variables in the observed variables (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). The following variables will be used in the analysis. 1. The possible correlations between the independent variables of the politics of school districts (POL) and the number of social media posts about CRT (#SOC). 2. The possible correlations between the independent variables of the politics (POL), race (RACE), socio-economics (ECO), and type of school districts (TDIST) and the number of allegations from parents (#ALLP), community members (#ALLCM), and allegations at meetings (#ALLM). 3. The possible correlations between the variables of the superintendents' level of preparedness (PREP) and the number of allegations from parents (#ALLP), community members (#ALLCM) and allegations at meetings (#ALLM).

The data will be checked for heteroskedasticity, which is essentially when the standard deviations of a predicted variable are not constant either as related to time periods or different values of an independent variable (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). Outlier detection and factor analysis will also be used to determine outliers and variability among observed, correlated variables (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016).

Additive Index. The final analysis will be the additive index, which is a set of models that are nonparametric and express unknown linear transformation of the predictor variables (Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, 2016). Since the first step of the additive index is choosing the variables that will be included in the test, the following variables will be used in the additive index. 1. Politics of district (POL) and # of social media posts (#SOC) 2. Politics of district (POL) and # of allegations by parents (#ALLP) 3. # of social media posts (#SOC) and student, parent, and community partnerships (SCHP) 4. # of allegations by parents (#ALLP) and student, parent, and community partnerships (SCHP). 5. # of allegations by parents (#ALLP) and # of student conflicts (#SCONF) Once the mean of each correlation is established, the hierarchy of the correlations will be analyzed and method alignment will be performed. By using these aspects of the analysis, a parallel convergent approach will be used to consider the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended question. The parallel convergent approach will be used to compare and interpret the quantitative and qualitative data, looking for areas of convergence and divergence between the two data sets (Precision Consulting, 2018). In short, the researcher will be seeking the parallels and discrepancies between the story told by the numbers submitted on the Likert scale and the participants' open-ended, narrative answers on their perceptions.

Informed Consent

The informed consent materials are not necessary since the survey will be distributed via email. By responding to the email survey, the participants will have provided informed

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

consent (Trochim, 2016). If the participants do not wish to participate in the survey, they simply will not respond to the email.

References

Mixed Methods (Video). Precision Consulting. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/M3gA7RD9Sxk>

Trochim, W.M.K., Donnelly, J.P., and Arora, K. (2016). The Research Methods: The Essential Knowledge Base. Cengage Publications.

Study Instruments

If applicable, attach all instruments (i.e. surveys, questionnaires, evaluation blanks, etc) to be used in the study.

[chapter 3 survey for irb.docx](#)

Informed Consent

*required

Informed Consent procedures/methods and forms

Identify the procedures/methods and consent forms to be used in your study:

✓ Written consent/assent form which contains all elements of the informed consent *required

only an IRB approved consent/assent form can be used in your study

study participant must receive a copy of the IRB approved consent/assent form after s/he or their legal guardian have signed the signed IRB approved consent/assent form must be securely kept by the researcher for 3 years

The IRB has provided a template containing the Elements of Informed info

Consent/Assent (per 45 CFR 116) on the YSU IRB website: <https://ysu.edu/research-services/human-subjects-research-irb>, under Informed Consent. Using the template is strongly suggested in order to eliminate errors and revisions.

Attach the written consent/assent form

[INFORMED CONSENT.pdf](#)

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

A short form written consent/assent form summarizing orally presented consent information
Written consent document but waiver of study participant or legal guardian's signature
Not applicable

Conflict of Interest

*required

Do you or any investigator(s) participating in this study have a financial interest related to this research project?

Yes

No

Attachments (Optional)

This section is an overview of all the attachments in your application.

Attach outside IRB records in this section under Outside IRB of Record.

Other Facility

If applicable, include the Letter of Cooperation.

Other facilities

If applicable, include all the Letters of Cooperation.

Study Procedures

If applicable, attach the following documentation

Study Documents

If applicable, this includes flyers used for recruitment. Study Instruments

If applicable, attach all instruments (i.e. surveys, questionnaires, evaluation blanks, etc) to be used in the study.

