RACE IN THE APPOINTMENT AND DAILY LEADERSHIP OF AFRICAN AMERICAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL HEADS

Tia Kathleen Gueye

BS, University of Rochester, 2003
MS, University of California at Irvine, 2004
MSEd, City College of New York, 2008

Mentor
Toby Tetenbaum, PhD

Readers
Sheldon Marcus, EdD
Carlos McCray, EdD

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK
2015
COPYRIGHT
© Tia Kathleen Gueye, 2015, All Rights Reserved.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Toby Tetenbaum for her support and guidance throughout this entire process. Toby, thank you for encouraging me to think creatively, critically and analytically at all times. I would also like to thank the eight African American independent School Heads that participated in this study. Without their willingness, genuine commitment and expressed responsibility to share their testimonies, this work would not have been possible. I would also like to acknowledge the ELAP 2012 cohort – especially Deanne Southwell who went along this journey with me simultaneously.
DEDICATION

To my husband, Modou: I thank you for your endless support, love and encouragement. To our children, Mali, Maye, and Awo: I hope that the content of this paper inspires you and encourages you to actualize your best selves. Thinking of you keeps me smiling on the inside and out. I love you with all of my heart.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOTICE OF COPYRIGHT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Rationale: Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Racism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slavery (1619–1865)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Crow and Segregation (1865–1965)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American School Leaders, Pre- and Post-Brown</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Independent Schools</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of African American Students in Independent Schools</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities between the School Head and a Superintendent</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of African American Public School Superintendents</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokenism</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Institutional Bias 25
The Glass Ceiling 26
Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination 27
The Independent School Board 28
School Head Appointment 28
Schools Led by African American Heads 30
Educational Factors Affecting Appointment 31
Professional Links to Schools Affecting Appointment 31
The Leadership Challenge 32

CHAPTER III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 34
Participants 34
Procedure 36
Qualitative Research 36
Data Collection 38
  Triangulation 38
  Interviews 41
  Member Checks 43
  Documents 43
Research Design 44
  Coding and Data Analysis 44
  Limitations 46

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS 47
# TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Path and Journey to Headship</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The School Heads’ Career Trajectories</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Background</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Relations</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Experience</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Leadership Style</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-Working</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Centered Leadership</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Experience</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why They Were Chosen as School Head</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Leadership</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Initiatives</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Considerations</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why So Few African American School Heads?</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Implications for Future Research 92
Implications for Education 93
Conclusion 94
REFERENCES 96
APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Form 104
APPENDIX B: Consent Form 105
APPENDIX C: Guiding Interview Questions 107
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Profile of African American Independent School Heads</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Data Regarding the Eight Independent School Heads Led by Study Participants</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

RACE IN THE APPOINTMENT AND DAILY LEADERSHIP OF AFRICAN AMERICAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL HEADS

Tia Kathleen Gueye, EdD

Fordham University, New York, 2015

Mentor
Toby Tetenbaum, PhD

This qualitative study explored the influence of race on the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. Currently, there are only 30 such School Heads out of more than 1,500 member schools in the National Association of Independent Schools. In-depth interviews revealed a considerable impact of race on the appointment and daily leadership of the eight African American independent School Heads who participated in this study. The lack of African American School Heads in the independent school pipeline is a result of the low representation of African American students, faculty, and administrators in independent schools. Through the application of tokenism, Critical Race Theory, and Kouzes and Posner’s leadership model, it was determined that these educational leaders thrive in predominately white, elite academic institutions because they grew up in the middle class and attended predominately white schools. Furthermore, these leaders exhibited transformational leadership that was both authentic and child-centered.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

