

**UNDERSTANDING WHY FACULTY OF COLOR
CHOOSE TO TEACH AT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

This study intended to investigate the perceptions of faculty of color to understand why they chose to teach in independent schools. For this research, faculty of color is defined as participants who self-identify as African American, Latinx, and Asian/Middle Eastern, representing an underrepresented minority group within the school. Beyond the initial recruitment, hiring, and onboarding processes, this exploration probes more in-depth to learn why these faculty of color decide to remain at independent schools despite the complexities of working within such cultural, social, and racial predominately white, homogenous school communities. The content of this critical research has two simple questions: 1) Why did faculty of color initially choose to teach at an independent school and 2) Why do faculty of color choose to continue teaching at an independent school? The research utilizes Weick's Organizational Properties of Sensemaking (1995) to define the seven properties of sensemaking and describe how faculty of color attempt to make sense of why they choose to teach in independent schools. Significant attention has been invested in correlating the central theme of sensemaking to identify two central themes, retrospection and identity. The findings elaborated upon the central themes of retrospection and identity to recognize five reasons (autonomy of teaching, relationships with students, class size, collaboration and collegiality, and compensation) why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools. The researcher also offers vignettes of faculty of color using their own words, actions, and actions of their schools as evidence of how and to what end they negotiated the multiple contexts, multiple identities, and the social-political dimensions of race. The research explored comprehensive implications for practice, policy, and future research and provides insight for decision makers as they work to improve recruitment, hiring, and supporting faculty of color.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years, independent schools have collectively taken meaningful steps to become more racially diverse and socially equitable communities (Brayboy, 2003). Almost every independent school has undergone or is undergoing a significant evolution in its thinking about the racial diversity of its student body and faculty (Thomas, 2008). For years, independent schools have prided themselves on the family-like culture of their predominantly White, homogenous school communities. Undeniable prerequisites, such as admission policies, have prioritized legacy families and perpetuated these elite communities, thus, limiting the racial diversity for underrepresented students of color. However, as independent schools examine how such policies impact the enrollment of students of color, they have also begun to discover how the absence of faculty (and administrators) of color influences the decision of parents of color to attend independent schools.

Whether independent school constituents see the racial diversity of its faculty as enhancing the educational experience of all students or a call for social justice and equity, the need to racially diversify the faculty remains a daunting and debatable task for school communities. As independent schools are challenged by the oversight of the National Association of Independent Schools to increase racial diversity and inclusion, independent schools have been tasked to make more significant efforts to recruit and retain faculty of color.

Racial diversity in independent schools is both a practical issue of survival and a moral issue of worthiness to survive. Given the abundant, new options of school choice, independent schools feel the effects of homeschooling, the charter school movement, and online education (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], 2018). Faculty of color are now faced with the conscious decision about the potential professional advantages and social perils of

working in independent schools. Many independent schools have become intentional about recruiting more faculty of color. Yet, in many cases, because of a lack of familiarity and cultural awareness, those responsible for hiring fail to truly understand faculty of color—their stories, cultures, experiences, and needs (Kane, 2002). DeCuir-Gunby (2007) suggested that beyond recruitment alone, attention must be directed to ensuring the needs of such faculty of color are systematically and institutionally met. As society attempts to deepen its cultural perspectives, the independent school community must recognize the value of racial diversity and its benefits to the respective schools. Thus, as independent schools strategize to increase the number of students of color, they must also be deliberate in recruiting and retaining faculty of color—a practice that until recently had not been a priority.

Statement of the Problem

Today, it seems like not much has changed in the realm of expanding the number of faculty of color in independent schools. Although much research has been done on the perspectives of students of color in independent schools over the past decade, researchers have invested less attention to the perspectives of faculty of color in independent schools and how they impact recruitment and retention. Independent schools continue to have difficulty recruiting, hiring, and retaining faculty of color (Liu, 1996). Despite the melting pot of racial diversity within the United States, in 2019, only 26% of faculty in independent schools identify as faculty of color, up only 7% from 2009 (NAIS, 2010, 2020).

The lack of racial diversity among faculty is a growing challenge for independent schools. Researchers have examined the racial diversity of employees in a broad range of organizational contexts, including K–12 public schools, but little has been done specifically within independent schools. With the overwhelming challenges of the teaching profession (Fox & Stallworth, 2010) and changing student demographics of independent schools (Finkelstein et

al., 2016), this lack of scholarly inquiry is troubling. Although research has documented that the experiences of employees of color can predict their well-being and the organization's overall culture (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000), it has not identified if such characteristics apply to independent schools. In particular, researchers have not investigated the recruitment and retention of faculty of color in independent schools, thereby examining why they choose to teach in such environments.

Research Objective

This study intends to investigate the perceptions of faculty of color to understand why they chose to teach in independent schools. For this research, *faculty of color* is defined as participants who self-identify as African American, Latinx, and Asian/Middle Eastern, representing an underrepresented minority group within the school. Beyond the initial recruitment, hiring, and onboarding processes, this exploration probes more in-depth to learn why these faculty of color decide to remain at independent schools despite the complexities of working within such cultural, social, and racial predominately White, homogenous school communities.

Independent schools must undergo significant evolution in their thinking about racial diversity and how to provide the best globally diverse educational experience for their students. Independent schools must strive to become multi-dimensional institutions in which they approach racial diversity using the holistic lens of admissions, professional development, curricula design and implementation, and support infrastructures for faculty of color (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Tatum, 1999).

Given the assertion that schools are racially socializing environments, race and racism play a significant role in how faculty experience their work environment. Thus, independent schools need to pay greater attention to the mental and emotional health and positive

development of faculty of color, which is equally important in gauging faculty inclusiveness and success. Policymakers need to understand that the opinions of the majority professional population may not be indicative of the most effective decisions or the best interest of the school when considering the least represented population—faculty of color.

Research Questions

The content of this critical research has two simple questions:

1. Why did faculty of color initially choose to teach at an independent school?
2. Why do faculty of color choose to continue teaching at an independent school?

With an overarching goal to increase the enrollment of students of color, it will be necessary for independent schools to learn how the presence of faculty of color can directly impact the experiences of all students, particularly students of color; and how the successful practices of recruitment, hiring, and support of such faculty impact retention. This research will serve as a framework of best practices to assist independent school leaders in creating a welcoming, supportive community that values the importance of meeting the needs of faculty of color.

Significance of the Study

Budding literature about the changes in the racial makeup of historically White schools has crept onto the scene. However, most research has focused on integrating students of color at the college and university level of private schools with little attention to the perspectives of the faculty of color and the factors contributing to a decision to work at independent schools. This case study examines why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools, perceptions of the infrastructures designed to support faculty of color, and their effectiveness in supporting them. The experiences of faculty of color in independent schools are explicitly and implicitly impacted by the convergent and divergent factors of their professional and social environments (Davis, 2018).

It is true that the job market is currently seeing unprecedented movement. The teaching force, in particular, is at higher risk for upheaval. Data collected by a RAND Corporation survey of American public school teachers in January and February 2021 indicated that one in four were considering leaving their job by the end of the 2020–2021 academic school year, a rate higher than a typical pre-pandemic year and higher than employed adults nationally. The independent school landscape is seeing movement as well. NAIS Career Center data show that the number of job openings posted increased 32% in 2021 from 2019.

In the independent school community, these broader trends in employee dissatisfaction and retention concerns echo even louder for faculty of color. In a November 2020 NAIS Snapshot, tepid morale among faculty of color was at a 67% higher rate than that of White colleagues. While the main factors contributing to this staggering difference included the political climate and the pandemic, more than ever, attention needs to be paid to the well-being of faculty of color in independent schools. Though many schools are taking steps in the right direction by offering tokens of gratitude, fewer are implementing actions to identify and address the underlying issues that can lead to dissatisfaction and a lack of support (Finkelstein et al., 2016).

Purdy (2015) argued that for institutional and systemic changes to occur, the school must provide purposeful clarity to its organizational structure and hiring practices and supplement the budget (budget planning) to support these efforts financially. If schools are sincere in their investment to promote equity and inclusion, they must take heed of the lessons learned from those willing to share.

Overview of the Methodology

This chapter aims to provide a methodological explanation of the processes used to understand why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools. This research is

classified as a case study employing qualitative data. The participants include 12 faculty of color from five PK–12 independent day schools in Texas. Semi and loosely structured interviews with faculty of color served as a medium for data collection to gain a detailed depiction of the participants' perspectives. The researcher asked and received permission to have each interview recorded. Notes were transcribed verbatim and coded by word usage and emerging themes.

Data Sources and Context

Participants in this study self-identified as a faculty of color representing an underrepresented minority group (African American, Latino, and Asian/Middle Eastern) within their school. Twelve faculty of color served as participants from five PK–12 independent day schools in Texas. At least three of the 12 faculty of color were selected from each division (lower, middle, and upper) of the given schools. Tenures at the school ranged from 5 to 26 years. The independent schools selected for inclusion in this study self-report to offer a rigorous PK through 12th-grade college preparatory curriculum in the state of Texas. The enrollment ranges from 1,060 to 1,500 students. The five schools represented three cities: Houston, Dallas, and Austin.

Data Collection

Although initially intended to be included in the study, given the global pandemic of COVID-19, direct observations of participants did not take place to examine the dynamics between faculty of color and other faculty of color, White faculty, or students in the work environment. As a result, the researcher used a digital platform (Google Meets or Zoom) to conduct the interviews. Interviews were conducted with each participant to verify their race, tenure in teaching at independent schools, and perspectives of their independent school teaching experiences. The participants were interviewed during a private, one-to-one session to maintain anonymity and ascertain perspectives and experiences of the workplace that promoted or

hindered their desire to teach in independent schools. Interviews of the participants were recorded. Perspectives and experiences were documented by the researcher using notetaking.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis includes data from the participants to ensure they identify as faculty of color and have taught in independent schools for at least five years. Data gathered from the interviews provided perspectives on why faculty of color initially choose to teach at an independent school and why they choose to continue teaching at an independent school. This data offered a segue into understanding practices employed by independent schools to recruit and retain faculty of color. Coding was implemented to identify and track feedback from faculty of color at their respective independent school. An analysis of their experiences and suggested effective support practices for faculty of color ensued. These results are also presented in table format for ease of interpretation.

Overview of the Conceptual Framework

Using Weick's (1995) seven properties of Sensemaking in Organizations as a guide for this case study, the intent of this research seeks to understand the perceptions of faculty of color who choose to teach in independent day schools through various subjective lenses. The researcher decided on the theoretical framework of sensemaking to explore the perceptions of faculty of color in a traditional, co-ed day, independent school. This framework also presents a rationally compelling argument based on previous literature and conclusions. Within this chapter, the researcher discusses the qualitative paradigm for selecting a case study as a strategy, identifies the research design of this study, and further explores the reasoning for her selections. Also, a thorough description of data sources, data collection, and data analysis are presented in this chapter.

Overview of the Chapters

This record of study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an overview of the study in understanding why faculty of color choose to teach in independent day schools. It also introduces the research objective, research questions, significance of the study methodology, conceptual framework, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature and research on independent schools, their history, and the racialization of faculty of color teaching within them. It also includes the common organizational and cultural norms within independent schools. This chapter reviews the literature and identifies sensemaking as the theoretical framework. It utilizes Weick's Organizational Properties of Sensemaking (1995) to define the seven properties of sensemaking and describe how faculty of color attempt to make sense of why they choose to teach in independent schools. Significant attention has been invested in correlating the central theme of sensemaking for this study.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used for the research. This chapter also highlights the study design, an explanation of the research process, data sources and selection procedures, data collection procedures, and the process for data analysis. This chapter presents the findings obtained from the research with a detailed analysis of the interviews as it relates to the theoretical framework.

Chapter 4 defined the seven properties of sensemaking to identify two central themes, retrospection and identity. It then described the design and methods employed to explore a qualitative study of perceptions of faculty of color and why they choose to continue teaching in independent schools. It offers vignettes of faculty of color using their own words, actions, and actions of their schools as evidence of how and to what end they negotiated the multiple contexts, multiple identities, and the social-political dimensions of race. A comprehensive

summary of their sensemaking perspectives and triangulation of data is evaluated. The findings elaborated upon the central themes of retrospection and identity to recognize five reasons (autonomy of teaching, relationships with students, class size, collaboration and collegiality, and compensation) why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings and recounts how the participants manage their situations and contributions to the field of education. The research explored the framework's implications for practice, policy, and future research. Finally, it offers limitations of the study and suggestions for future research concerning the identification and strategies for faculty of color teaching in independent schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After reviewing the research on independent schools and faculty of color as a minority in independent schools, the theoretical framework for this study is presented. A literature review was completed to understand one central question of the present study. That question is: Why do faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools?

The present study was designed to explore the question (intended to understand) of why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools and make sense of their perceptions and decision-making. Using sensemaking as the interpretative lens, the researcher examined the process and product of faculty of color's sensemaking for their choice to teach in independent schools. Therefore, sensemaking served as the conceptual framework for the present study. The prior research was grounded in critical race theory and race relations. These two conceptualizations provided the framework for the previous research in understanding the perspectives of a racial minority group in education (Speede-Franklin, 1988). However, for this study, Karl Weick's *Sensemaking in Organizations* (1995) offered the best lens into dissecting why faculty of color choose to work in independent schools.

This review of literature aims to explore through a holistic approach the concept of sensemaking, that is, the process by which school leaders, personally and collectively, come to make sense of the multiple demands they confront within education reforms. It then proceeds to make sense of the faculty of colors' sensemaking, discuss how sensemaking is framed in empirical studies, and suggest implications and possible future research.