[chapter 3 survey for irb.docx](#)

Existing data (archives/databases.)

If applicable, include permission to access.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

FDA Letter

If applicable, attach FDA Letter.

Participant Protection

Attach applicable forms

Written consent/assent form INFORMED CONSENT.pdf

Short form written consent/ assent form

Outside IRB of Record If applicable, attach outside IRB records

Study Protocol

Attach the protocol for this study that was reviewed by the Outside IRB.

Outside IRB Approval

Attach the IRB Approval from the Outside IRB.

Outside IRB Review Meeting Minutes

Attach the minutes from the outside IRB meeting(s) for the review of this study.

Outside IRB Correspondence

Attach all correspondence concerning the review of this study by the Outside IRB.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Youngstown State University

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Educator:

I am a teacher of English and Language Arts in the high school setting, and I am also a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Youngstown State University. As part of my dissertation process, I will be conducting surveys as part of a research study to explore how social media posts and allegations about critical race theory may affect student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships. As an educational leader, you are in a position to provide valuable, first-hand information and experiences. This letter serves as a formal invitation to participate in my research study.

In this study, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding social media postings and allegations about critical race theory, student behaviors, and school, family, and community partnerships. I will also need to collect information to describe your school district, such as the type of district, political affiliations of residents, socio-economics and race demographics of students.

You may be at risk of minimal emotional/psychological and societal harm because of this research. The survey you will complete asks about your perceptions and knowledge of social media posts and allegations about critical race theory, as well as student behavior and school, family, and community partnerships. Because being an educator is a great source of pride and dedication to most educators, you may have negative emotions when completing the survey. You may also feel hesitation to express your views because of the current coverage about critical race theory in the media. The benefit is that you will have the opportunity to share your experiences,

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

which could positively shape the learning and teaching environment for many years to come.

The likelihood that you will be harmed is greatly minimized because I will strictly maintain the anonymity of all of the study's participants.

Your privacy is important, and I will code all identifying information about you and your school district to maintain your anonymity. I plan to present the results of the study to the Youngstown State University IRB without identifying names of participants or school districts.

You do not have to be in this study. If you don't want to participate, you should not submit the survey without losing any benefits that you are entitled to. If you do agree, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw, you can simply not submit the survey.

If you have questions about this research project, please contact Deanna Jordan at 440-666-6433. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Research Services at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

If you are willing to participate in my research study, please return this survey via email no later than two weeks from today. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