African American men and women are underrepresented in the leadership position of School Head in independent schools (Driscoll, 1982; Kane, Fontana, Goldberg, & Wang, 2008; Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012). Members of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) consider the low number of African American School Heads a problem and are committed to increasing the percentage of students, faculty, and administrators of color in the independent school sector so that they more closely approach those in the overall U.S. population. In an effort to understand why the low representation of African Americans among independent School Heads in the United States, the NAIS has conducted several research studies. The researchers involved have concluded that although African Americans, other people of color, and women apply to more School Head positions than do Whites, factors such as age, lack of experience as assistant head of school, and geographic limitations result in lower numbers of women and people of color being appointed (Batiste & McGovern, 2011). Of the more than 1,500 member independent schools affiliated with the NAIS, only 30 had African American School Heads as of February 2015 (A. Torres, personal communication). This qualitative study will investigate the factors that have led to the appointment of these 30 African American School Heads. The glass ceiling (Bassett, 2011; Profit, 2007), institutional bias (Banks, 2007; Profit, 2007), discrimination (Scott, 1980), prejudice, stereotypes, and tokenism will be considered as factors influencing the lack of African American independent School Heads. The two central research questions are as follows: (a) How did race contribute to the appointment of these 30 independent School Heads? (b) How does race affect the daily leadership of these School Heads?
As part of its effort to grow the pipeline of women and people of color among leaders in independent schools, NAIS began the Fellowship for Aspiring School Heads in 2003-2004 (initially called the E. E. Ford Fellowship for Aspiring School Heads). Among those who completed the fellowship program, however, women and people of color were less likely to obtain headships (Batiste & McGovern, 2011, p. 76). This NAIS initiative is not meeting its goal because the female and minority aspiring heads are not being considered as finalists in their School Head search, despite the fact that more people of color applied for more School Head positions then their White counterparts and were considered as finalists in about the same proportion (Batiste & McGovern, 2011).

In the rare instances in which a man or a woman of color gains a School Head position, often the school had a firm commitment to hiring a person of color. These independent schools have greater than average percentages of minority students and staff. In the independent schools with goals aligned with the NAIS—that is, the schools that have expressed their intention to increase the diversity of leadership roles within the school, specifically in the headship—women and candidates of color are more favorable candidates than Whites. If the independent school is reluctant to change the demographics of the school leadership, however, candidates of color could be at a disadvantage in their headship pursuit (Driscoll, 1982; Batiste & McGovern, 2011). Paradoxically, most women and candidates of color believe that their gender or race is either an advantageous factor or not relevant to their headship search (Bassett, 2011). It also can be difficult “for a school to picture itself with a minority or female School Head at a time when there are admittedly few models” (Driscoll, 1982, p. 15). In this study, the paradox regarding the role of race is explored as a central factor in the appointment and leadership of male and female African American independent School Heads. Eight of the 30 African American independent
school heads were interviewed to determine what role they believe race played in their hiring and the degree to which race affects their daily leadership. They were also asked to identify any racial influences that they believe affect their leadership behavior.

African American men and women have historically been underrepresented and underappreciated in educational leadership (Banks, 2007; Brown, 2012; Driscoll, 1982; Gillespie, 1999; Kraushaar, 1972; Profit, 2007). This historical tendency among independent schools continues to create a barrier limiting African Americans’ access to elite educational leadership opportunities. While a few African Americans have gained access to the job of independent School Head, many are denied this opportunity because schools are not ready for African American leadership (Driscoll, 1982; Profit, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of race on the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. Through this qualitative research study, the following research questions were explored:

**Research Questions**

1. What role does race play in the hiring of African American independent School Heads?
2. How does the race of African American independent School Heads contribute to their daily leadership?

**Definitions of Terms**

There are numerous definitions of *leadership*. In this study, leadership will refer to the process by which an individual influences a group to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2013). This process requires the leader to produce change and involves daily interaction between the leader and the followers. *Daily leadership* will refer to the ways in which the leader influences
followers on a regular basis. Effective leaders establish direction, align people with the leader’s vision, and motivate and inspire the constituents of the organization (Northouse, 2013). Kouzes and Posner (2007) defined the five practices of exemplary leadership as follows: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. Leaders who contribute one or more of these factors daily are engaging in a process of influence. To model the way, a leader sets an example for the organization by doing what he or she values. This requires the leader to clearly define his or her values and communicate them to the constituents or followers. The second practice, inspiring a shared vision, is similarly communicative in nature, because it requires the leader to share the vision and aspirations of the organization with followers so that goals can be reached. Challenging the process embodies the notion that leaders are pioneers—that is, they are willing to take on challenges and are not satisfied with the status quo. By empowering others, leaders enable others to act and do good work. These leaders also desire to share their power. “Leaders work to make people feel strong, capable, and committed. Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 68). Lastly, encourage the heart refers to being motivational, uplifting, and encouraging. Leaders who recognize and celebrate the contributions of their constituents build a sense of trust and unity (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Independent schools are a subset of private, precollegiate educational institutions and are generally members of the NAIS. Not all private schools are independent schools. Although most independent schools are predominately White elite institutions, all NAIS membership requirements do not support this notion (Speede-Franklin, 1988).
NAIS member schools are nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations that subscribe to the principles and policies of nondiscrimination. They are approved by a recognized evaluation process, maintain fiscal independence from government and church entities, and are governed by independent boards of trustees, directors, or advisors. Independent schools generally perceive themselves as institutions which stress public service, emphasize social responsibility, actively promote a multicultural and multiracial environment, and strive to build a diverse and pluralistic student body (Speede-Franklin, 1998).

