ACCESS TO THE INSTITUTION:
Exploring the Relationship between Race and Employment in Independent Schools

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Abstract/Introduction

Educators of color are underrepresented in the teaching profession. The National Association of Independent Schools' 2018–2019 statistical data report shows that faculty and administrators of color are underrepresented within independent schools. FOC (faculty of color) makeup l9.1% of teaching faculty, while administrators of color makeup only 16% of the total number of administrators (NAIS, 2018). Despite NAIS' commitment to diversity and inclusive hiring practices, evidenced by their hosting of the Diversity Leadership Institute (DLI) as well as the People of Color Conference (PoCC), the reality is that people of color are underrepresented in comparison to their White counterparts in every independent school, irrespective of geographic region. Yet, as he also acknowledges, "despite the well elaborated legislation and the convincing ethical argument against discrimination, the gap between formal and real equality of opportunity remains great" (p. 85). In recognizing this issue, how might schools identify the barriers both historically and currently, that keep people of color from being considered viable candidates? How can schools actively work to build more inclusive processes around the hiring of FOC? Our research will explore these questions as a way to critically examine hiring strategies and practices implored by independent schools, identifying differences, if any, with respect to the racial identity of prospective candidates. Based on our findings, future recommendations and implications for independent schools will be discussed, in the hopes of offering solutions that result in positive outcomes for both the school and candidate, where diversity and equity are present, essential to an inclusive hiring process (Cort, 2018).

Schools have prioritized their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, by drafting or adopting their mission statements to reflect the concern for diversity. However, a disconnect still remains on if schools are actually living out their mission with meaning and purpose (Brosnan, 2018), specifically as it pertains to hiring, which is one way to define access. Historically, independent schools were created for the White, elite, and affluent (Brown, 2016; Wong, 2018). The foundation and ethos of these schools systematically keep people of color out or on the fringes of the school community. In "Non-Discrimination in Human Resources Management as a Moral Obligation," Demuijnck (2009) purports that the hiring of a diverse workforce is not only a moral responsibility, but that it can only be actualized through a program that includes developing a non-discrimination policy and assigning responsibility for it and anti-bias (or stereotype awareness) training for managers.

Research Questions:

Our research questions were as follows:

i. What factors inform the decision by new FOC to accept a position at a particular independent school?
ii. To what extent do their experiences align with those initial expectations since joining the school?

Methods (Participants & Procedure)

We conducted a qualitative study by conducting one-on-one interviews. Our population (n=11) was instructional staff who identify as people of color at four independent schools across different geographic regions, whose first year at the school was the 2017–18, 2018–19, or 2019–20 school year. Non-teaching staff, associate teachers (who do not have an expectation of employment beyond two years), and international teachers were not included. Participants were selected by purposeful maximum sampling. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 55 and included 5 men and 6 women. Our sample included Black, Asian, Latinx, and Biracial educators. Four members of our research team invited participants to answer questions about their hiring process in order to learn more about new teachers' experiences with being hired, and improve experiences for future hires. Researcher and participant met for approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded, with interviewers making note of when they switch from one question to the next to the best of their ability. Audio recordings were transcribed by an outside service and subsequently coded by our research team. We sought to have transcripts coded by individuals other than those who conducted the interviews. In the process of coding, we read through the text data, labeled the segments of text using lean coding, and ultimately collaborated to identify a smaller set of themes amongst the interviews. One validity concern we identified relates to how differently faculty of color responded based on the school they were at, their own years of experience, racial identity, age, gender, and familiarity with independent schools. Nonetheless, we found overarching commonalities that we felt were significant.

Results/Findings

The following themes emerged; we also noted the frequency they were mentioned in the interviews.