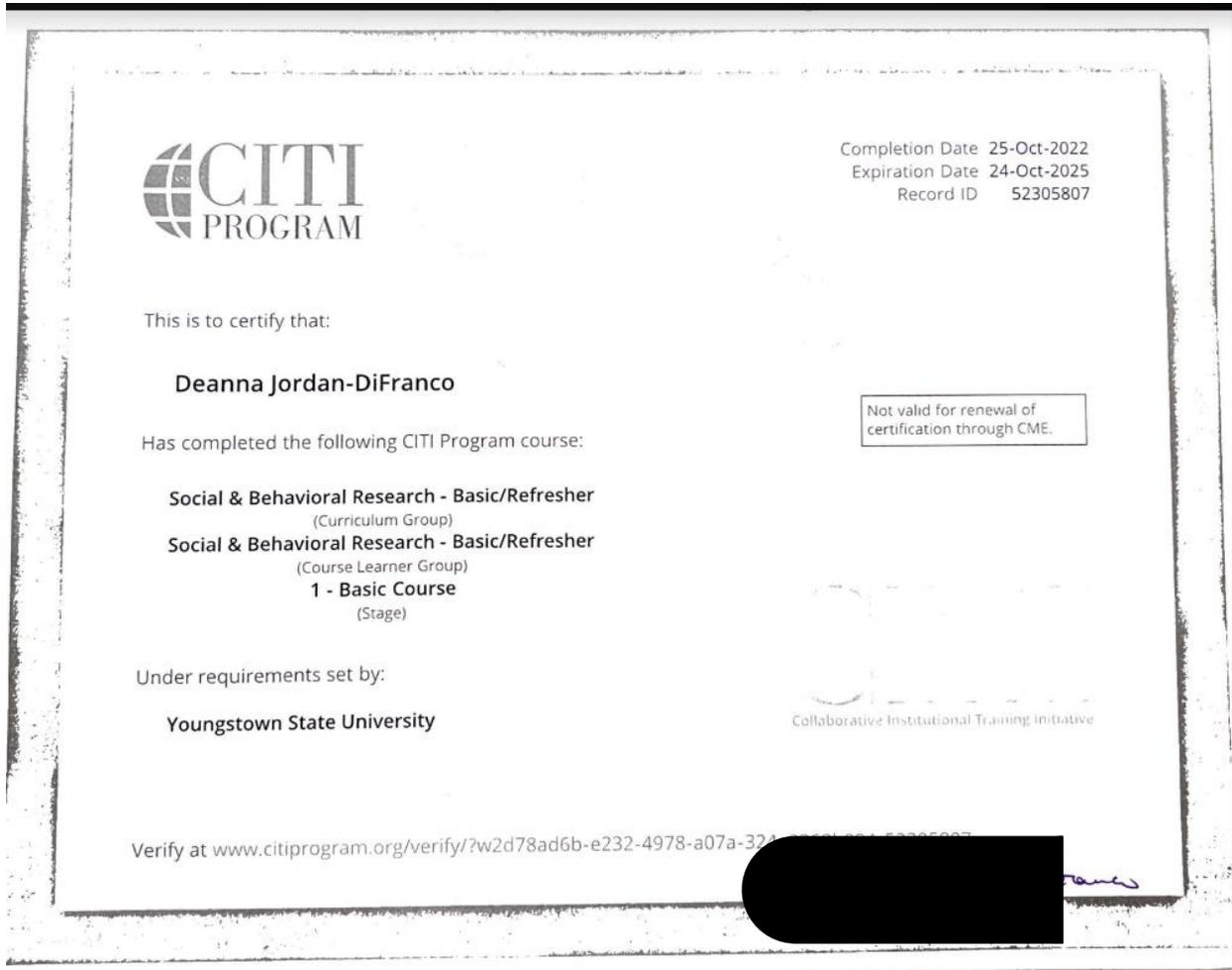
Thank you!

By progressing to the next screen, you will be indicating that you understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. You are also indicating that you are 18 years of age or older and have agreed to participate.

Proceed to the survey.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

APPENDIX D: CITI



CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Date: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 at 9:11 AM

To: Deanna L Jordan <dljordan01@student.ysu.edu>, Jane Beese <jbeese@ysu.edu>

Subject: 2023-236 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

Apr 25, 2023 9:10:57 AM EDT

Jane Beese
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2023-236 CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

Dear Dr. Jane Beese:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for CRT in Ohio Schools: Effects on School Partnerships & Student Behaviors

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

APPENDIX F: EMAIL INVITATIONS AND REMINDERS OF SURVEY

Sent invitation

FROM: dljordan01@student.yosu.edu via SurveyMonkey

DATE: Monday, June 05, 2023 8:25 AM

SENT TO: 205 recipients

SUBJECT: Ohio Superintendents: Important Request. Please respond today. Thank you.

MESSAGE:

Good morning,

Please see the request for input below.

Thank you and have a wonderful day.

Deanna Jordan

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Youngstown State University:

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Educator:

Hello, I am a teacher of English and Language Arts in the high school setting, and I am also a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Youngstown State University. As part of my dissertation process, I will be conducting surveys as part of a research study to explore how social media posts and allegations may affect student behaviors and school, family, and community partnerships. As an educational leader, you are in a position to provide valuable, first-hand information and experiences. This letter serves as a formal invitation to participate in my research study.

In this study, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding social media postings and allegations about student behaviors, and school, family, and community partnerships. I will also need to collect information to describe your school district, such as the type of district, political affiliations of residents, socio-economics and race demographics of students.

You may be at risk of minimal emotional/psychological and societal harm because of this research. Because being an educator is a great source of pride and dedication to most educators, you may have negative emotions when completing the survey. You may also feel hesitation to express your views because of the current allegations in the media. The benefit is that you will have the opportunity to share your experiences, which could positively shape the learning and teaching environment for many years to come. The likelihood that you will be harmed is greatly minimized because I will strictly maintain the anonymity of all of the study's participants.