All independent schools share six basic characteristics: self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size (Kane, 1992a). Self-governance refers to the self-selected board of trustees that is responsible for the school’s goals, vision, philosophy, resources, and program.

The independent school board of trustees chooses the *School Head*, also known as the chief administrator, who is responsible for executing the day-to-day operations set forth by the board. Independent schools are financially self-supporting; they depend on revenue from tuition, as well as gifts from parents, alumni, foundations, corporations, and endowments. Each independent school determines its own academic curriculum. Students and teachers are selected by each school, based on how well they fit the school’s mission (Kane, 2003). Lastly, educators at independent schools pride themselves on having small student populations and class sizes conducive to a close-knit community and increased academic achievement (Kane, 2003).

The School Head is the CEO (chief executive officer) of the independent school. He or she leads and oversees the daily operations of an independent school by fulfilling the goals of the school board. More specifically, according to the NAIS Principles of Good Practice, “The primary responsibility of the head of an independent school is to carry out the school’s stated
mission” (National Association of Independent Schools, 2013). School heads are responsible for:

1. Partnering with the board of trustees
2. Overseeing the school programs
3. Establishing effective leadership with the school administration
4. Attracting, retaining, developing, and evaluating qualified faculty and staff
5. Communicating effectively with all constituencies and being accessible
6. Managing finances
7. Ensuring that every element of school life reflects equity, justice, and the dignity of each individual
8. Being aware of their role within the broader network of schools, school leaders, and the community
9. Cooperating with heads of other independent schools (NAIS, 2013, p. 17)

School Heads communicate with all the schools’ various constituencies; as such, they must be sensitive and open-minded diplomats, willing and able to deal with parental pressure, knowledgeable of various legal areas, aware of the constant changes in education, and able to build consensus by working collectively with others to meet the school’s goals (DiCieco, 2004).

The School Head serves as the educational leader of the institution, administers the school according to the policies set forth by the board, and works with the board, particularly the board chair, to enable the board to carry out its responsibilities. Within the board’s guidelines, the head has complete authority for faculty, staff, and student selection, evaluation, and dismissal. The head has a duty to keep the board informed about all pertinent school matters (Stanton, 1989).
African American will refer to a U.S. citizen who self-identifies as Black and of non-Hispanic origin (Carter, 2013). Further, for the purposes of this study, the term will also refer to people of full or partial Caribbean or African descent.

Significance of the Study

Currently, there is a limited body of literature on African American independent School Heads and, more specifically, on the racial factors that affect their appointment and daily leadership. This study can aid not only aspiring African American heads, but also school board members who need to understand the benefits that African American School Heads can make to their school and the community.

The NAIS (2015) accounted for 1,520 member schools during the 2014–2015 academic school year. Of these schools, only 30 were identified as having an African American School Head, or 2% of the total. This number is significantly lower than the African American independent school student population of 6.2% (NAIS, 2013). This disparity highlights the need for more Black senior-level leaders in independent schools. African American students in independent schools lack leaders who look like them; in many states with numerous independent schools, there are no African American School Heads (Kane & Orsini, 2004). Further, the lack of representation of African Americans among School Heads does not help independent schools to encourage social justice or to prepare their students to pursue this goal. As Kane and Orsini (2004, p. 354) observed, “We need to prepare our students of all races and ethnicities to function effectively in a diverse world by creating a microcosm of society within our schools.”

All independent school students, including those who are African American, would benefit from having more African American leaders and role models in their schools (Brown & Greenwood, 2009; Kane & Orsini, 2004). Such a development would help students to develop
tolerance and would break down cultural barriers (Kane & Orsini, 2004). Independent school graduates occupy a disproportionate number of leadership positions in society (Speede-Franklin, 1988), and they should be equipped to make our society’s workforce more collaborative and inclusive for women and people of color (Kane et al., 2008).