Faculty of Color in Independent Schools

Most independent schools have prided themselves in preparing students for societal leadership roles. Still, it wasn't until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that independent schools began to confront their homogeneity and act on a newly awakened sense of social responsibility to educate a more diverse student body. Following this new sense of social justice came the reality that all graduates would live and work in an increasingly diverse world. It took another 20 years for these schools to recognize an equally strong need to have a diverse faculty. To prepare students for leadership in a diverse society, independent schools would have to provide a microcosm of that diverse society. Thoughtful educators recognized that students of color and White students need to see role models of people of color in authority positions within schools. Interactions with teachers of color during formative years of schooling are a necessary precondition for breaking down stereotypes White students may form about people who are different from themselves, opening the possibility of achieving greater understanding in the school and society.

Whether independent school constituents see racial diversity as enhancing students' educational experience from different backgrounds or a call for social justice and equity, the need to diversify remains daunting and debatable. For years, independent schools have prided themselves on a family-like culture of their predominantly White, homogenous school communities. Undeniable prerequisites, such as legacy admission policies, have prioritized traditional families and perpetuated these elite environments, limiting the racial diversity for underrepresented students of color. As independent schools are challenged by the oversight of the National Association of Independent Schools to increase racial diversity and inclusion, independent schools have been tasked to make efforts to recruit, enroll, and support students of

color. Likewise, given the political climate that influences the social culture of most independent schools, compounded with the accessibility of social media to express opinions and behaviors with ease publicly, school leaders have increasingly sought not only to enroll but to create environments where all students and families feel welcomed and valued members of the communities.

Independent schools have collectively taken meaningful steps to attract African American students and make their campuses more socially equitable. With the changing demographics of independent schools, many have undergone or are undergoing significant evolution in their thinking about racial diversity and how to provide the best globally diverse educational experience for their students. Independent schools strive to become multi-dimensional institutions that approach racial diversity using the holistic lens of admissions, administration, faculty, professional development, curricula design, implementation, and support infrastructures for students of color (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Tatum, 1999). The perceptions of these infrastructures designed to help families of color and their effectiveness are further examined within this case study. Purdy (2015) further argued that for institutional and systematic changes to occur, the school must provide purposeful clarity to its organizational structure and supplement the budget to support these efforts financially.

Support for students of color must extend beyond the confines of financial aid to include students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Additionally, it is recommended that the schools conduct a detailed annual analysis with parents to learn about the experiences of students and families of color, their concept of knowledge construction and empowerment, their identity development, and their cultural spectrum of connectedness and sense of belonging to the school community (Arrington et al., 2003). Queries of expressive student outpourings, nostalgic

memories, personal theorizing, and honest commentary about the institutions in which they lived and learned have provided several focal points for future discussions and explorations. The salient features of most research accounted for students' feelings concerning issues of academics, social interactions, socio-economic gaps, and institutionalized racism (Delpit, 2006; Tatum, 2017).

Given the assertion that schools are racially socializing environments, race and racism play a significant role in how students experience their school. Thus, independent schools need to pay greater attention to African American students' mental and emotional health and positive development, which is equally important in gauging student inclusiveness and success. It is suggested that policymakers need to understand that the opinions of the majority population may not be indicative of the most effective decisions or the best interest of the school when considering the least represented population—families of color.

The experiences of African American students in independent schools are explicitly and implicitly impacted by the convergent and divergent factors of their home, school, and social environments. Families of color want more than a superficial invitation—they want to feel welcomed and a part of the school community. They want to visualize themselves at the school, and for them to successfully do so, they need to see others who look like them at the school (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012). While traditional independent school parents send their children to the legacy of a school, parents of color send their children to people. As a result, schools need to also invest in increasing the faculty and administrators of color to provide visible role models for all students, particularly students of color.

Current theoretical literature indicates continued underrepresentation of faculty of color in an academic arena in which the majority of the populations are predominantly White, affluent,

and homogenous high-achieving suburban public school environments. Supportive to the literature, many schools have a more significant proportion of higher-achieving students and a seeming imbalance of this proportion among occupancy of faculty of color. The focus on high-achieving faculty of color perceptions could offer great insight into why independent schools have a shortage of faculty of color. Although the previous research did not conclude why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools, this qualitative study's findings may also provide insight into other factors contributing to faculty perceptions. Thus, this underrepresentation and lack of data in independent schools have warranted further investigations into the experiences of faculty of color teaching in independent schools.

The History of Independent Day Schools

For this literature review, the term *independent schools* is defined as non-public and non-parochial, non-profit corporations with a board of trustees responsible for making all decisions. These schools also have self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size. They receive little or no funding from the local or federal government in their attempt to maintain their autonomy and avoid compromising their mission. However, elite independent schools are a subset of independent schools. Elite independent schools are distinguished by their high tuitions (often annually in the tens of thousands of dollars). They are frequently even more selective and have substantial endowments, prestigious alumni/alumnae, and parents (Kane, 1992).

Likewise, according to the National Association of Independent Schools' website, independent schools are defined as non-profit private schools independent in philosophy: Each is driven by a unique mission. They are also independent in managing and financing: Each is governed by an independent board of trustees, and each is primarily supported through tuition

payments and charitable contributions. They are accountable to their communities and are accredited by state-approved accrediting bodies. Almost 1,550 independent schools educate over 675,000 students annually, and independent day schools are the largest independent school sector.

Within the definition of independent schools, it is essential to acknowledge the distinction between day and boarding schools. There is a significant difference between the two. Students in independent day schools commute to and from schools and are explicitly and implicitly impacted by their home, school, and social environment (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012). Students in boarding schools remain on campus to attend classes and participate in residential life and thereby must acclimate to instead of associate with the expected cultural school norms. According to French (2017), boarding schools offer absolute social immersion for students and the potential for duality (or even multiplicity) of social worlds.

Status and power are inherently associated with the history and legacy of predominantly White independent schools. Private (or independent) schools existed before the United States of America was formed. The first independent school on what would become American soil was a day school for boys in Manhattan, founded in 1628 (Collegiate School), which predates the founding of the first public school (Boston Latin), also a day school founded for boys. Similar parallels underline the importance of private day schools within the broader education system. Brayboy (2003) noted that independent schools have been and continue to be an essential fixture in U.S. history and that private school students outnumbered public school students well into the 19th century.

The founding dates of the earliest and most elite independent schools suggest that these schools aimed to educate the sons of society's upper-class families. Early in the 19th century,

children of affluent families were educated at home. Still, the years marking the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century saw a dramatic increase in the demand for private schooling from elite White families migrating from the city to the less populated suburbs. This was also the era when girls' schools were established, clearly pointing to the societal shift in opportunities for girls educated outside the home and the value of single-gender education. Another critical development during this era was the establishment of many elite boarding schools in the New England area, which entirely served as a pipeline into Harvard, Yale, and Princeton Universities (Karabel, 2005).

The first wave of diversification of students in elite day schools came as boys began to leave the day schools for the newly formed boarding schools. Many independent day schools began to enroll boys from the public school system to compensate for the void in enrollment. For many families, entrance to and matriculation from elite, independent schools was a higher status marker than they inherited from their parents. Baltzell (1958) offered insight suggesting schools and families created a relationship of reciprocal benefit:

Private day schools, especially during the depression, needed pupils who could pay full tuition. In turn, newly rich fathers and mothers were eager for their sons to meet "nice people." The earliest shifts in independent schools' demographics came from a need to keep wealth flowing into these institutions. (p. 297)

Following the affluent path, the next wave of pressure and ultimately limited exclusion came from wealthy Jewish families. Before including Jewish students (and faculty) in previously established private schools, Jewish families more frequently attended Jewish private schools. Again, Baltzell (1958) noted the existence of Jewish elites assimilating to their Christian neighbors and addresses Jewish inclusion at historically non-Jewish (and often anti-Jewish)

schools. Although the movement for the inclusion of Black students during the Civil Rights movement is well documented, Karabel (2005) further noted that Jewish inclusion in elite day schools generally predates the push for Black inclusion. Kane (1992) pointed out that “Quaker schools have included Black students for decades and decades” (p. 41) before the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s. However, whether religiously affiliated or otherwise, the most elite independent schools began their concerted efforts toward racial integration during the Civil Rights movement.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which called for the desegregation of public schools. By way of backlash, the decision provoked a rash of exclusively White private schools to cater to those White students and parents. They did not want to participate in racially integrated education. This segregationist reaction, however, was not uniform. Many long-established predominately White schools specifically recruited Black students beginning in the 1960s. Speede-Franklin (1988) explained there were three “imperatives” that led to the recruitment of Black students and other “minority” students at this time. The first imperative was to “address the broader problem of social inequality.” The second was a financial imperative as, following *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, private schools were required to make efforts to integrate or risk losing their tax-exempt status and, therefore, the financial standing of their institution. The third was based on the “demographic reality” that the schools need to fill those spaces as “traditional” independent school student enrollment wanes. Notably, the second and third “imperatives” of money and student enrollment are the same imperatives that led to the inclusion of students from public school backgrounds in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Like Speede-Franklin's findings, Purdy's (2015) historical research highlights the collective experiences of African American students desegregating an elite, independent school in the South. It reflects upon the cultural relevance of the lessons learned through their journey. She recounted significant landmarks during desegregation, including the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements which both helped and hindered the integration of these African American students. While the school made intentional efforts to understand African American students' cultural needs better, the school community struggled to make necessary changes and adjustments. However, it was not until the African American students demonstrated social activism through public protests, printed articles and interviews in a local newspaper, and mastered the negotiation process that their voices were recognized as a significant contributing factor to the larger community.

All private schools were not created equally. In a study by Banks (2006), many private schools and academies, especially in the South, were founded on segregationist ideals in the wake of court-ordered desegregation. Enrollment in these post-integration academies dramatically increased between 1968 and 1970. Banks surmised that the rising enrollment in these academies was due to White protest against the Civil Rights Movement and the ideals of equality and desegregation.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, many Black families whose children were among the first to attend historically White independent schools paid as much as the White families. "Even as early as 1970, over 45 percent of the minority families whose children attended NAIS member schools received no financial aid; and at the time, Black students comprised 92 percent of the minority population" (Speede-Franklin, 1988). Despite the inclusion of these historic "outsiders," schools held on to their "elite" status. The meaning of "elite," however, changed

from Baltzell's definition of the social elites to a more comprehensive "image of academic, financial, and social inaccessibility" (Speede-Franklin, 1988, p. 24). Those "non-traditional" students were then, and now, skimmed from the very top level of academically (and athletically) talented students. Almost immediately after the initial recruitment of Black students, independent schools began to recruit other racial and ethnic groups to their schools. By 1987, the number of Asian Americans in independent schools passed that of Black students, and simultaneously, the proportion of "minority" students on financial aid decreased (Speede-Franklin, 1988).

As schools take on the responsibility of addressing issues of diversity and inclusion, historical documentation highlights themes such as racial tokenism, marginalized isolation, system resistance, and racial cognitive dissonance. Purdy (2015) argued that as African American students navigate independent schools, they must remain aware of the "subtle hostilities" and be diligent in recognizing and addressing cultural inequities and social injustices. It is important to note that independent schools continue to develop and practice the cultural competencies of racial integration and are guided even today by the experiences and courage of the first African American students and parents who navigated the first voyage within elite independent schools years ago.

Independent schools' historical efforts toward racial integration and greater diversity have made undeniable progress in the enrollment of students of color. While some racial groups are now more represented in independent schools than they once were, Black Americans remain severely underrepresented. As a result of being challenged by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) oversight to increase racial diversity and inclusion, independent schools have been forced to re-examine their efforts to recruit, enroll, and support students of

color. Increasing the number of students of color or ethnic diversity in independent schools may evoke various responses.

As independent schools embark upon the challenges of enriching their communities by increasing the number of students of color, it is essential that diversity is clearly defined, understood, and accepted in terms of its educational and cultural relevance to individual school communities. For some, particularly in the South, Parker (1991) asserted that it is often assumed that ethnic diversity is exclusively related to race relations, particularly among Blacks and Whites. For others, ethnic diversity embraces the opportunity for educational and cultural awareness. It may elicit a call for action associated with inclusivity and social justice or create skepticism associated with prejudice and bias (Nieto, 2000).

In the past, ethnic diversity in independent school education has been measured quantitatively, based upon the numerical breakdown of a student body along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines, focusing primarily on the need to increase students of color populations (Newman, 2005). However, more recently, researchers such as Arrington et al. (2003) have examined the circumstances that impede students of color from thriving in independent schools while looking for substantive data to enhance their success. In doing so, such researchers have investigated the environmental, cultural, psychological, and personal experiences of students of color to gain valuable quantitative and qualitative insight.

Ethnic diversity in independent schools is both a practical issue of survival and a moral issue of worthiness to survive. Herr (1999) suggested that within independent schools, there seem to be two predominant arguments: One indicates that diversity is an issue among many in schools, a significant need perhaps, but secondary to such topics as enrollment management, teachers' salaries, mounting regulation, and school governance; and another that suggests it is the

paramount issue of our time. Supporting Herr's (1999) previous findings, Milliman (2004) argued that independent schools must be ethnically diverse for three fundamental reasons:

1. With ethnically diverse populations, they will be able to survive in the next century, either legally or economically.
2. With ethnic diversity in staffing, students, and programs will be morally worthy to survive.
3. With ethnically diverse curricula, they will be intellectually worthy to survive.

An independent school that is ethnically diverse in its population and its program is ethically sound or (and) intellectually accurate.

Racial Socialization With Independent Schools

Many independent schools strive to recruit more faculty of color, yet in many cases, they fail to truly understand these faculty—their stories, cultures, experiences, and needs. Therefore, O'Neil (1986) suggested that beyond recruitment alone, much attention needs to be directed to ensuring that the needs of such faculty of color are systematically and institutionally met. As society attempts to deepen its cultural perspectives, the independent school community must recognize the value of ethnic diversity and its benefits to our respective schools. Thus, as interest in independent schools continues to expand beyond traditional families, independent schools are responsible for ensuring that their communities are prepared to embrace such progress.