Your privacy is important, and I will code all identifying information about you and your school district to maintain your anonymity. I plan to present the results of the study to the Youngstown State University IRB without identifying names of participants or school districts.

You do not have to be in this study. If you don't want to participate, you should not submit the survey and simply click out of survey, without losing any benefits of which you are entitled. If you do agree to complete the survey, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw, you can simply not submit the survey.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

If you have questions about this research project, please contact Deanna Jordan at 440-666-6433. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Research Services at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

If you are willing to participate in my research study, please return this survey via email no later than Tuesday, June 13, 2023. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you!

----- By
progressing to the next screen, you will be indicating that you understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. You are also indicating that you are 18 years of age or older and have agreed to participate.

Thank you!

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Sent reminder

FROM: dljordan01@student.yosu.edu via SurveyMonkey

DATE: Thursday, June 08, 2023 8:00 AM

SENT TO: 195 recipients

SUBJECT: Reminder: Ohio Superintendent Request

MESSAGE:

Hello,

We recently contacted you about a survey, but noticed you haven't completed it. We'd really appreciate your participation.

Respond below to start or continue the survey.

Thank you for your time.

Deanna

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Youngstown State University:

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You may be at risk of minimal emotional/psychological and societal harm because of this research. Because being an educator is a great source of pride and dedication to most educators, you may have negative emotions when completing the survey. You may also feel hesitation to express your views because of the current allegations in the media. The benefit is that you will have the opportunity to share your experiences, which could positively shape the learning and teaching environment for many years to come. The likelihood that you will be harmed is greatly minimized because I will strictly maintain the anonymity of all of the study's participants.

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CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

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If you are willing to participate in my research study, please return this survey via email no later than Tuesday, June 13, 2023. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you!

----- By
progressing to the next screen, you will be indicating that you understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. You are also indicating that you are 18 years of age or older and have agreed to participate.

Thank you!

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Sent reminder

FROM: dljordan01@student.yosu.edu via SurveyMonkey

DATE: Monday, June 12, 2023 7:58 AM

SENT TO: 190 recipients

SUBJECT: Reminder: Superintendent Response Requested

MESSAGE:

We recently contacted you about a survey, but noticed you haven't completed it. We'd really appreciate your participation.

Respond below to start or continue the survey. Thank you for your time.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Youngstown State University:

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

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In this study, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding social media postings and allegations about student behaviors, and school, family, and community partnerships. I will also need to collect information to describe your school district, such as the type of district, political affiliations of residents, socio-economics and race demographics of students.

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You do not have to be in this study. If you don't want to participate, you should not submit the survey and simply click out of survey, without losing any benefits of which you are entitled. If you do agree to complete the survey, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw, you can simply not submit the survey.

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

If you have questions about this research project, please contact Deanna Jordan at 440-666-6433. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Research Services at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

If you are willing to participate in my research study, please return this survey via email no later than Tuesday, June 13, 2023. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you!

----- By
progressing to the next screen, you will be indicating that you understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. You are also indicating that you are 18 years of age or older and have agreed to participate.

Thank you!

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Describe the type of school system where you are employed.

- Urban
- Rural
- Suburban

2. Please provide the race demographics of the students where you are employed.

-
- ___% White students
-
- ___% students of color

3. Approximately how many students qualify for free lunch in your school system?

- Less than 10%
- 25% or less
- 50% or less
- 75% or less
- Over 75%

4. What is the predominant political affiliation of the residents in the communities your school systems serve?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Even Mix of Republican and Democrat
- I am unsure

5. Please check all that apply.

- a. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or more of the curriculum focused on critical race theory.
 - b. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or less of the curriculum focused on critical race theory.
 - c. I have read 4 or more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT.
 - d. I have read 1-3 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT.
 - e. I have viewed 3 or more scholarly documentaries on CRT
 - f. I have viewed 1-2 scholarly documentaries on CRT.
 - g. I have read 3 or more articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory.
 - h. I have read 1-2 articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory.
 - i. I have viewed 3 or more news reports from a variety of news networks on critical
-

race theory.