Black students from independent schools are amassing a similar track record of achievement and influence. While contemporary Black leaders predominantly emanate from public and parochial schools and historically Black colleges, this trend is likely to change by the turn of the century. Growing numbers of Black students identified as gifted, talented, and possessing leadership potential are passing through the doors of independent schools. . . . In their passage, they gain access to current and future power brokers in political circles and corporate suites. (Speede-Franklin, 1988, p. 31)

NAIS member schools have been relatively successful in attracting more students and faculty of color, but they continue to fall short in increasing the number of administrators of color. Overcoming this barrier is a fundamental necessity for the elite independent school student (Brown & Greenwood, 2009; Kane & Orsini, 2004). If independent schools are to deliver on the promise of preparing societal leaders, then students must learn to collaborate with a diverse population of students and faculty during their formative years. Many independent schools embrace this vision and have made strides in increasing the ethnic and racial composition of their student body. However, they have been less successful in diversifying their faculty and administration. (Kane et al., 2008).

**Theoretical Rationale: Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) offers a suitable theoretical and analytical framework for this study because it “focuses directly on the effects of race and racism” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p.
CRT activists and scholars seek both to study and to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). CRT was initially established in the 1970s and used in American law; it has more recently been applied to education (Chapman, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). “Specifically, a critical race theory in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (Solorzano, 1998, p. 4). CRT deals with the following five tenets: (a) counter-storytelling, (b) the permanence of racism, (c) Whiteness as property, (d) interest convergence, and (e) the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Each of these tenets relates to the hiring and daily leadership of African American School Heads.

Counter-storytelling involves stories and narratives that aim “to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 144). African American headmasters can use counter-storytelling to provide a new and unfamiliar voice that may oppose common racial stereotypes and trends perpetrated by the majority (Chapman, 2011).

The permanence of racism refers to the idea that racism is a permanent fixture and remains strongly rooted in American society. Within this premise, racist hierarchical structures are the rule (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). The permanence of racism can therefore be proposed as an explanation of the limited number of African American independent School Heads.

Whiteness as property deals with the restrictions on access to high-quality education that people of color experience, along with the policies and practices that regulate cultural dress and behavior. African American independent school heads are few in number, and this may be a
result of their frequent lack of access to high-quality education, as well as school boards’
conservative stance with regard to hiring minorities as leaders.

*Interest convergence* arises from the gains from the civil rights movement, specifically
those pertaining to African Americans (Bell, 1980, 2004; Chapman, 2011; DeCuir & Dixon,
2004). African American heads of independent schools could be considered victims of interest
convergence, as their positions as school leaders could likely intersect with the self-interests of
White elites. This is because an independent school may choose to appoint an African American
School Head for the sole purpose of fulfilling its interest in diversifying its administration.
Lastly, the *critique of liberalism* refers to the fact that gains for marginalized groups such as
African Americans “must come at a slow pace that is palatable for those in power” (DeCuir &
Dixon, 2004, p. 29). As school boards become more receptive to African American school
leaders, perhaps more African Americans will be appointed to become School Heads. The
interviews conducted in this qualitative study are intended to show how these five tenets of CRT
relate to the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent school heads.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The traditional, stereotypical NAIS independent School Head is a White, male Ivy League graduate and scholar of the classics (Griffin, 1999; Mahoney, 2008). White males continue to dominate independent school headships, despite NAIS efforts to increase diversity in these positions. In 2005, only 1.6% of School Heads were African American (0.8% African American male and 0.8% African American female), whereas White males and females held 64.8% and 31.9% of headships, respectively. The remaining 1.7% of headships were held by Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and other people of color (Profit, 2007). The low percentage of African American School Heads has not changed much in the past 10 years. The goal of this qualitative study is to understand how race influences the appointments and daily leadership of African American heads of independent schools.

NAIS researchers have concluded that although African Americans, women, and other people of color apply for more headships than Whites, factors such as age, lack of experience as assistant head of school, and geographic limitations result in lower numbers of appointments (Batiste & McGovern, 2011). This conclusion has also been reached by other researchers, including Profit (2007), Brown (2012), and Vargas (2012), who studied (respectively) African American School Head appointments, the social capital possessed by heads of color, and the culturally relevant leadership styles of women of color serving as heads. In addition to these conclusions, factors such as the glass ceiling (Bassett, 2011; Profit, 2007), institutional bias (Banks, 2007; Profit, 2007), and discrimination (Scott, 1980) have been linked with the disparity in numbers between White and African American heads. This study explores these factors further and includes prejudice, stereotypes, and tokenism as additional potential factors.
Brown (2012) found that about 70% independent School Heads of color (including African Americans) held the position of assistant head of school prior to their appointment to School Head. This percentage was almost twice as high as for Whites. While Profit (2007) found that only two of 14 African American heads were assistant heads prior to their appointment, five of the 14 held the position of diversity director. Clearly, African Americans who earn the role of assistant head or diversity director are more likely to become School Head.