According to the NAIS website, given

The assertion that schools are racially socializing environments, not talking about race and racism does send messages to the school community members. Not discussing race and racism, particularly in denying their relevancy, also leaves notions of privilege and whiteness unexamined. As a result, students of color and all school community members

are left without the necessary tools to work through the role race and racism play in their school experiences.

Race and racism matter in an employee's successful work experience and the best way to reduce its negative impact is by confronting it directly. Newman (2005) further suggested that racial conflicts continue "when the significance of race is denied or downplayed or when there is no acknowledgment of the messages sent about race and how it impacts success in the school community." Policymakers need to understand that the opinions of the majority population may not be indicative of the most effective decisions or the school's best interest when considering the least represented population (faculty of color).

Independent schools must realize that for faculty of color, racial socialization is perhaps more important than professional socialization. When exposed to a broader context of whiteness in predominantly White schools, racial dissonance becomes even more meaningful for faculty of color as they try to assimilate to the rules and cultural norms that define appropriate behavior and how faculty should interact with one another. These norms become complicated as school officials wrestle with how to best manage issues of cultural and racial diversity. Problems escalate when the significance of race is minimized, and there is no acknowledgment of how it impacts or impedes community building. The roles of race (and stereotypes) and the realities of racism are fundamental for faculty of color.

Due to the faculty of color's racial socialization by peers and leadership, most faculty of color felt both angry and strengthened in response to racist encounters. The need for schools to address such behaviors and incidents is essential because they adversely affect faculty of color's psychological and emotional health. In addition to the faculty's teaching, collegial relationships, and work-related experiences, independent schools need to pay greater attention to the mental

and emotional health and development of faculty of color, which is equally essential in gauging student success and happiness (Diggs et al., 2009). Thus, predominately White independent schools should recognize that faculty of color benefit from school programming that includes their story, voice, and culture, including a year-long exploration and not only during specific holidays.

Arrington et al. (2003) also explored three contributing factors that contributed to the success of faculty of color. For faculty of color, the sense of belonging and establishing a solid communal connection is essential to their emotional health and thus their professional success. As emotional distress increases, self-esteem and anger management decrease, hindering faculty's ability to control their emotional health, leading to poor decision-making and lower professional performance. Similar findings by DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2012) found that faculty identify as being of color based on their awareness of racial inequalities (defined by social, economic, and political injustices), how they are treated or accepted by others, and most importantly, the construct of racial identification practiced at home and then executed at school. Faculty of color significantly influence the racial identity development of their children. They actively engage in race-conscious practices such as history discussions, exposure to culture (church and community), and actively seek opportunities to interact with other same-race faculty of color. Independent schools also contribute to the racial identity development of faculty of color by offering opportunities to participate in unique professional and social encounters.

The experiences of faculty of color in independent schools are explicitly and implicitly impacted by the convergent and divergent factors of their home, work, and social environments, due to the complexities of racial socialization of faculty of color. While independent schools are improving measures to attract faculty of color, the experiences of these faculty should be

carefully explored to provide greater “value-added” benefits for all constituents. Two of those suggested are the schools’ need to engage in more active, honest, and meaningful dialogue about race and incidents involving race and the integration of more culturally relevant teaching practices and inclusive curriculum.

Datnow and Cooper (1997) highlighted the value of formal and informal networks that contributed to the professional and social success of faculty of color in predominantly White independent schools. They further indicated that faculty of color’s successful migration through these schools relies heavily on their ability to establish informal groups with other faculty of color and claim that such peer groups also provide significant benefits to the faculty to achieve professional success and navigate their racial identity while trying to balance cultural assimilation and individuality.

In addition to the informal peer networks of faculty of color interacting with faculty who share ethnic and sometimes socio-economic similarities, faculty of color see value in formalized school-sponsored clubs and organizations, which allows a conducive environment to have their voices be heard. While faculty of color acknowledge the benefits of peer association with white colleagues, it was not until later in their professional careers that faculty of color identified the potential value of such relationships. With the intentionality of independent schools becoming more ethnically inclusive, it is paramount for school leaders to understand better and recognize the experiences of faculty of color within such exclusive, homogenous communities.

In the past, ethnic diversity in independent school education has been measured quantitatively, based on the numerical breakdown of a student and faculty body along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines, focusing primarily on the need to increase students and faculty of color populations (Newman, 2005). However, more recently, researchers such as Arrington et

al. (2003) have begun to examine the circumstances that impede students and faculty of color from thriving in independent schools while looking for substantive data to enhance their success. In doing so, such researchers have investigated the environmental, cultural, psychological, and personal experiences of students and faculty of color to gain valuable quantitative and qualitative insight.

Sensemaking as a Theoretical Framework

As stated before, racial diversity in independent schools is both a practical issue of survival and a moral issue of worthiness to survive. Given the abundant, new school choice options, faculty of color now face the conscious decision about the potential professional advantages and social perils of working in independent schools. Sensemaking theory will analyze why and how faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools. Sensemaking suggests that individuals will go through a process to make sense of their decision-making or choice or come to a thorough understanding of what their choice means and how they will choose to actualize the decision. This research intends to encourage faculty of color to do this by using their prior knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, the social context of the work, and the intrapersonal and interpersonal connections that lead to the decision (Spillane, 2012). Sensemaking theorists suggest that making sense of information is an ongoing process. It is dynamic, fluid, and dependent on variables that parallel and collide with previous experiences and current interactions.

To better understand the conditions that facilitate how faculty of color construct and reconstruct self-explanations, evaluate their relative soundness, and make sense of what constitutes an excellent decision to teach in independent schools, one must recognize that sensemaking is a complex process of beliefs that evolve, change, replace one another, or merge

into a new view (Evans, 2007). Many independent schools strive to recruit more faculty of color, yet in many cases, they fail to truly understand such faculty—their stories, cultures, experiences, and needs. DeCuir-Gunby (2007) suggested that beyond recruitment alone, attention must be directed to ensuring that the needs of such faculty of color are systematically and institutionally met. As independent schools strategize to increase the number of students of color, they must also be intentional in recruiting and retaining faculty of color—a practice that until recently had not been a priority.

Using the theoretical framework of sensemaking offers a multi-dimensional dissection of the lived experiences of faculty of color choosing to teach in independent schools. Until now, making sense of why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools had not been fully captured or documented. The sensemaking process offers policy-makers insight into how faculty of color define and make sense of the racial, social, cultural, and political issues that influence their professional career choices. It further aids in identifying and recognizing the impact of experiential constructs for faculty of color teaching in independent schools.

There is a shortage of literature exploring how people of color's sensemaking shapes their understanding of being a minority in professional communities. Given the potential bipolarity of race in education, specifically regarding teachers, such a perspective is needed to make sense of the problem of faculty of color shortages, especially within independent schools. It is believed that sensemaking, in this case, will serve as a valuable lens to contribute to the emerging understanding of how to address faculty of color shortages in a range of contexts through policy and practices.

Faculty of color must make sense of the messages they receive from multiple, overlapping contexts of their independent school environments. Equally important, they must

shape their meaning of school events and issues with and for other school constituents. Weick's seminal *Sensemaking in Organizations* (1995) cited seven properties of sensemaking.

Identity and identification are central—who people think they are in their context shapes what they enact and how they interpret events. *Retrospection* provides the opportunity for sensemaking: The point of retrospection in time affects what people notice. Thus, attention and interruptions to that attention are highly relevant to the process. People enact the environments they face in dialogues and narratives. As people speak and build narrative accounts, it helps them understand what they think, organize their experiences, and control and predict events. Sensemaking is a *social* activity in that plausible stories are preserved, retained, or shared. However, the audience for sensemaking includes the speakers themselves, and the narratives are “both individual and shared . . . an evolving product of conversations with ourselves and others” (Gioia, 2006, p. 1717). Sensemaking is *ongoing*, so individuals simultaneously shape and react to the environments they face. As they project themselves onto this environment and observe the consequences, they learn about their identities and the accuracy of their accounts of the world. This is a feedback process, so even as individuals deduce their identity from the behavior of others towards them, they also try to influence this behavior.

Weick argued, “The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs” (Weick, 1995, p. 409). People *extract cues* from the context to help them decide what information is relevant and what explanations are acceptable. Extracted cues provide points of reference for linking ideas to broader networks of meaning and are “simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (Weick, 1995, p. 419). People favor *plausibility over accuracy* in accounts of events and contexts “in an

equivocal, postmodern world, infused with the politics of interpretation and conflicting interests and inhabited by people with multiple shifting identities, an obsession with accuracy seems fruitless, and not of much practical help, either” (Gioia, 2006).

Making sense of things involves constructing reality by creating meaning from prior knowledge, experiences, values, and beliefs (Coburn, 2005; Spillane, 2012; Weick et al., 2005). Using the sensemaking approach in the educational leadership context suggests that faculty of color make and enact their meaning of reform demands based on preexisting understandings and overlapping social contexts inside and outside of school (for example, policymakers, district, local council, teachers, parents, and students). This internal process through which leaders respond to reform involves an interplay between personal values and school culture. In other words, the faculty of color’s sensemaking process is influenced by their values and colleagues’ values, school norms, and traditions. The faculty of color’s sensemaking is nested in multiple and often conflicting school contexts. This two-way interaction in which the faculty of color’s sensemaking shapes and is shaped by school culture can either reinforce existing practices or facilitate an educational change (Coburn, 2005). The following analysis of the faculty of color’s sensemaking provides a helpful insight into how leaders and all those within the school culture negotiate, mediate, and contribute to reform policies in their local contexts.

Little inquiry has been conducted concerning faculty of color’s experiences with and responses to reforms. In particular, while studies have addressed the role of schools in influencing the faculty of color’s sensemaking (Coburn, 2005), only limited research has examined the sensemaking of faculty of color (Spillane, 2012). Faculty of color shape and influence the interpretation of events and issues within their independent schools. However, faculty of color must first interpret the meanings of the events and issues for themselves. To

make sense of things, faculty of color “draw from” various individual, social, and institutional contexts to read meaning into the situations they must interpret. From there, faculty of color determine what to emphasize, downplay, or ignore in their words, actions, behaviors, and decision-making. It seems reasonable that faculty of colors’ history and background, beliefs, work history, role identities, and group affiliations figure as they frame and interpret events and issues and construct their roles in the manner they do. Moreover, independent schools’ myriad organizational and institutional contexts provide faculty of color with ideological, social, and political cues that signify patterns, filter information, and experiences, and guide actions and behaviors.

Mediating these multiple messages and cues, often in conflict, becomes a central challenge to faculty of color. Evans (2007) contended that often faculty of color create “legitimizing myths” to resolve ideological contradictions. These “myths” inevitably serve to legitimize existing social structures. Furthermore, he argued that if faculty of color is to “function,” they must resolve the contradictions between personal, professional, and organizational ideologies through the development of a “coherent ideology” (p. 48). This idea implies that faculty of color with a clear and consistent ideology on the broader social-political issues facing independent schools may be better able to reconcile multiple perspectives and challenge status quo structures in schools.

Faculty of color within independent schools engage in sensemaking “when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world” (Gioia, 2006, p. 1720). In short, sensemaking is how organizational participants make sense, or meaning, of uncertainty and determine how best to respond given these attributed meanings. Since Weick’s (1995) seminal text on sensemaking, the

research has taken two divergent forms: individual-level cognitive approaches to sensemaking and social process approaches. Further, sensemaking has been utilized for understanding diverse organizational events and perspectives, including but not limited to corporate crises and change.

Because faculty of color work at the nexus of micro- and macro-contexts and engage within professional communities, this research is framed using a conceptualization of sensemaking as a social process. This critical view of sensemaking further highlights how faculty of color ascribe meaning to an event and how different groups can make sense of and respond to the same problem in divergent ways. However, they may frame the problem through common vocabulary and public discourse. This characteristic of sensemaking suggests that faculty of color across the state might make sense of the same challenges in convergent and divergent ways, resulting in similar and diverse macro-level responses.

Because sensemaking from the framework presented in this research is a social process influenced by micro- and macro-relationships, whether it responds to crisis or other change, sensemaking can be shaped and inhibited by dominant power structures. Through an organizational member's participation in institutional practices that support certain norms while constraining other methods, sensemaking can create conditions that precipitate and sustain organizational crisis (Weick et al., 2005). In this case, such models are reinforced through public discourse and institutional experiences, creating dominant narratives that further inhibit sensemaking and crisis response options. In sum, faculty of color's sensemaking processes and responses are influenced by the local context (organization and community characteristics), participation in professional communities, and dominant narratives that favor specific causes and solutions. Thus, it might be expected that faculty of color make sense of the shortage of faculty of color and consequently alter their practices in both shared and unique ways. Using

sensemaking as a framework to guide participants in this study can illuminate how they engage in responsive practices. This can, in turn, inform an emerging understanding of how independent school policies are designed to address how teaching and staffing issues differ in their ability to alleviate shortages regarding faculty of color.

Based on trends from previous theoretical research focused on defining and assessing faculty of color teaching in suburban communities, it is evident that when faculty of color are placed in specific race-dynamic academic environments, professional, social, and emotional assimilation feelings are more pervasive. Using sensemaking as the primary framework to unravel counter storytelling situated in race, the researcher seeks to understand why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools and serve as a practical guide of best practices to recruit, hire, and support faculty of color. This data will then be used to directly or indirectly influence a primary goal of independent schools—to increase the racial diversity of the student body. Standard practices will be used to conduct a qualitative study, including a non-robust and comprehensive data collection, sources, and analysis. In conjunction with the qualitative assessment of reviewing perceptions, the analysis of this data offers a thread for connecting the perceptions of faculty of color teaching in environments that drastically differ in racial dynamics.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Definitions

For this research, the following terms are defined as follows:

Faculty of Color: Faculty of color is defined as participants who self-identify as African American, Latino, and Asian/Middle Eastern, representing an underrepresented minority group within the school.