- j. I have viewed 1-2 news reports from a variety of sources on critical race theory.
- k. I have engaged in conversations with others about critical race theory.
- l. I have read social media posts on critical race theory
- m. I have not read articles on critical race theory.
- n. I have not watched news programs on critical race theory.

6. When I consume media that addresses CRT, I am reading or watching (Check all that apply).

- CNN
- FOX NEWS
- MSNBC
- NBC News
- ABC News
- CBS News
- News Week
- NPR
- PBS News Hour
- Time
- USA Today
- Wall Street Journal
- The New York Times
- Washington Post
- The Guardian
- The American Spectator
- Boston Herald
- Washington Times

7. Please check all that apply.

- I have completed graduate course work in crisis communication management.
 - I attended one professional development session recently in crisis communication management.
 - I learned about crisis communication management during my training to be an administrator some time ago.
 - I have read 4 or more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on crisis communication management.
 - I have read 1-3 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on crisis communication management.
 - I have read 3 or more articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on crisis communication management.
 - I have read 1-2 articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on crisis communication management.
 - I have led a proactive response strategy with a committee of staff, family, and community members.
-

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

- I have led a proactive response strategy with my staff members.
- I have discussed a proactive response strategy with my staff members.
- I have not had crisis communication management training.
- training.
- I have not discussed a proactive response strategy with my staff members.
-

8. How many social media posts or comments about critical race theory have you seen or were brought to your attention posted by people who reside in your school district in the last three years?

- Not even one
- 1-3 posts or comments
- 4-7 posts or comments
- 7-10 posts or comments
- Over 10 posts or comments
-

9. Please estimate the number of negative questions and/ or allegations posed to you by parents about critical race theory in the last three years.

- Not even one
- 1-3 negative questions/ allegations
- 4-7 negative questions/ allegations
- 7-10 negative questions/ allegations
- Over 10 negative questions/ allegations

10. Please estimate the number of negative questions and/ or allegations posed to you by community members who do not have children in the schools about critical race theory in the last three years.

- Not even one
- 1-3 negative questions/ allegations
- 4-7 negative questions/ allegations
- 7-10 negative questions/ allegations
- Over 10 negative questions/ allegations

11. Please estimate the number of negative questions and/ or allegations concerning critical race theory that you have witnessed at school board meetings or other school events in your school district in the last three years?

- Not one
- 1-3 negative questions/ allegations
- 4-7 negative questions/ allegations
- 7-10 negative questions/ allegations
- Over 10 negative questions/ allegations

12. Please estimate the number of school board meetings or school events have you witnessed being interrupted or becoming confrontational concerning critical race

theory (if any)?

- Not one
- 1-3 occasions
- 4-7 occasions
- 7-10 occasions
- Over 10 occasions

13. Do you think that critical race theory social media posts and allegations have caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in your school district?

- Yes
- No

14. If you said yes, in what ways do you think these posts, allegations, and/ or incidents have had an impact on school, family, and community partnerships? Please expand on your answer, providing any examples or instances that may have occurred without indicating names or locations.

15. If you do think that the CRT allegations and posts have impacted school partnerships, what (if anything) do you recommend could be done to improve partnerships and behaviors?

16. Has the number of student to student conflicts (verbal, physical, or in writing) that have occurred in your school district increased in the last 3 years?

- Yes
- No

17. If you answered yes, do you think that the posts and allegations about CRT have had an impact on student behavior in your school district? If so, please expand on the impact that you have noticed providing any examples or instances that may have occurred without indicating names or locations.

18. Do you think that the spread of misinformation about critical race theory has become an issue in your school district?

- Yes
- No

19. If you chose yes, in what ways do you think that the spread of misinformation about critical race theory has become an issue in your school? Please expand on your answer, providing any examples or instances that may have occurred without indicating names or locations.

20. Is there anything you would like to add concerning your experiences with critical race theory misinformation and schools? Your identity will remain anonymous.