THEME	Community Warmth	Affinity with people of color	Visible diversity	Unclear expectations	Attracting forces	Repelling forces
COUNT	40	17	20	27	57	36
DESCRIPTION	Warm interactions and/or connections with students and/or adults	Affinity with other people of color in the community (including mentorship)	Visible diversity during school visit (desire not to be the "only one"), and noticing what positions do people of color hold in the school	Lack of clarity of expectations (or, how are mistakes received by others in the community?)	Subthemes: Visible school commitment to DEI work; Opportunities & Support for professional growth & leadership; Teacher autonomy; Practical and personal considerations, including geography, salary, etc; School culture	Subthemes: Undesirable features of current school, or other schools where the candidate interviewed including: culture; demographics; pace of change; salary negotiations
REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES	"I can still remember certain students that I seemed to really connect with even during my demo lesson of 45 minutes, I can still remember who those students are. So I really appreciated that because I was coming from a school where the relationships with kids was very strong and I didn't know how that might present itself here in a more 'serious and rigorous place.'" "It was [Department Chair], she was the main pull… I met her and I was like, 'This is a boss I'd want to work for.' I just trusted her. She was so organized. Like I said before, she knew me so well, her questions were always specific, the day was planned out perfectly. It was very humane that she had worked in breaks, that she had worked in lunch."	"...it was also being able to speak one on one with the lady who is the head of school secretary, she happens to be an African American female. And me speaking to her on a private level, making that connection was something that really, really made me feel comfortable and it was something that I definitely left that place thinking that, you know what? This isn't going to be a school if I was to get hired, it isn't going to be a school where I felt like I was going to be on an island isolated." "I started immediately going to [Employees of Color Affinity Group]. I just learned throughout my life pretty much since college that it just helps to find an affinity space wherever you go. I was right, it's a great space, very supportive. Then [Senior Colleague] kind of took me under her wing and very early on introduced me to this program called Sisters of Color in Independent Schools. That's a brunch every couple of months that I go to, serves the same purpose of just having a support group."	"… I noticed right away when walking from the main entrance of the building to where I was interviewing… that there were other African American male teachers on the campus…finding out that those male teachers were teaching subjects like history, like English… oftentimes in these independent school settings… Black males are only PE teachers and coaches. So the fact that there were Black males teaching core subjects was something that was awesome in addition to seeing African American female teachers as well was even more icing on the cake." "I was excited to walk into an auditorium of new faculty members that upon first impression seemed very diverse. I was really excited about that. And then I think there was a realization that a lot of the faculty of color that was brought on were actually associate teachers in the lower school and so I think I was not surprised. But I think I had just assumed that all of the new faculty of color were lead teachers, head teachers, administrators. Yes, I think the optics were different once we recognized that a lot of the new faculty of color were associate teachers rather than head teachers." "I remember that one of the people in the room was a woman of color. She was more disappointed with the school than the other people in the room who were white. I remember feeling kind of reassured that she was able to say that out loud, so I remember that moment very clearly."	"I anticipated pushback for being new, which I think, and I've heard this from a lot of people, but it's really hard to be new at [School]. And I would beg to say that's probably true at all independent schools and I think one of the things that [School] doesn't do well as a culture and as a school, whether you're new or not is create space and room for making mistakes… I think it is a culture driven by perfection almost. And so being new has an added pressure layer of instances where asking questions probably feels really hard and not seeming an expert all the time seems really hard."	"I think getting paid more was really helpful for me as someone who just feels pretty financially stressed all the time." "Then this job, I really liked that I didn't have to pay rent. I was living on campus, food included. I think that was... It's something you don't see every day." "So when I set out to try independent schools, I was very, very intentional about which ones I was willing to work at... I was incredibly well versed in independent schools, and therefore my knowledge of which ones I was willing to work at that's where it was coming from. I knew the schools that had the highest populations of students of color, which ones were the most financial aid generous and that were more aligned with the values that I was looking for." "… [O]ne of the things that I was concerned about coming from the school where I came from was the caliber of students. And so I was pretty impressed by the caliber of students here. Also I think one of the things that really struck me was they had students interview. That was a big positive in my mind in terms of how involved the students get. "… I was really struck by [the] curriculum and what that meant for how serious this school was about taking on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. And it just seemed to be light years ahead of the institution where I was previously." "I think that the way things are structured in a way that is somewhat unstructured is nice because it allows me to choose what I want to do. There's a level of choice and trust in where you decide where your developments, your career development or professional development path. And I think that is really nice to have."	"I think on a professional front, I did not feel that support [supportive relationships] on any realm, which has caused me this year to really isolate myself, and just disconnect from school when I leave school…it just feels like it's not worth investing energy in, because it's just going to bring me down and I'm not going to have any safety net." "I think that there is a certain fragility to some white colleagues, where as a person of color I feel like a threat. I feel like I must've been a diversity hire or I'm out to like ruin all bastions of whiteness….which to clarify is not my goal ever will never be my goal." "In my department when I was the only member like person of color, I felt like there was this great responsibility to speak for all people of color when it came to our curriculum, and then a real defensiveness from colleagues around any suggestions I made." "Money--if it was just finance I would have went there, because that was a significantly better situation. But when you combine everything else it's like, "Do I want to be the only black teacher here?" Because who knows how long they bring in another one. "With no black kids ever? Never get to work with black kids." "On my interview day itself, he showed me the pay scale and made me commit on the spot….'We're not even considering people past this point if this doesn't work for them'…. I had never anticipated being asked that on the spot. And so I didn't have any of the language down to say, 'Hey no, I'm not going to talk about this right now.' And so I feel like I accepted something that was definitely beneath what I am worth and I'm now locked into that, in perpetuity as long as I work here."