Independent Schools (also private schools): According to the National Association of Independent Schools' website, independent schools are defined as non-profit private schools that are independent in philosophy: each is driven by a unique mission. They are also independent in how they are managed and financed: Each is governed by an independent board of trustees, and each is primarily supported through tuition payments and charitable contributions. They are accountable to their communities and are accredited by state-approved accrediting bodies. Almost 1,550 independent schools educate over 675,000 students annually.

The school's governing body, however, is a Board of Trustees. This board can be made up of many people, but most often is a group of high-donor parents with perhaps alumni and community representation. The Head of School (formerly called Headmaster or Headmistress) presides over all school branches, including academics, community, and finances. For this research, the term independent school represents one school entity and not a group of collective schools within an independent school district.

Methodology

This study catalyzes the sequential and procedural qualitative inquiry to explore the perceptions of faculty color teaching in independent schools. This research focused on why

faculty of color choose to work in independent schools. Through the review of this research, it will become evident that the end goal is to identify and understand the perceptions of faculty of color and its impact on creating and replicating a supportive environment conducive to recruiting and retaining faculty of color in the future. The following sections consist of an outline for the qualitative study. It begins with the role of the researcher and the strategy employed, followed by descriptions of data sources and sampling procedures, data collection and methods used, data analysis, and techniques to establish the reliability and trustworthiness of results.

Thus, the qualitative method presented is an exploratory case study based on an in-depth investigation of faculty of color teaching in independent schools. Serving as a teacher, admissions officer, administrator, and parent of a student of color, the researcher has been immersed in independent schools for almost two decades. As a teacher and administrator within independent schools, the researcher has been privy to a broader picture of the functioning of an independent school. Therefore, she cannot pretend to be an objective outsider. The researcher's insider status opened the door for collecting data. Given this potential bias, the researcher chose to approach such research with the philosophy that the words of her participants would be the primary focus and form of data. The researcher hopes to have served as a filter for their comments to make connections, highlight contradictions, and ask questions.

The researcher also contributes a positionality of significant bearing. She is an African-American female administrator and previous teacher of 19 years in independent schools and parent of a 12-year-old daughter who has attended independent schools for nine years. She has made sense of the decision to remain in independent schools. She has taken on the responsibility of recruiting, hiring, and retaining faculty of color as a senior-level administrator. While she understands and values the need for faculty of color to create and sustain a culturally

relevant learning community, she, too, has struggled with her decision to remain teaching in a primarily homogenous community. In addition to gaining the perceptions of other faculty of color on why they choose to teach in independent schools, the researcher also hopes that this study may provide solace to current and future faculty of color as they work to navigate their roles within their work communities.

Data Sources and Context

Data reported from the NAIS on the racial composition of faculty of color at member schools are available from the 2001–2002 school year through the 2018–2019 school year on the NAIS website. This national data, though, was not easy to interpret, and there was little data on faculty of color employment specific to the three cities used in this study. In one section, the NAIS offered the “Employment of Faculty of Color as a % Total Faculty” for “Faculty of Color” and then for each racial group. The first issue encountered was that the NAIS included in its definition of “Faculty of Color” Middle Eastern faculty. The United States defined those of Middle Eastern descent as “White.” The second issue is that “race” and “ethnicity” are conflated in the term “faculty of color.” Again, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the “Hispanic/Latino” designation represents an ethnic, not racial, group. In this data, White and Black Hispanic faculty members have been deemed “faculty of color.” The third issue, even more, problematic than the first two issues, is that the percentage of faculty of color reported by NAIS does not accurately reflect the raw number of faculty of color that the NAIS reported. For example, in the 2015–2016 school year, the NAIS reported that 16.5% of faculty at day-member schools were faculty of color. However, when reviewing the raw data of faculty of color, the percentage equals 15.1, suggesting a margin between the reported percentages of faculty of color

and calculated percentages of faculty of color. For the purpose of this research, reported percentages were used.

The researcher chose purposive sampling as the sampling strategy for this study. Purposive or theoretical sampling is often employed in qualitative research to focus on the perspectives of those known to experience the phenomenon of interest. It is used in qualitative research to focus on the views of those known to experience the phenomenon of interest and enables the phenomenon to be studied in greater depth (Patton, 1990). It naturally lends itself to establishing criteria to obtain an information-rich case of the phenomenon before sampling the population (Hays & Singh, 2012).

To identify Kindergarten through grade 12 coed, college preparatory independent schools in Houston, Dallas, and Austin, the researcher reviewed the Independent School Association of the Southwest (ISAS) website. The researcher focused on independent schools that included the words “diversity” or “inclusion” in its mission statement or any school that had a published Diversity Statement. There were four schools in Houston, three schools in Dallas, and two schools in Austin for a total of eight schools. The researcher viewed the faculty directory of each school’s website and eliminated one school in Houston because there was no visible faculty of color. The researcher removed another school in Houston in which she was employed. The researcher removed one school in Austin due to a transition in the administration and there was only one faculty of color who was an elementary teacher assistant.

The researcher used her positionality as a senior administrator of color to solicit help from her head of school to contact heads of schools at the remaining six schools for a formal introduction. Once the introductions were made, the researcher emailed and called the heads of school to share the intent of the study and to receive approval to reach out to specific faculty of

color on their campus. Of the six heads of school, one did not respond after several unanswered emails and voicemails. Therefore, the number of schools in the study resulted in five.

The researcher initially identified and received approval to contact 18 faculty of color within five schools. However, four of the potential participants did not meet the criteria. The researcher sent emails to 14 participants and 9 responded favorably and agreed to participate in the study. A second communication was sent and this gained one additional participant for a total of 10. Two of the initial participants recommended three additional potential participants who met the criteria. The researcher then contacted the heads of school of those participants to receive approval for their participation. An email was sent to those potential participants, and they agreed to participate. This yielded a total of 13 participants. However, one participant did not attend the second interview so a full completion of data was collected from 12 participants.

Participants were contacted with an email that introduced the research, provided the statement of the problem, and highlighted the purpose and significance of the study. They were informed about how the investigation would be conducted, how participants could assist in any efforts (including their investment of time and honesty), why their participation would be necessary, and a timeline for when the research would be conducted. For those faculty of color who did not respond to the email, a secondary email was sent and followed up with a phone call, when the contact information was available. The initial participants created positive energy that snowballed and encouraged non-participatory faculty of color and new participants to get involved.

In an attempt to explore an individual's experience in-depth, 12 faculty of color served as participants from five independent day schools in Texas. This small sample size allowed the researcher to capture specific sensemaking themes rather than generalize the experiences to a

larger population. At least three of the 12 faculty of color were selected from each division (lower, middle, and upper) of the given schools. More specifically, participants in this study self-identified as a faculty of color representing an underrepresented minority group (African American, Latino, and Asian/Middle Eastern) within the school. Tenures at the school ranged from 5 to 26 years. This specificity method was sought to examine a population of faculty whose experiences differed from those of traditional independent school teachers who identified as Caucasian.

Although the hope had been to visit classrooms and the participants' work environment, due to COVID-19, in-person observations were a primary source of qualitative data that could not be achieved. Unfortunately, the researcher was not permitted to attend or observe community events or activities such as classrooms, lunch, athletic events, or performances. The researcher could only observe faculty interactions during off-campus virtual visits in this case study. These virtual visits allowed the researcher to understand the visual environment better, understand the context, and obtain information that the participants may not be willing to discuss (Patton, 1990). This limited virtual observation data were also used to validate statements made by the participants during interviews.

The other research instrument used consisted of two interview protocols. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for background information, perceptions of faculty of color, and how their experiences impact their decisions. The researcher developed the protocols based on a three-step approach outlined by Hays and Singh (2012). The first step established the 12 participants' demographic information. The second step focused on the details of the participants' lived experiences in their working environment. The third step encouraged participants to reflect on why they chose to teach in independent schools. Initial questions were

more structured to obtain baseline contextual information about each school and its cultural norms and traditions.

The content of this critical research has two simple questions for faculty of color: (a) Why did you initially choose to teach at an independent school? (b) Why do you choose to continue teaching at an independent school? In addition to gaining demographic information of the participants, such as gender, position (professional and personal), tenure (public and independent), and ethnicity/race, all of the semi and loosely structured interviews with faculty of color were guided by the following focal questions:

1. What specific efforts did the school use to recruit you? What specific efforts is the school making to recruit and retain faculty of color?
2. What programming efforts has your school made regarding diversity, multiculturalism, or inclusion of faculty of color? What efforts have been made within your school to institute the programmatic and social integration of faculty of color?
3. What are some positive experiences that you have encountered as a faculty of color that make you proud to work within your independent school?
4. What are some experiences (which you attribute to being a faculty of color) that make you feel disappointed to work within your independent school?
5. What advice or suggestions do you have for new faculty of color considering working in independent schools?
6. What advice or suggestions do you have for administrators responsible for hiring or leading faculty at an independent school?

Data reported in this section were intended to offer insight into the specific participants interviewed. Given the initial limitations of distance and travel, the researcher focused only on independent schools in the cities of Houston, Dallas, and Austin. Five PK–12th-grade independent schools were selected. A sample size of 12 faculty of color was selected. Each of the 12 participants self-identified as a person of color and had been a faculty member at their current school for at least five consecutive years.

The decision to conduct individual interviews with 12 faculty of color from five different PK–12 independent schools in Texas was made to provide greater depth into the participants' perceptions of feeling supported by their specific school. The selection of faculty of color from different grade levels or divisions within the schools represents the researcher's attempt to increase trustworthiness and reliability by integrating an appropriate level of sampling adequacy.

The independent schools selected for inclusion in this study were considered to offer a rigorous PK–12th-grade college preparatory curriculum in Texas. However, the five schools represented three cities: Houston, Dallas, and Austin. The enrollment ranges from 1,060 to 1,500 students. The five schools have a student population range of 17%–26% for students of color. Conversely, the range of faculty of color among the five schools is only 7%–11%. Each of these schools has recently completed its accreditation, and four of the five had a noted recommendation that addressed a needed increase for students and faculty of color. The suggestions for improvement suggest exploration of its diversity efforts to increase the hiring of faculty of color and lend itself to assessing the policies, practices, and procedures already in place for supporting such faculty. The researcher believes such an assessment would assist these specific institutions in addressing the hiring and retention gap and internal support structures for faculty of color.

Table 1***Racial Demographics of Participating Schools***

School	Location	Total # of Faculty (% of faculty of color)	Total Student Enrollment (% of students of color)
School 1	Austin	93 (7%)	1060 (17%)
School 2	Dallas	103 (7%)	1120 (18%)
School 3	Dallas	142 (10%)	1300 (26%)
School 4	Houston	167 (9%)	1460 (20%)
School 5	Houston	201 (11%)	1500 (22%)

All the schools in the sample share a similar organizational structure for decision-making. The Head of School presides over all school branches, including academics, community, and finances. Each school noted that faculty hiring was done by a collaboration of the leadership team, which included the Head of School and the Division or Department Leaders. At two of the schools, it was noted that department heads or lead teachers were also influential in the decision-making process for hiring. However, it should be noted that all of the Heads of School are Caucasian, and only one of the influential decision-makers (who is not a Head of School) is an administrator of color (an African American female).

For this study, a person of color was defined as African American (or Black), Latinx, or Asian/Middle Eastern. Participants represented a variety of grade levels, with the highest concentration of participants teaching in grades 6–12, including P.E. teachers or coaches. There were five male and seven female participants. Included within the study were two African American males and two African American females; two Latinx males and three Latinx females; and one Asian male and two Middle Eastern females (Table 2).

Table 2***Participants by Race and Gender (N = 12)***

	Male	Female
African American	2	2
Latinx	2	3
Asian/Middle Eastern	1	2
Total	5	7

Lower schools (P.K. through 4th or 5th grades) participants represented two of the 12 total participants; middle school (grades 5 or 6 through 8) faculty of color represented five of the 12 faculty of color interviewed, and five of the participants represented upper school (grades 9 through 12; see Table 3). Of the 12 faculty of color in this study, two taught elementary grades; two taught science; one taught math; two taught history; one taught English; two taught Spanish; and two coached P.E. or athletics (see Table 4).

Table 3***Participants by School Level Division (N = 12)***

School Level Division	Number of Participants
Lower School (grades Pk–4)	2
Middle School (grades 5–8)	5
Upper School (grades 9–12)	5

Table 4***Subject Taught (N = 12)***

Subject Taught	Number of Participants
Elementary/General	2
English	2
Foreign Language	1
History	2
Mathematics	1
Science	1
Physical Education/Athletics	2
Other	1

Of the 12 participants, it was worthy to note that five attended independent or private schools at some point during their Kindergarten through 12th-grade education. Three of the females interviewed, including one African American, one Latina, and one Middle Eastern, attended an independent upper school (grades 9–12). The African American female attended a Catholic parochial independent day school, the Latina participant attended an independent boarding school, and the Middle Eastern participant attended a traditional independent day school. The remaining four female participants attended public schools across the country. Only two of the seven females attended schools in Texas, one a public school and the other a parochial day school. One of the five males attended independent day schools. This participant was African American and did receive a K–12 education in Texas. Three of the remaining four male participants received public school education in Texas. See Table 5.