APPENDIX G2: THEORY, VARIABLE, & SURVEY ALIGNMENT WITH LIKERT

SCALE SCORES & CLASSIFICATIONS

Demographics Questions

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Describe the type of school system where you are employed. | NOMINAL |
| - Urban | |
| - Rural | |
| - Suburban | |
|
 | |
| 2. Please provide the race demographics of the students where you are employed. | NOMINAL |
| - ___% White students | |
| - ___% students of color | |
|
 | |
| 3. Approximately how many students qualify for free lunch in your school system? | NOMINAL |
| - Less than 10% | |
| - 25% or less | |
| - 50% or less | |
| - 75% or less | |
| - Over 75% | |
|
 | |
| 4. What is the predominant political affiliation of the residents in the communities your school systems serve? | NOMINAL |
| - Democrat | |
| - Republican | |
| - Independent | |
| - Even Mix of Republican and Democrat | |
| - I am unsure | |

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Theory	Research Questions	Variable to be Measured	Survey Questions with Likert Scale Scores & Classifications
Definition and History of CRT	How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of understanding of critical race theory?	Level of Understanding (UNDC RT)	<p>5. Please check all that apply.</p> <p>a. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or more of the curriculum focused on critical race theory. (5)</p> <p>b. I have completed graduate level coursework, where 50% or less of the curriculum focused on critical race theory. (4)</p> <p>c. I have read 4 or more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT. (3)</p> <p>d. I have read 1-3 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on CRT. (2)</p> <p>e. I have viewed 3 or more scholarly documentaries on CRT. (3)</p> <p>f. I have viewed 1-2 scholarly documentaries on CRT. (2)</p> <p>g. I have read 3 or more articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (2)</p> <p>h. I have read 1-2 articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (1)</p> <p>i. I have viewed 3 or more news reports from a variety of news networks on critical race theory. (2)</p> <p>j. I have viewed 1-2 news reports from a variety of sources on critical race theory. (1)</p> <p>k. I have engaged in conversations with others about critical race theory. (1)</p> <p>l. I have read social media posts on critical race theory. (1)</p> <p>m. I have not read articles on critical race theory. (0)</p> <p>n. I have not watched news programs on critical race theory. (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excellent: Score of (5) or more - Above Average: Score of (4) - Average: Score of (3) - Below Average: Score of (2) - Very Poor: Score of (1) and below <p>6. When I consume media that addresses CRT, I am reading or watching (Check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CNN (L) ● FOX NEWS © ● MSNBC (L) ● NBC News (centrist) ● ABC News (centrist) ● CBS News (centrist) ● News Week (centrist) ● NPR (centrist) ● PBS News Hour (centrist) ● Time (centrist) ● USA Today (centrist) ● Wall Street Journal (centrist) ● The New York Times (L) ● Washington Post (L) ● The Guardian (L) ● The American Spectator © ● Boston Herald ©

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

● Washington Times ©

Liberal: Participants chose majority liberal news outlets.
Conservative: Participants chose majority conservative news outlets.
Centrist: Participants chose majority centrist outlets.
Multiple: Participants chose multiple sources from multiple groups.

Motivations of Sharers How do Ohio superintendents rate their own levels of preparedness to respond to in-depth questioning or allegations regarding the use of critical race theory in the K-12 classroom.

School/Family/Community Partnerships

Crisis Communication Management

Level of Preparedness (Prep)

- 7. Please check all that apply.**
- I have completed graduate course work in crisis communication management. (5)
 - I attended one professional development session recently in crisis communication management. (3)
 - I learned about crisis communication management during my training to be an administrator some time ago. (2)
 - I have read 4 or more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on crisis communication management. (3)
 - I have read 1-3 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on crisis communication management. (2)
 - I have read 3 or more articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on crisis communication management. (2)
 - I have read 1-2 articles (not scholarly) from a variety of sources on crisis communication management. (1)
 - I have led a proactive response strategy with a committee of staff, family, and community members. (3)
 - I have led a proactive response strategy with my staff members. (2).
 - I have discussed a proactive response strategy with my staff members. (1)
 - I have not had crisis communication management training. (0)
 - I have not discussed a proactive response strategy with my staff members. (0)
- **Excellent:** Score of (5) or more
 - **Above Average:** Score of (4)
 - **Average:** Score of (3)
 - **Below Average:** Score of (2)
 - **Very Poor:** Score of (1) and below

Motivations of Sharers Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community

School/Family/Community Partnerships

Social Media Posts (#SOC)

- 8. How many social media posts or comments about critical race theory have you seen or were brought to your attention posted by people who reside in your school district in the last three years?**
- Not even one (5)
 - 1-3 posts or comments (4)
 - 4-7 posts or comments (3)
 - 7-10 posts or comments (2)

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

ips partnership - Over 10 posts or comments (1)
s?