Discussion/Implications/Future Work

Many of our interviews with FOC reinforced existing research. In particular, they highlighted the importance of:

- **Soliciting Feedback:** It was clear from our conversations, that this was the first time for many FOC that they had been asked in a non-social capacity about their experiences at the school. This has clear implications for future research about retention. It also suggests that schools would benefit from more systematically reaching out to FOC to be better positioned to meet their needs. Structured interview protocols and guarantees of confidentiality uncovered opportunities for support. Faculty of color felt affirmed and valued simply by being asked to share their stories, goals, and values. Administration should initiate such conversations with FOC to foster community building and create feedback opportunities.
- **Effective and transparent communication** is key to recruitment and retention of FOC. Explicit and visible commitment to diversity and inclusion work, as well as the presence of FOC on campus makes a school more appealing. Finally, once new faculty arrive on campus, communicating directly about the responsibilities and expectations in every aspect of the school is critical. Administrators need to take responsibility for communication, and not be quick to judge or reprimand based on their opinion of why a new FOC may have not met unspoken job expectations, which might be formed by implicit bias, or simply the result of ineffective administrative communication.
- **Financial concerns:** Administrators who make and communicate salary decisions need to play an active role in counteracting racial and gender biases. While salary alone is unlikely to be the main deciding factor, historic discrimination means FOC are more likely to suffer from financial anxiety. Heads of School should not condemn FOC who attempt to negotiate.
- **Relationships:** Simply knowing the names of colleagues and saying hello in the morning goes a long way, and is not a given. Beyond common courtesy, supportive relationships with supervisors that connect FOC with other FOC in the school and community, support professional growth and leadership opportunities, with colleagues and administrators, and meaningful relationships with students can motivate school choice and job satisfaction. Mentorship and affinity spaces help FOC feel a sense of belonging.
- **Active DEI Investment:** If institutions seek cultural shifts by hiring more FOC, they should anticipate calls to change the curriculum and support them fully if they seek to retain those individuals. Schools with clear curricular investment in equity work are especially appealing to candidates of color; schools espousing commitment without much to show beyond the statements have trouble attracting and retaining FOC. A school's commitment to DEI must go beyond its marketing. As Head of School Noni Thomas Lopez has said, "The mission of the school lives in the school lives in the curriculum. The curriculum has to reflect those values."