Table 5

Participants by Years of Teaching Experience in Independent Schools (N = 12)

Years of Teaching Experience	Number of Participants
5–10	2
11–15	5
16–20	2
20 or more	3

Data Collection

Data collection began after receiving IRB approval of this study record. Data collection for the present study consisted of traditional qualitative methods. These were interviews with faculty of color at each of the five schools, virtual observations and reviews of the schools’ websites following each interview, informal conversations with participants recorded as field notes, and document analysis. Individual interviews with each faculty of color took place virtually through Zoom for 12 participant interviews. Merriam (1998) advised the qualitative researcher to be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it. Taking an interest in each participant’s contextual changes and challenges allowed the researcher to develop and maintain trust and rapport with the participants throughout the study.

The researcher conducted this qualitative case study utilizing one technique, mainly one-on-one virtual interviews. Hays and Singh (2012) suggested that data collection methods in qualitative research could be categorized into four types: (a) participation in the virtual setting, (b) direct observation, (c) in-depth interviews, and (d) document analysis or field notes. To gather qualitative data in accordance with the sampling strategy, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews and Zoom or Google Meet sessions

with volunteer participants as the primary methods of data collection. This data collection was at the core of this study's efforts to examine the perceptions of faculty of colors' feelings supported by their independent school.

Researchers often collect qualitative data through interviews, which are more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allows the researcher to investigate the participant's perspectives in greater depth (Hays & Singh, 2012). Interviews are far more personal than other data collection methods by allowing the interviewer to interact with the participant directly and allowing the interviewer to probe or ask follow-up questions. Combining these reasons, the researcher used individual interviews as the primary method of data collection in this study.

To gain a detailed depiction of the participants' perspectives, a case study design using semi- and loosely structured interviews with faculty of color served as a medium for data collection. The value of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to speak with their voices and express their thoughts and feelings (Hays & Singh, 2012). In an attempt to conduct an in-depth exploration of each participant's experience and to prevent exclusionary practices, the data provided by participants were used to solicit participation from each faculty of color rather than being concerned with the ability to generalize the experiences to a larger population. The semi-structured interviews provided greater flexibility and freedom to elaborate on various issues. An interview protocol was used during the interviews. While the questions were asked in the same order, the number of questions asked per participant depended on the responses to previous questions.

The purpose of the observations and informal conversations with faculty of color was to triangulate their self-reports. The informal discussions with participants were intended to elicit information about their schools, including practices that impacted the participant as a faculty of

color, their experiences within independent schools, and the impact of their experience on their decision to continue teaching in independent schools. These informal conversations took place virtually, during the teacher's planning period, at lunchtime, or after school hours and were recorded as field notes. In the final phase of data collection, each participant was allowed to review the recording to confirm the accuracy of the data for collecting observation data to triangulate self-reports in the previous interviews. Again the data collected from these interviews were recorded as field notes. Repeated interviews were conducted, and data were collected until no new information was obtained, thus achieving saturation.

Additionally, the researcher collected documents and reviewed the websites of each school. Records collected included missions and history of the school, job descriptions, diversity statements, employee directories, published parent communications, and other noteworthy publications. These documents were analyzed to corroborate the participants' self-reports and provide further insight into the participants' work environment (Hays & Singh, 2012). Such information can provide a rich source of contextually relevant information and was used to test whether the perceptions emerging from the interviews were accurate (Lincoln, 1995).

Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic strategy of data analysis, based on Lincoln's (1995) constant comparative approach, was used to categorize and make judgments about the meaning of the data from the participants' interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). The constant comparative process involves coding a unit of data into a category and comparing it with previous units of data coded into that category. The coding was based on Weick's seminal *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Codes were also developed using Evans' (2007) concept of sensemaking about race. These codes were utilized to explain connections between the broader themes. Disconfirming evidence was

identified and coded also. During the first steps of data reduction, identifying the initial data analysis, transcripts were read one by one. The coding process began by underlining passages that were relevant to the research questions:

1. Why did you initially choose to teach at an independent school?
2. Why do you choose to continue teaching at an independent school?

With data collected during interviews and observations, the researcher noted the experiences of faculty of color in independent schools during their teaching tenure. The researcher also conducted content analyses of published and web-based materials from the five schools and the NAIS to trace the public discussion of race and the integration of faculty over time. It is worth noting that each participating school and the NAIS has a portion of its website dedicated to diversity issues. In addition, the NAIS publishes a quarterly journal, *Independent School Magazine*, which includes articles on diversity practices and faculty of color. Several of these materials were analyzed for their references to diversity, faculty of color, related themes, and the hiring data when available.

The researcher collected information from multiple sources to better validate insights and descriptions about the same events, relationships, or relevant information. The researcher then used triangulation in connection with member checking and the contributions of peer debriefers. These additional layers are believed to provide greater credibility for the study and the researcher. Throughout the study, the researcher relied on her personal and professional experiences within the independent school community to inform her research. The researcher utilized anecdotes and previously acquired knowledge of independent schools to clarify a point and situate incidents within the more prominent independent school culture. As an administrator

within independent schools, the researcher understands the structure of independent schools and also understands the independent school culture.

Summarizing each participant's responses to the questions and creating memos were repeated following the virtual review of the case study schools. After the second interview, the researcher continued to code the data using Weick et al.'s (2005) Properties of Sensemaking. Also, new codes were developed as new categories emerged from the second wave of data. The constant comparative approach allowed for the ongoing validation, development, and adjustment of emerging themes as other data collection took place throughout the study.

Based on the study's findings, in conjunction with the definitions of properties of sensemaking, the researcher derived the theme of identity. In contrast, identification is central to who people think they are (Weick, 1995). Field notes from the interviews were gathered. Data were transcribed into electronic transcripts in Microsoft Word or Google Documents, then printed onto index cards and coded for thematic categories and development. The analysis included both qualitative research and coding and thematic development. A qualitative thematic data analysis strategy was used to categorize and make judgments based on the perceptions of why faculty of color choose to teach at an independent school and the practices used at their school to support them. By reviewing the schools' websites and data collected during interviews, the researcher was able to identify which practices, policies, and programs are effective and to what extent.

In the field notes, beyond the interview data, the researcher included observational data of the schools virtually visited. All of the interviews took place virtually using Zoom or Google Meet. The events and interactions surrounding the interview often yielded informative data such as virtual classroom observations. Additionally, the researcher kept in contact periodically with

the participants throughout the research, which resulted in a richer understanding of how faculty of color encounter ongoing issues.

Member checking was used to ensure reliable interpretation of the data (Merriam, 1998). Several other techniques were employed to increase the probability of producing credible findings and interpretations from the study (Lincoln, 1995). These techniques are explained in the following section.

Establishing the trustworthiness of a study is essential if the researcher is to persuade an audience that the findings are worth attending to and considering. In quantitative work, criteria typically associated with this task are defined as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln, 1995). In brief, internal validity is the extent to which variations in an outcome or dependent variable can be attributed to manipulations of an independent variable. External validity refers to the extent to which the relationship between the two variables can be generalized to other settings and individuals. Reliability is often associated with validity in terms of consistency and accuracy of measures used in the study.

Objectivity ensures that a study is not contaminated by human weaknesses that produce variations in approaches used to conduct the study. Finding these conventional criteria for establishing trustworthiness inappropriate for the naturalistic inquiries of qualitative research, Hays and Singh (2012) offered four alternative criteria: (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality. Truth value, referred to as credibility, is enhanced by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The researcher used multiple data collection methods through field notes and document acquisition to substantiate (triangulate) the findings from the participants' interviews. As a part of the conclusion drawing and verification phase of data analysis, the credibility of emerging themes was validated through member

checking by taking the themes back to the respondents for their review and reaction (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and through peer debriefing by members of the researcher's record of study committee (Merriam, 1998).

Applicability offered as an alternative to the more conventional experimental or quasi-experimental criteria of external validity is referred to as transferability by Miles and Huberman (1994). They asserted that the naturalistic researcher cannot make assertions about the transferability of findings to other contexts. Instead, judgments of the transferability of the results are the reader's task. However, for the reader to assess the applicability of the findings to context, the researcher must fully describe the context and time in which the findings were identified and provide a thick description of all activities in the research setting. They noted, "The description must specify everything that a reader may need to know to understand the findings" (p. 125). In other words, the researcher does not make claims of transferability but rather provides the data so that transferability judgments are possible for those who wish to apply the findings. Reliability of the findings, whether the findings of the study are consistent with the data collected, was addressed by recording and transcribing interviews with the principals, maintaining an audit trail, and keeping a reflexive journal during the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). From the audit trail, the research process and its products (data, findings, and interpretations) were continuously examined by the researcher's dissertation committee chairperson. The reflexive journal addressed both consistency and neutrality of findings. First, consistency was enhanced by documenting study logistics such as the researcher's daily schedule during data collection, the methodological decisions made and the reasons for making them, and the researcher's activities during data analysis. Second, the neutrality of findings was enhanced

by keeping the reflexive journal to record the researcher's reflections and speculations throughout the study.

The researcher needs to read the transcripts with an open mind, letting the interview "breathe and speak for itself" (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, during the initial reading of the transcripts, passages that provided insights into the participant's context of practice or seemed interesting were also underlined. Thus, the coding process involved studying and categorizing the data based on participants' responses. Each code was given a label, characteristics, description, qualifications, and exclusions (Merriam, 1998). Then the labeled codes, referred to as concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994), were grouped into categories and referred to as themes.

Then memos were written summarizing each participant's explanation of why they chose to teach in independent schools. Other notes summarized each participant's response to questions asking them to comment on why they initially decided to teach at an independent school and why they continue to teach at an independent school. These memos were utilized to develop member-checking questions for the second interview. Based on these memos and the coding process, the researcher wrote case summaries from the first wave of data collection as part of a data reduction process. As a data reduction strategy, these summaries created descriptions of participants' acquisition, contextualization, and experiences within independent schools. The researcher asked each participant to have their interviews audio recorded. Notes were taken during and after each interview. The researcher then transcribed each of the recordings and coded the transcriptions by word usage, including direct quotes for the most relevant data and theme patterning.

As described above, generalizations about the case study were developed upon completion of the data analysis based on the identified themes. This is the third phase of the data

reduction process, identified as conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this phase, a constant comparative approach continued to be utilized, focusing on the triangulation of findings. For verification purposes, faculty of color interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed to triangulate the findings from the participants' interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Ethnic diversity efforts in independent schools began with actively recruiting Black faculty to these exclusive communities. Undeniable progress has been made in hiring faculty of color in independent schools since the 1960s and 1970s. Faculty of color in independent schools, in the 2018–2019 school year, made up 19.0% of all faculty in NAIS schools across the country (NAIS 2019c). That percentage is a snapshot revealing an apparent increase in the rate of faculty of color from the days of single-digit representation in the prior decades.

Data reported from the NAIS on the racial composition of faculty of color at member schools are available from the 2001–2002 school year (NAIS, 2003) through the 2018–2019 school year on the NAIS website (NAIS, 2020). This national data, though, was not easy to interpret, and there was little data on faculty of color employment that were specific to the three cities used in this study. In one section, the NAIS offered the “Employment of Faculty of Color as a % Total Faculty” for “Faculty of Color” and each racial group. The first issue encountered was that the NAIS included in its definition of “Faculty of Color” Middle Eastern faculty. The United States defined those of Middle Eastern descent as “white.” The second issue was that “race” and “ethnicity” are conflated in the term “faculty of color.” Again, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the “Hispanic/Latino” designation represents an ethnic, not racial, group. In this data, a White Hispanic faculty member and a Black Hispanic faculty member were deemed “faculty of color.” The third issue, even more, problematic than the first two issues, was that the percentage of faculty of color reported by NAIS does not accurately reflect the raw number of faculty of color that the NAIS reported. For example, in the 2015–2016 school year, the NAIS reported that 16.5% of faculty at day-member schools were faculty of color. However, when reviewing the raw data of faculty of color, the percentage equals 15.1, suggesting a margin

between the reported rates of faculty of color and calculated percentages of faculty of color. For the purpose of this research, reported percentages were used.

Despite these issues, the data from the last decade are illuminating. Based on data from the NAIS website, nationally, the percentage of faculty of color in NAIS member day schools has increased from 9.1% in 2001–2002 to 19.0% in 2018–2019, a rate that still does not adequately represent the students of color population in independent schools. However, the increase is less impressive as the focus shifts to faculty of color in independent schools within Texas. Based on the same data points from the Independent School Association of the Southwest (ISAS), faculty of color only represent 10.8% of all faculty in member-day independent schools in Texas, a percentage well below the national average. Therefore, the desire to cast a more considerable net of participants was limited. The need to depend on word of mouth and the snowballing effect among participants in the study to capture the voices of faculty of color was crucial.

For this research, the snowball effect proved critical for sharing commonalities among the researcher and participants. Participants were open in responding to more personal questions than initially expected. The fact that most participants were referred to the researcher made the relationship-building process easier to navigate and quicker to establish trust.

Qualitative responses varied when presented with the essential question of why they chose to teach at an independent school. Yet, regardless of race or gender, two properties of sensemaking emerged as central themes—*retrospection and identity*. From these major themes, several significant reasons arose as to why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools—the autonomy of teaching, relationships with students, class size, teacher collaboration, and compensation (Table 6). These five reasons emerged related to who the participants thought

they were in the context of their schools and how those perspectives shaped what they enacted and how they interpreted events and situations.