**Crisis
Communi-
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**Motivatio-
ns of
Sharers** Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships? # Allegations from Parents (#ALLP)
9. Please estimate the number of negative questions and/ or allegations posed to you by parents about critical race theory in the last three years.
- Not even one (5)
- 1-3 negative questions/ allegations (4)
- 4-7 negative questions/ allegations (3)
- 7-10 negative questions/ allegations (2)
- Over 10 negative questions/ allegations (1)

**Crisis
Communi-
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**Motivatio-
ns of
Sharers** Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships? Allegations from Community Members (#ALLC M)
10. Please estimate the number of negative questions and/ or allegations posed to you by community members who do not have children in the schools about critical race theory in the last three years.
- Not even one (5)
- 1-3 negative questions/ allegations (4)
- 4-7 negative questions/ allegations (3)
- 7-10 negative questions/ allegations (2)
- Over 10 negative questions/ allegations (1)

**Crisis
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**Motivatio-
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Sharers** Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships? Allegations at Meetings (#ALL M)
11. Please estimate the number of negative questions and/ or allegations concerning critical race theory that you have witnessed at school board meetings or other school events in your school district in the last three years?
- Not one (5)
- 1-3 negative questions/ allegations (4)
- 4-7 negative questions/ allegations (3)
- 7-10 negative questions/ allegations (2)

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CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

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Sharers** Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships?
Number of Disruptions (#DISR)
12. Please estimate the number of school board meetings or school events have you witnessed being interrupted or becoming confrontational concerning critical race theory (if any)?
- Not one (5)
- 1-3 occasions (4)
- 4-7 occasions (3)
- 7-10 occasions (2)
- Over 10 occasions (1)

**Crisis
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**Motivatio-
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Sharers** Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships?
School, Family, & Community Partnerships (SPART)
13. Do you feel that critical race theory social media posts and allegations have caused a change in school, family, and community partnerships in your school district?
- Yes
- No

**Crisis
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**Motivatio-
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Sharers** Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships?
14. If you said yes, in what ways do you feel these posts, allegations, and/ or incidents have had an impact on school, family, and community partnerships? Please expand on your answer, providing any examples or instances that may have occurred without indicating names or locations.

QUALITATIVE

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

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number of
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conflicts?

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critical race
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**School/
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and the
number of
student
conflicts?

15. If you do feel that the CRT allegations and posts have impacted school partnerships, what (if anything) do you recommend could be done to improve partnerships and behaviors?

QUALITATIVE

16. Has the number of student to student conflicts (verbal, physical, or in writing) that have occurred in your school district increased in the last 3 years?

- Yes
- No

17. If you answered yes, do you think that the posts and allegations about CRT have had an impact on student behavior in your school district? If so, please expand on the impact that you have noticed providing any examples or instances that may have occurred without indicating names or locations.

QUALITATIVE

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

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Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships?

**Misinfo-
rmation
(MIS)**

18. Do you think that the spread of misinformation about critical race theory has become an issue in your school district?

- Yes
- No

**Crisis
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**Motivatio-
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**School/
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Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school, family, and community partnerships?

19. If you chose yes, in what ways do you think that the spread of misinformation about critical race theory has become an issue in your school? Please expand on your answer, providing any examples or instances that may have occurred without indicating names or locations.

Qualitative

**Crisis
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**Motivatio-
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Sharers**

**School/
Family/
Communi-**

Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and school,

20. Is there anything you would like to add concerning your experiences With critical race theory misinformation and schools? Your identity will remain anonymous.

QUALITATIVE

CRT IN OHIO SCHOOLS: EFFECTS ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS & STUDENT BEHAVIORS

ty Partnerships family, and community partnerships?

Crisis Communication Management Is there a correlation between critical race theory allegations and the number of student conflicts?