Table 6

Reasons Why Faculty of Color Choose to Teach in Independent Schools

Sensemaking Theme	Number of Participants Who Noted Theme
Autonomy of Teaching	11
Relationship with Students	9
Class Size	6
Teacher Collaboration	5
Compensation	4

In addition to the participant’s relationship with their students and autonomy of teaching, several other themes emerged as compelling reasons for their choice to teach in independent schools. Six faculty of color shared that class size was a significant factor. Five interviewees noted that they appreciated the teacher collaboration within their independent school. Four of the 12 participants reported compensation and benefits for choosing to teach in independent schools. Three participants indicated that they preferred an independent school in hopes that their child(ren) would be able to attend at a discounted rate. One participant noted that independent schools were most appealing because they do not require a state license. One faculty of color indicated that he was looking for a job and received an offer from the independent school before any other school extended an offer. Also for consideration is that of the 12 participants, 10 initiated contact with their school. Two were recruited by their school based on a previous connection with a current employee. See Table 7.

Table 7

Reasons Why Faculty of Color Choose to Teach in Independent Schools Based on Themes and Subthemes of Sensemaking

Theme	Subtheme	Number of Participants Who Noted Theme
Retrospection	Autonomy of Teaching	11
Identity	Relationship with Students	9
Identity	Teacher Collaboration	5
Retrospection	Class Size	6
Retrospection	Compensation	4

Retrospection as a Central Theme

Using sensemaking as the conceptual framework, the first central theme identified was retrospective or retrospective relational sensemaking. For this research, retrospective sensemaking provided the opportunity for participants to reflect upon the time that affected what they noticed, thus making the attention and interruptions to that attention highly relevant to their decision to continue to teach in independent schools. Most properties of sensemaking overlook the critical matter of relational sensemaking processes from a prospective perspective. However, retrospective sensemaking in this study identifies the participant’s experiences as an ongoing and cyclical process. Therefore, it makes sense that retrospective sensemaking is an essential theme for enhancing shared understanding in areas of relational learning, interactions, and interpretations that are undertaken in ongoing discourse in an attempt to make sense of the surrounding world and to set the basis for roles and responsibilities (Weick, 1995).

As participants shared their experiences, the following identified subthemes presented a continuous and retrospective process in which actions were not guided by sense, but instead, sense is driven by action and a retrospective understanding of that action. Weick (1995)

suggested that the relational sensemaking process springs into action when discrepancies and equivocality in ongoing activities interrupt regular action and trigger sensemaking. Listening to the participants, this frequently occurred when faculty of color noticed peculiar events that deviated from previous events and experiences and invented new potential interpretations to make sense of the situation. Based on the participants' reflections and perspectives, three distinct commonalities emerged as subthemes for the sensemaking property of retrospective: autonomy of teaching, class size, and compensation.

Autonomy of Teaching

The most common and first subtheme of retrospective sensemaking in this research was the autonomy of teaching. In the book *Drive*, Daniel Pink (2009) described the fundamental characteristics which motivate people and personal independence as high on his list. For teachers, this translated to professional autonomy while they are at work. He suggested that one will work harder and be more effective if given personal authority over their sphere of possible influence. Most teachers, regardless of where and what they teach or the color of their skin, desire autonomy in teaching. They prefer freedom from the bureaucracy of public education and share incredible frustration in teaching to a mandated test. In general, faculty take great pride in the curriculum they develop and the instruction they provide. Eleven of the 12 participants noted autonomy in teaching as a great privilege and benefit of teaching in independent schools. Although some standards and curricula should be taught, how and when it was taught was usually at the individual teacher's discretion. Participants spoke about the lack of time constraints and the ability to teach to the student's needs at a pace complementary to their progression stage.

When I taught in public school, I was held hostage to lesson plans, benchmarks, and test results. There were times when I knew my students had not mastered the material, but I

had to move forward anyway. Here, I am not confined to a timeline or a state-mandated test. Instead, I can provide the attention and time needed to ensure that my students are learning and meeting my expectations. I have input into my students' progress and success, and I can maneuver my lesson plans to best meet my student's learning needs.

Given the teachers' ongoing capacity to take control of their teaching, faculty of color began to rationalize the value of choosing to remain in independent schools as a significant benefit. They had the freedom to study, learn, and teach to their passions and content. The participants in the study noted a relatively high classroom autonomy in choosing curriculum and instruction, including teaching and assessment methods, lesson plans, and professional development goals. It was evident that classroom autonomy was a major level of job satisfaction for the participants. One teacher noted that classroom autonomy speaks to whether the administration and parents trust them as competent professionals. One participant suggested that her experience as both a classroom teacher and administrator indicates that teachers need autonomy if they will be decision-makers, leaders, lifelong learners, and provide practical instruction for all students.

As both a classroom teacher and administrator, the autonomy I have to develop and execute my lesson plans is unique in independent schools. I am encouraged and expected to use my professional judgment to develop curriculum and to teach to the needs of my students.

Further discussion suggested that independent school teachers appreciated the opportunity to personalize their teaching experience. This personalization was done by changing the curriculum to meet the needs of their students, offering input into their teaching schedule, planning their lessons and assessments, choosing their professional development, and collaborating with other highly qualified teachers. Participants also expressed their ability to

experiment with new pedagogical styles, choice in textbook selection, and trust by administration and parents to exercise professional judgment in determining what is best for their students. One English teacher shared the following:

I am a professional and respect that I am treated like one. I can choose my curriculum, what I deem important to teach and how I wish to teach it. I can approach each lesson in the best way for my students. I am not mandated to teach to a book or required to give bureaucratic assessments to my students every few weeks. I can teach so that my students will learn; because of that gift, I have learned to teach better. As a result, my students are better learners and appreciate the learning process.

Class Size

The second subtheme for understanding retrospection was class size. Class size was a crucial reason why faculty choose to remain in independent schools and likely contributed to the opportunity for teachers and students to develop relationships. Six of the 12 participants commented on the importance of small class sizes. The student-teacher ratio in the lower (elementary) schools surveyed was nine to one. The average student-teacher ratio in middle and upper (high) schools was 15 and 12, respectively, to one. This personal approach allowed teachers to plan and prepare high-quality instruction (a standard expectation of administration and parents), connect with students, and learn and address their academic and personal needs. In addition, the small class size encouraged teachers to use practices sensitive to students' differences and needs. Students' voices were heard and valued, which in turn helped them to feel better about the school, engage more, and demonstrate less disruptive behaviors in the classroom. As a result of the small class sizes, faculty and students of all colors maintained relationships well beyond interactions in the classroom.

One teacher noted that based on her anecdotal data, small classes appeared to reduce racial and ethnic inequalities in reading and gender inequality in mathematics.

Teaching fifteen (or fewer) students compared to twenty (or more) students make a significant difference in the learning outcomes and achievement. Not only am I able to identify which students struggle with specific concepts, but I can also invest the necessary time to plan and prepare for class. Instead of differentiating for twenty students, I can focus on fifteen. Instead of grading twenty papers, I can give the necessary attention to the fifteen and examine their needs. We all benefit from smaller classes. I can better connect with the students, and the students can connect more among themselves. They become a team, and they are each other's cheerleaders. They want to succeed collectively as a class, and I want nothing more for them than to learn in this way.

In addition to the relationships that were established with small class sizes, teachers also noted their pedagogical perspectives. Teachers felt as if the discussions in small classes were enriched and more meaningful to students' learning process, ironically allowing more voices to be heard and respected. They noted the benefits of discussion for student learning outcomes, especially the ability to improve student's critical thinking skills. They indicated that participation was higher in small-group talks, as were students' perceptions of learner outcomes. They also found equal participation of students of different ethnic backgrounds in small-group discussions. Teachers also shared that when attending a conference for normed test scores, such as the Educational Records Bureau (ERB), results indicated that students who had been in small classes showed statistically significant advantages over students in large classes on all achievement measures.

When I arrived at my school, I was shocked by the number of students enrolled in my English class, and even more shocked to see the student's previous year's standardized

test scores. When I inquired about the success of the students, I was told that our students do well because we can focus on their individual needs from year to year and identify targeted areas for growth. With a class of eleven students, this makes sense and I can differentiate my instruction in such a way that all my students meet or exceed normed expectations.

Compensation

The third subtheme of retrospection as a central theme was teacher compensation. Compensation as discussed comes in many forms and was a continuous interaction that constructs and reconstructs organizational actions and strategy through the sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995). One-third of the 12 participants noted compensation and benefits as reasons for choosing to teach in independent schools. Each of these four teachers of color had previously worked in public (including charter) schools and noted their delight in compensation, including insurance and 401k/401b benefits, when transitioning to independent schools. With the same years of experience, faculty of color noted a \$2,000 to \$4,500 base salary increase and an annual percentage salary increase. This salary increase was accompanied by a reduced teaching load, smaller class sizes, fewer disciplinary issues, additional resources and support, less standardized testing, greater teacher autonomy and personal safety, and a free high-quality lunch. For two of the participants, it also offered the opportunity for their children to attend school at reduced tuition costs.

Since salaries were not published, I assumed my pay at (school's name) would be considerably lower than public school. When I was offered a salary, I almost fainted. I was shocked. Not only did I receive an increase of over five thousand dollars, but the number of students was less, the work environment felt positive, and the lunch was delicious.

In addition to the financial benefits of teaching in independent schools, faculty of color also noted the opportunities for professional and leadership development, tuition assistance for advanced degrees, national networking with other colleagues, and upper-class community connections. One participant spoke about a faculty award he received to travel to Greece for the summer to enhance his teaching. He also shared that other faculty members had trips to Normandy, Jerusalem, Spain, France, and the Galapagos Islands.

Perhaps even more personal was the ability to connect and network with influential community leaders, business owners, health care professionals, and other movers and shakers within the community. Two participants shared stories about purchasing a vehicle from a parent who owned a car dealership and the ease of the process and discount in price. One participant shared an account of the new medical treatment (and surgery) received for his severely-ill son from the parent of a student he taught and how the parent worked with the insurance company to reduce the out-of-pocket expenses. Another participant noted the community support for her mother, who battled cancer, and how the faculty and parents collectively rallied around her to ensure that she (and her mother) had access to all the resources available.

This sense of community support was a common theme. Faculty of color identified their connection with students' parents as a personal benefit. Participants noted the gratitude parents extend in receiving quicker access to medical care, discounted rates on vehicle purchases, high dollar monetary gifts, gift cards and certificates, large-ticketed purchases, consultation for financial advice, access to athletic events and performances, and even earn extra money outside of school for tutoring or babysitting services provided. While these were not reasons faculty of color specifically chose to teach in independent schools, it was apparent that they saw these perks as beneficial opportunities for working within independent schools.

Independent schools are one of the best-kept secrets in education. I taught in and retired from public school before I came here. The salary is more than I had imagined and the annual percentage increase gives you extra motivation each year. While financial compensation and benefits are important, so is the non-tangible compensation of time.

Participants shared the increased amount of non-teaching and planning time during the academic day because of the reduced number of classes taught, which provides time after hours to appreciate non-work-related hobbies. One noted the ability to leave at the end of the work day without being frowned upon by other colleagues or administration. This sense of work-life balance was mentioned during conversations with three participants in different contexts. Yet, the ultimate theme was highlighting the importance of being able to set parameters and boundaries for work. One faculty member referred to these benefits and incentives as the “golden handcuffs,” indicating such perks make it challenging to depart.

These (independent) schools are smart and have figured it out. They get us here and then snap us into the “golden handcuffs.” They offer us more than enough to keep us, making it difficult to leave when we have had enough. The money, the freedoms, the connections, and even the education our children receive all remind us why appreciate our job. And these “golden handcuffs,” also remind us of why we need to keep our job.

Faculty of color noted opportunities for growth regarding professional advancement in title or position and strengthening their skill set and craft. In addition to the professional development, and perhaps more important, the faculty of color also spoke to their personal growth in learning about themselves, their biases, the culture of the school’s dominant race, and other groups of color. Working in independent schools can help faculty of color, similar to their students, better understand their needs and the needs of others and gain valuable insight into different perspectives.

Although class sizes and the number of students taught are smaller than their public school counterparts, the expectations and level of accountability for the work to be done are substantial. Yet, faculty of color spoke positively about the overall commitment from their respective schools to encourage a balanced work-life experience. From the medical benefits, time off for holidays and personal sick time, and healthy and affordable eating options on campus (most of which are free or reduced in price) to the programs in place for physical and mental wellness, including access to on-campus fitness facilities and counselors and health professionals, most independent schools work to provide a positive and manageable work-life balance for their employees.

Identity as a Central Theme

Using sensemaking as the conceptual framework, the second central theme was identity. Individuals are constantly engaged in the process of framing and making sense of their environment. Several studies show how and why identity influences individuals' sensemaking (Gioia, 2005; Spillane, 2012). Gioia (2006) determined that identity is a reference point for determining the critical issues and the actions or nonactions in response to them. Although identity represented important context cues for faculty of color's sensemaking, this was especially significant for faculty of color whose professional actions and consequences fall under the purview, scrutiny, and accountability of the general public within an organization (Weick, 1995). Socially constructed conceptions of race impose differential identities based on social status, power, and cultural, physical, and intellectual attributes assigned to racial or ethnic groups.

Evidence suggested that many inside and outside of the school community related identity with their students' race and socioeconomic status, as well as the location of their school (Goodson et al., 2006; Evans, 2007). Similarly, within schools, identities often became

associated with the predominance of a particular racial group. This was particularly true in such educational organizations as independent schools.

In addition to the racial composition, the faculty of colors' racial identity became another crucial contextual factor in schools, particularly when juxtaposed against the "identity" of a majority "minority" school. Racial diversity among faculty of color within independent schools was virtually nonexistent as most independent school communities are white. Although the lack of racial diversity in independent schools presented one dilemma, the broader concern identified by Young and Laible (2000) was White educators and decision makers' lack of understanding of the various manifestations of racism and the consequences of this for the student body and parent community.

Relationship With Students

The first subtheme of identity sensemaking related to this study was the participants' relationships with their students. Think about a favorite teacher from school. What made that teacher so special? Maybe they were the first person who told the student they could be or do anything or helped math "make sense." The wisdom and mentorship that faculty offer can be life-changing, especially for younger students. Parent engagement is the heart of most independent schools, but for the participants in this study, student engagement was just as essential. When students know their teachers cared, they were more equipped to reach their potential. According to the faculty of color interviewed, one of the best ways to encourage academic achievement, self-motivation, and self-regulation was by building meaningful teacher-student relationships.

Faculty of color suggested that the teacher-student relationship was an interpersonal relationship that connected to their individual identity. From the participant's perspective, this interpersonal relationship was connected to experience and thus used as guidance for

forthcoming action and understanding (Weick, 1995). When teachers had a positive relationship with their students, students not only developed better social-emotional skills but also learned more academic content—participants believed that their students had higher test scores, better grades, and were less likely to be retained in grade or referred for special education. Teachers showed respect, valued each student’s individuality, and were kind and polite. They helped students with schoolwork, managed the classroom well, and, perhaps most importantly, taught in a way that fostered learning for all students. A caring teacher gave honest but kind feedback and offered second chances.

Nine of the 12 participants shared that one of their greatest incentives to teach within independent schools was the students—all students. The teachers recognized that the core of education was the relationship between the teacher and student. Overwhelmingly, faculty of color noted the desire of students to learn and achieve. Most of their students understood the importance of education and were generally intrinsically motivated and performed as expected at high academic levels. Teachers suggested that their relationships with students positively impacted student motivation, commitment, effort, engagement, intellectual development, and academic achievement. When student relationships with teachers were more emotionally supportive and less conflictual, teachers observed students who were more socially and academically competent. Teachers also celebrated their ability to have close, influential relationships associated with greater student engagement in learning and better social and behavioral outcomes. Students worked to establish positive relationships with their teachers and, in most situations, were respectful and compliant with academic and behavioral expectations. The participants benefited from the teacher-student connections and celebrated the joy of teaching and their commitments to their profession, school, and students.

I identify as a Middle Eastern female. I was hired just months before the US invaded Iraq in 2003. At that time, there was a lot of targeted hatred against people who looked like me in the United States. I vividly recall a time being afraid to leave a basketball after hearing students from the opposing school chanting horrific slurs in the parking lot. As I stood in the opposing team's gym building the courage to walk to my car, a group of my seniors approached me. They asked if I was ok, and escorted me to my car. It was at that moment that I was reminded of the importance of relationships. My students shared the incident with my administration and by the end of the week, the Head of School of the opposing team met with in-person me to apologize. Here I thought I am supposed to protect them, and they protected me. I knew that day, that this was the right place for me, and I have been here ever since.

While the schools represented are investing resources in diversity, equity, and inclusion, the participants noted that the presence of faculty (and students) of color played a significant role in this work. Overwhelmingly, women faculty of color spoke about their connections with their students and identified students of color as a high priority. Likewise, men faculty of color reported the relationship they built with their students to be of most importance and focused on mentorship, specifically of African American and Latinx males. Although all faculty of color commented on the importance of mentorship or role models for students of color, they also spoke about the value of their presence for White students, colleagues, and parents.

One participant specifically spoke about her many meaningful relationships with young women on her athletic team.

Because I also teach P.E., I have seen my girls grow up and be a part of their lives since they were in elementary or middle school. I know them and their families know me. The time with my girls is always a meaningful experience, and I always get more from them

than I give. They inspire me to be better, and I am blessed that they are a part of my life. Like all students, my players need an ally at school, someone they can talk to, someone they know will support them, and someone who cares for them. They know I am one of those people on and off the court. Most of the time, our conversations (off the court) have little to do with basketball or academics but more about life and navigating the challenges of school or their social life on or off-campus. Perhaps what is also unique is that I have daughters here, and my players are role models for my girls and someone my girls can talk to and look up to. My players help me to be a better person ~ a teacher, a coach, and a parent.

This experience was not unique. Most participants directly or indirectly noted the fulfillment they received in the established connections with their students (and families) of color. Whether inside or outside the classroom, faculty of color were tasked to build relationships. Sometimes, this task was assigned by the administration, and other times it was a self-imposed responsibility. Either way, participants reflected on the joy (and sometimes heartache) of this additional, but worthy other duty as assigned.

According to one participant, commitment to his students translated to close and supportive relationships that helped to model examples for his peers. He cared about his students, believed that every child would learn, set high expectations, was warm and trusting, and strived to keep the relationship conflict-free. He also used humor, admitted mistakes, set clear boundaries, and was open, honest, and approachable. As Rita Pierson proclaimed in her famous TED talk, “Kids aren’t going to learn from someone they don’t like.” This participant added that his students once told him that good teachers listen to and take a personal interest in students’ lives. They were approachable—they said “hi” on campus outside of their classroom, smiled often, and stayed after class to talk with students. They also set high expectations and were fair,

honest, trustworthy, respectful, open, supportive, and encouraging. This anecdote summarized the professional and personal commitment faculty of color attempted to offer their students regardless of race.

When I arrived, I made assumptions about my students. For the most part, I thought they were all entitled rich white kids with high IQ's and low EQs. For some that was true, but for most, it was not. I saw their thirst for an emotional connection and worked to quench it. They come to my classroom before school to hang out. We talk about music, social media, or the happenings on campus. No reassuring. No offering advice. I just listen. And, they have learned to trust me. For many of my students, I am the first African American teacher they have had. So, I take pride in knowing that I have offered them a positive perspective on cultural relationships. And in truth, they have done the same for me. We have all benefitted.

Teacher Collaboration/Collegiality

The second subtheme within the central theme of identity is teacher collaboration and collegiality. Here, identity sensemaking involved conversational and social practices that occurred verbally and non-verbally. This subtheme, teacher collaboration, and collegiality highlight the specific experiences and activities that occurred in identity sensemaking practices in the context of faculty of color. Although only five interviewees noted that collaboration and collegiality impacted their willingness to remain in independent schools, my research suggested that this also affects their decision to leave independent schools. Therefore, I believed it noteworthy to share the benefits and challenges of teacher collaboration and collegiality, or the lack thereof. Contexts, needs, talents, and commitments differ, but one thing appeared constant: a school cannot improve without people working together. Despite one's interest in autonomy, the teachers of color interviewed appreciated genuine opportunities for collaboration. Although

participants used the terms collaboration and collegiality interchangeably, most reported they are built on a belief in the value of openness, tempered by respect for individual and collective security.

Faculty of color who have developed a sense of belonging within their community also touted the fact that they had fun at work. They developed meaningful relationships with their colleagues and have had the opportunity to know their students and their families better. One elementary teacher shared the comment below:

When I think of the teacher to who I am closest, our relationship began in an honest opportunity of vulnerability. I was new, and she first reached out to me to invite me to lunch before the start of the school year. We went to lunch, and what I had anticipated being an hour or so turned into almost four hours of rich, thoughtful, and hilarious conversation. We apparently had more in common than just teaching the same subject at the same school. I was worried our schedules would prevent us from interacting once school started, but she found time to check in on me, and I made myself available to her. I will never forget her vulnerability when she asked about my natural hair. While I don't always enjoy giving white folks a lesson on ethnic hair, this was different, and I did not mind. I know she was sincere, and I felt like I was talking to a friend and not informing a stranger. I believe that her comfort level with me allowed other colleagues to let me into "their circle" sooner and certainly faster than some of my other colleagues of color have been accepted. Once they allowed me to enter, they could see why I am here and just how talented I am as an educator and hopefully as a person, too.

The added bonus is that I also have the privilege to work alongside a fantastic team of teachers, who I call colleagues and a few of them friends. The administration can assemble the best group of educators on staff. Still, suppose you (the administration)

don't allow us to use our professional judgment. In that case, we will be powerless to act and make the school a community to offer the best student-centered experience for their students.

Collaboration and collegiality constitute and reflect one another. While they are closely connected, both terms are not identical. Whereas collaboration was used as a descriptive term, referring to cooperative actions, teachers referenced collegiality as the quality of the relationships among staff members in a school. Based on the feedback from the participants, the actual steps of working together were determined by the quality of the relationships among staff members, which seemed to reflect collegiality more than collaboration. However, the mutual constitution and reflection of collaboration and collegiality was an ongoing process, which, according to this study's participants, seemed difficult to navigate for cross-racial relationships and interactions. Therefore, both their appearance and meaning developed and shifted over time.

Collaboration and collegiality seemed to be defined as the pedagogy of cooperation. Teachers of color believed collaboration and collegiality played a vital role in augmenting teacher professional growth and development, job satisfaction, organizational and professional commitment, school quality, and student performance. The effectiveness of working together looked different for teachers of color who taught among different grade levels.

Teachers of younger students described collaboration and collegial relationships as those that demonstrated polite, reasonable, and respectful behavior. They spoke about and to their colleagues respectfully and politely. They felt they were protective of one another and defended and supported colleagues in unfair or difficult situations. Elementary teachers of color suggested that they developed a genuine interest in every faculty member, and regardless of color, created opportunities to give and receive constructive feedback, and helped their colleagues to achieve their goals of educating students.

On the contrary, teachers of middle and high school students contended that it felt more challenging to build the trust needed as teachers tended to work in silos either within their department or their division. They suggested that communication among teachers of color tended to be open, honest, and confidential. However, they initially did not feel that same respect and dignity from white colleagues. Given the departmentalized nature of the middle and high school, teachers of color suggested that white faculty were frequently recognized publicly for their academic achievements more than faculty of color. At the same time, faculty of color were often acknowledged and solicited for their perceived expertise in race relations, not academic excellence. One participant also noted that she had experienced numerous episodes of poor behavior by white colleagues. She stated that although a response was required, as a faculty of color, she felt like she had to be more diplomatic and respond with a smile. She further suggested that she understood there would be conflict and the need for it. She added that

Conflict was normal and could be positive, but it should not be personal, and it should not be disrespectful. Therefore, from the beginning, faculty of color must acknowledge that conflict impacts culture, and culture impacts conflict. As independent schools seek to increase faculty of color, they cannot be afraid of cultural conflicts and racial differences.

Overall, faculty of color recognized that relationships built on trust and fed by personal integrity produced a more meaningful foundation. Therefore, to survive or thrive in independent schools, faculty of color had intentionally modeled characteristics they wished other faculty and staff to exhibit. The most valuable assets of their independent schools were their people, their intellectual capital, and the culture they created. A healthy balancing of autonomy, collegiality, and collaboration for accomplishing a positive professional culture seemed to provide the most promising foundation.

Collegiality strengthens collaboration. We come here every day giving it our all. Regardless if we are one of many or one of a few, like our students, our bucket is filled by the daily professional and social interactions with one another. We thrive when we feel valued and respected and we feel invisible when we do not. I left my previous school for that very reason. The teachers there never let me in. The more I tried to connect, the more they tried to disconnect. They would go out after work or gather for celebrations and discuss it in front of me, and I was never invited. Then I realized, why stay at a place where I was not welcome so I left. I have been here for nine years now, and I feel like I belong. My colleagues feel like family. We celebrate each other. We eat lunch together. And occasionally, we attend each other's family gatherings. Not only do we care about our students, we care about each other.

Noteworthy Experiences as Faculty of Color in Independent Schools

As faculty of color mitigated tenure and migrated through independent schools, it was certainly worth noting the reasons for choosing to remain had changed over time. For many, the initial reason they decided to teach at independent schools was consistent throughout their journey. However, for some participants, as their tenure changed, so did their reasons for staying at their schools. During the interviews, each participant shared experiences that questioned their decision to remain at their respective schools and described isolated situations attributed to being a faculty member of color.

Overwhelmingly, faculty of color spoke to what they felt was a blatant disregard for their subject matter and educational expertise. Time and time again, faculty of color were solicited to lead and offer guidance on race-related issues with students and parents of color. Faculty of color were often sought out as community experts to address or resolve racial challenges and assist with recruiting other faculty or students of color. Yet, these same faculty members were not

invited into the conversation and were less involved in other academic, non-racial issues at the school. One upper school teacher of color shared her experience:

On several occasions, I was tagged by the administration to work specifically with student affinity groups or lead organized diversity efforts within the school community. Yet, I was not provided adequate professional development, resources, administrative support, or financial compensation. I was even asked to lead an “unofficial” affinity group of African American students after school hours (on the weekend) without a plan, a representative from the administration, or financial compensation. I was told that the “school was not quite ready to take this work on publicly.” Yet, when the school was forced to have an assembly on race relations after the 2008 presidential election, I was not consulted with or informed until I arrived in the auditorium. As a result of the tensions, the school hired an outside consultant, and unlike a few of my white colleagues, I was not a member of the task force or hiring committee.

Another faculty member shared his desire with the administration to coordinate a Martin Luther King, Jr., program and was denied, only to learn the following month, that a Black History Program was held and coordinated by his white colleague, from which he was omitted. One participant shared a similar story when he was asked to lead the Black History Program. When the administration learned that he had included all the African American students within his respective division, he was told that the participants must consist of some White students. He recalled examples of the many assemblies he had observed with only White students on the stage and then posed his observation to the administration. He was told that “it would not look good” to have only African American students on the stage and was forced to change the program.

When faculty of color were asked if they felt like they have demands placed on them beyond teaching, over half responded, “yes.” They noted the pressure to be “perfect” to negate

stereotypes, the expectations of supporting all students and parents of color, being expected to be the spokesperson or expert for one's race, and coordinating and educating the community about diversity.

Although no participant stated that the school's commitment to racial diversity or equity was a reason for choosing to remain at their independent school, each participant expressed an interest and personal passion for the work of equity, inclusion, and belonging within their schools. Given the purpose of the research, this observation proved to be meaningful and inspired conversations about the participants' experiences as faculty members of color.

Using sensemaking as the framework to collect this qualitative data helped the researcher (and the participants) better understand the cognitive act of using the participants' perspectives within their context to process and respond to why they chose to remain to teach in independent schools. Regardless of the primary reason for choosing to teach in independent schools, each participant acknowledged the value of connections and relationships. Those connections varied from students to colleagues to parents to administration. Although fewer faculty of color pointed to a positive relationship with the administration, it was evident that the administration played some role (large or small) in their decision-making.

Most respondents were employed at their current school for at least seven years and plan to stay in teaching, perhaps even at their current school. However, the reasons given for those unsure if they would stay at their current school were related to issues of diversity. They noted their desire to work in a school with more teachers and students of color, a feeling of isolation, and a more supportive administration (which may or may not be related to being a faculty member of color). One surprising finding was the desire for faculty of color in independent schools to collaborate with public schools. Participants working in independent schools that

collaborated with public schools spoke highly of the school's moral commitment to a greater good and their personal sense of connectedness to their schools.

The findings in this study offered a panoramic discovery of why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools. For some respondents, this research offered a necessary exploration of their reasoning and rationales, including one's intrinsic satisfaction of professional connectedness and doing a necessary good and the extrinsic motivation of personal benefits like compensation. Whatever their reason, this research should serve to provide intangible insight into supporting faculty of color and strengthening the relationship between these employees and the school community. Whether a school wishes to increase the number of faculty or students of color or just do a better job of supporting its current population, the defined reasons in this study may serve as a catalyst for fostering a sense of belonging among all members of the community, regardless of their race.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research aimed to introduce a framework for understanding why faculty of color choose to teach in homogenous, predominantly White, affluent, and exclusive independent schools. The framework drew on findings from 12 faculty of color who have worked in independent schools between five and 26 years. The study began with a brief overview of sensemaking as a framework to help understand why faculty choose to work in independent schools. The research defined the seven properties of sensemaking to identify two central themes, retrospection and identity. It then described the design and methods employed to explore a qualitative study of perceptions of faculty of color and why they choose to continue teaching in independent schools. Synthesizing interview data collected from 12 faculty of color, the findings elaborated upon the central themes of retrospection and identity to recognize five reasons (autonomy of teaching, relationships with students, class size, collaboration and collegiality, and compensation) why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools. These findings included the teachers' context and the school and culture's interpersonal experiences. Finally, the research explored the framework's implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Summary of Findings

This study grew out of the challenges many independent schools face when trying to recruit, hire, and support faculty of color. The intended outcome is an enhanced understanding of ways that independent schools can attract and retain more significant numbers of faculty of color. A good amount of research had been written about the role of faculty of color in public schools. However, few comprehensive studies had been published on the specific significance, need for, or experience of faculty of color in independent schools. Given the limited number of

faculty of color teaching in independent schools, it made sense to explore why faculty of color chose to teach in independent schools. Hopefully, these collective perspectives of faculty of color might provide administrators and independent school communities an opportunity to listen, reflect, and act upon building a more inclusive school culture through the recruitment, hiring, and retention processes.

As the research began, it became evident that the faculty of color selected to participate in this study were eager to share their experiences and have their voices heard, albeit confidentially. Several of them specifically inquired about having a copy of the completed findings to share with their administrators. They were also curious about what other schools were doing to recruit and retain faculty of color, particularly in the subject areas that faculty of color tend to be represented, such as in science, English, and not to mention, administration.

The findings indicated that many faculty of color were often asked to deal with a range of challenges of students of color while at the same time being held responsible for a full workload of other responsibilities. For years, these faculty of color have bridged the gap between those who had access and opportunity and those who did not. In past calls to action, educated people of color in the south had been called to march, sit in, or demonstrate. Now, they are invited to the “table” for inclusion using more subtle techniques to help unlock closed minds and doors to provide all students access to educational opportunities through program development in independent schools.

Among nonsectarian schools in America, the small group of private schools that call themselves “independent schools” rank among the most prestigious educational institutions in America. Financially self-supporting and essentially free of government intervention, independent schools define themselves, determine their curriculum, and select faculty and

students who they feel best fit the school's mission. These schools have demanding academic curricula for their students that emphasize academic rigor and character development. They enjoy an influence disproportionate to their actual numbers because of the quality of their educational programs, their graduates' success in matriculating at competitive colleges and universities, and their alums' substantial social, economic, and political capital.

While the independent school community is making strides in diversifying its faculty and staff, many schools still have only a few or no faculty of color. The researcher chose to highlight these schools with their specific faculty because although they are in different stages of reaching their optimum commitment to employing faculty of color, each perspective offers lessons for other independent schools. Although the reasons why faculty of color chose to teach at their respective independent school, it must be remembered that their experiences are highly influential in determining the culture of their classroom and the climate of openness during instructional times, which directly impacts the culture of the school community.

Implications for Independent School Leaders

Independent schools' student body is rapidly changing, but the teaching workforce has not kept up with the trend. This must change. Students of all backgrounds deserve teachers of all backgrounds. Increasing the number of faculty of color in independent schools is not enough. The schools must provide an environment in which faculty of color are drawn and in which they are willing to stay. The research and the personal accounts presented in this study emphasize that increasing the numbers is only the first step in the long road toward making faculty of color receptors to a career in independent school education. The findings indicate that schools must commit to transforming themselves into multicultural communities.

Schools likely to succeed in attracting and retaining faculty of color are embarking on

school-wide change that involves scrutinizing every aspect of school life, including the explicit and hidden curriculum they are expected to teach. Suppose schools are serious about becoming inclusive communities where faculty of color feel they belong. In that case, they must engage and allow for honest dialogue and critical reflection about their differences and similarities. The task is not simply to help faculty of color acclimate to the school. Nor is it to place faculty of color in situations where they are the cultural carriers—burdened with the task of teaching peers and students about diversity issues—often while, as faculty of color, they too are in the process of working out their own identity within the school.

Sensemaking, as a critical element of identity, enables individuals, and faculty of color, in this research to transform school communities into effective educational institutions (Banks, 2006). Weick (1995) argued that the school leaders' essential task is to ensure that everyone within the school culture can make sense of what they are doing, why, to what ends, and how. Namely, sensemaking and understanding the perspectives of others is an important cultural capacity for today's dynamic world. It allows leaders to grasp better what is going on in their environments. Sensemaking in this research study is about giving meaning to unclear experiences while dealing with ambiguity. Based on the experiences of faculty of color, white colleagues and leaders can struggle with the interplay between action and interpretation. To better relate to the experiences of faculty of color, they have recommended a shift from management by control and command to management by collaboration and teamwork. For this to occur, leaders leading effectively in a complex and dynamic environment must understand and respect how all those within the school culture make sense of their work, including their most vulnerable, less represented, and often unheard employees.

Accordingly, leaders have an essential role in facilitating the sensemaking process for

their faculty and staff. To understand why faculty of color choose to work in independent schools, leaders need to invest time upfront during the recruitment process communicating and working with all faculty to help them attain a deeper understanding of inclusivity and belonging. This sense of inclusion and belonging entails providing faculty and staff with education and clarification on community norms, expectations, and priorities and ensuring that all employees are held accountable. Fostering such a community requires leaders to focus on professional development and community engagement. Educators, like the students they teach, need support and guidance when learning and implementing new initiatives. This holistic approach invites new perspectives on implementing a community of belonging by faculty of color, thus developing an understanding of the interdependent relationship between school leaders, teachers, and students.

As one participant noted,

This process was an essential introspective framework that helped me to understand my actions and reactions to specific biases and microaggressions I have encountered in my workplace. The questions and reflections increase the self-knowledge of my professional beliefs and values, and practices. It also offers me perspective on how I can better engage others in this shared process. If we all could experience such a process, I think it would serve our independent school communities well.

This research legitimates those who experience an opportunity to observe problems neither as a stigma nor a sign of failure but rather as a challenge that provides a valuable component for community building. The hope is that this research may increase the burden and responsibilities of all community members and simultaneously evoke tremendous potential for individual and communal growth. Helping the community develop a more sophisticated understanding of the

social, political, and emotional aspects of why faculty of color choose to teach in independent schools is crucial for building inclusive school culture. This welcomed understanding for all community members to learn about their vital role will contribute to nurturing a safe environment for faculty and students of color. When the faculty feel safe, they can help to ensure that the students feel the same, which is of the utmost importance.

Independent schools, which frequently pride themselves on preparing students for leadership, must recognize the need for faculty of color if they wish to prepare students to live, work, and lead in a global society. They feel visible when faculty of color are seen as role models and shapers of school culture, values, and policy. Faculty of color who promote the culture and values of the school tend to do that through their experience. Delpit's (2006) analysis suggested that faculty of color in independent schools have navigated both a majority and minority culture and thus are indispensable guides and interpreters for others within the school. They can help change White values and White notions of pedagogy and thus aid the transition to culturally responsive pedagogy suitable for all students. As one upper school teacher noted, "the trustees and administration need to create a multicultural environment where ethnic pride is understood by all not as racist but as necessary" by hiring new faculty of color and increasing the number of students of color.

As independent school administrators continue to think about ways to actively recruit and creatively support faculty of color, suggestions include contacting colleges and universities, particularly those which a larger constituent of students of color, advertising in people of color publications or social media venues including churches and community centers. Schools then need to move to more structural changes such as engaging board support, having a true vision for diversity, and reflecting the goal of diversity and inclusion in the mission statement.

Additionally, offering cultural training for the school community, having professional support and mentorship for faculty of color, and implementing multicultural events in the curriculum are noted areas that add impact. Less significant, but still important are providing professional development, defining job expectations, and creating an inviting work environment. Most participants stated that their decisions to teach at their school were positively influenced by the teachers they met during the interview process. This information is important for schools and to those responsible for assembling the hiring process and committee.

Limitations of the Study

While the topic of diversity in predominantly White school environments has made strides over the past 30 years, studies remain limited in understanding the experiences of faculty of color. Data collection is even less available, specifically related to their experiences at independent schools. Limitations in this study include providing perspectives of faculty of color within only five independent schools and only three Texas metropolitan cities (Austin, Dallas, and Houston). Given the proportionately small percentage of faculty in independent schools, this study is further limited by an even smaller percentage of faculty of color meeting the research criteria.

Research on this topic should be expanded to include a broader representative sample of participants with elementary, secondary, and higher education experience. Perspectives of faculty of color within different types of schools, including suburban public schools and independent institutions such as religious, boarding, and single-sex schools, might be meaningful. To enrich the data, this study could capture the perspectives of various other school constituents—students, administrators, board members, and parents. Suppose a holistic analysis of faculty recruitment and retention was of interest. In that case, the research could be expanded

to include the perspectives of White colleagues to understand why they choose to work in independent schools and note points of comparison.

Conclusion

Based on the feedback from the respondents, it seemed clear that a critical mass of students of color was influential in attracting faculty of color. To build more racially and culturally diverse faculties, independent schools need to rethink their conceptions of an ideal independent school teacher and recruit more broadly. One administrator of color stated that most of his colleagues sought faculty of color who fit into a box. They often hired those who fit a specific profile. They tended to be middle-class and attended an independent school and a private competitive college. Thus, they were believed to be someone who would not rock the boat. However, he also stated that due to the limited applicant pool of teachers, his school has had to reconsider what an ideal candidate would look like on paper.

As a leader, understanding everyone's "voice" is crucial in creating an environment that fosters collaborative dialogue and engages all members equally. People are shunned, silenced, and muted when diverse thoughts are not included. They lose self-esteem and may become discouraged, upset, and alienated. Addressing this endemic culture is essential to reaping the benefits of communal richness.

In a healthy climate, each employee experiences a sense of freedom to express their ideas. Members of the community feel as though their contributions are welcomed, valued, and respected. This psychological safety is essential to growing a thriving and culturally strong work environment. It is necessary to have a head of school and a board of trustees who have a vision and are committed to seeing the beauty of inclusivity. When leaders engage with and provide a voice to the silenced, it enhances awareness. It allows a dynamic culture of peace and

understanding in the service of children to emerge that inspires everyone to bring their best.

The outcomes of the research discuss how important a diverse teaching force is for creating a positive school culture for all students. The study also provides a framework useful in gauging the challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers in a shrinking national teaching pool. It reveals how faculty of color within three Texas cities found their jobs and their reasons for choosing to teach at an independent school as well as the special demands they face, and why they opted to stay. The researcher analyzed data collected from 12 independent school faculty of color and includes provocative considerations to help schools evaluate their own progress. Lastly, this study may offer guidelines to help educators close the faculty diversity gap in their schools, and subsequently do the same for their student population.

In the end, the researcher hopes that this study will serve as a catalytic springboard for future research. Although these findings offer powerful testimony by independent school faculty of color, perhaps several of the reasons why faculty of color chose to teach in independent schools may be relevant to other faculty as well. While some of the personal burdens of being a community expert on race or the pressures to be perfect to negate stereotypes may be different, it would be insightful to understand the perspectives of “white allies” in why they choose to teach in homogenous, predominantly White independent schools. To further this specific research, it might also be helpful to study the perceptions of administrators who are trying to navigate the difficulty of tradition and progressive cultural relevancy within their independent school communities. Considerations for exploring the perspectives of faculty of color to better understand how they overcame race-based scrutiny within their community could provide a platform for faculty support and community awareness.

As a context for understanding the political climate in America, it is essential to know that this research was conducted before the riots of racial tensions of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the 2020 presidential election. And while these happenings marked a real and present time within the country's history, the reality of such events within independent schools perhaps manifested some sobering skeletons within the history of many independent schools. As a measure for further research, it may be worthwhile to re-examine the same participants later to learn if or how their perceptions of teaching in independent schools have changed if they have remained in their respective schools or the teaching profession entirely.

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