Male and female heads of color all have significant ties to independent schools. These ties are a result of being independent school alumni, teachers, administrators, board members, or parents. Their links to an independent school provide them with a personal understanding of the school environment—they fit in (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012). The limited studies on male and female heads of color indicate that if the headmaster did not have previous direct ties to the independent school, he or she had participated in the NAIS Aspiring Heads Fellowship or something similar (Brown, 2012).

This chapter contains a descriptive history of race and racism in America, as well as a history of prejudice and discrimination faced by African Americans. Several factors that contribute to prejudice and discrimination will be explored, such as tokenism, institutional bias, the glass ceiling, and stereotypes. Next, an overview of how independent school heads are appointed, along with the factors that contribute to the successful appointment of African American school heads, will be discussed. The chapter concludes with additional factors that influence independent school appointment and daily leadership.

**Race and Racism**

Race is defined in both biological and social terms. Biologically, a race is a group of people with common ancestry and genetically transmitted physical characteristics. Race can be
captured with terms such as *Black* or *White*. Race is also defined as a social construct that labels individuals in society based on their physical characteristics. These physical characteristics—for example, skin color, hair type, and other physical features—are often used to discriminate, because these attributes are described in polarizing fashion as either *bad* or *good* (Hasberry, 2013). These polarized notions are designed to perpetuate an ideology of superiority and inferiority (Gasman, 2011).

The Black/White color line has a history of rigidity in its definition and enforcement. This is because *White* has been considered a pure category; anyone who has a racial intermixture automatically is considered non-White and therefore Black (Gallagher, 2009). Historically, being White or Black has been associated with the terms *superior* and *inferior*, respectively, thereby creating a climate of racism. Racism, which is defined as the poor treatment of or violence against people because of their race, includes the belief that some races of people are better than others (Zinn, 2009). The notion of racism is often linked with the inferior status of African Americans who were once slaves (Zinn, 2009). Racism led to (and continues to lead to) behaviors such as discrimination, stereotyping, tokenism, and inequality. “When one thinks of race and gender in American society, the historical issues of oppression, inequity, and marginalization of particular groups of people—African American and women—come to mind” (Gasman et al., 2011, pp. 20-21).

Race, and particularly the African American race, appears to be a central decision factor in the hiring and appointment of independent School Heads, as evidenced by the fact that there are only 30 African American school heads in over 1,500 independent schools associated with the NAIS. To understand the impact of race on the hiring process, it is important to understand the history and identity of African Americans in the United States and the consequences of this
background that persist today. The rich history of African Americans is an integral part of their identity and is integrated in all aspects of life, whether personal or professional (Gasman et al., 2011). Beachum and McCray (2011) divided African American history into three periods: Slavery (1619–1865), Jim Crow/Segregation (1865–1965), and Pre-Brown, Post-Brown, and the Aftermath (1965 to present).

**Slavery (1619–1865)**

In England prior to 1600, even before the slave trade in America had begun, the color black was deemed distasteful (Zinn, 2009). This idea permeated the early days of slavery and was reinforced by laws and societal patterns that created a divide between Blacks and Whites. Because slavery was supported by the government and reinforced through laws, the United States is often seen as having been founded on ideals that supported racial differentiation and racism. “Prejudice based on identity groups was formalized in the laws of the country (p. 71)” and pervaded much of U.S. history (Cox, 1993). African Americans were brought to the United States solely to be sold as slaves, and their value was based upon their ability to serve and take on the role of subordinate. The foundation and results of slavery instilled a tide of racism in the United States. Slavery solidified racial supremacy and the belief that African Americans were intellectually inferior to Whites. Unfortunately, this belief affected the educational progress of slaves, who were forbidden to become literate (Beachum & McCray, 2011). Slaves understood the power of knowledge and realized that their individual and collective freedom depended upon attaining literacy, self-education, and communal education. Once a slave became literate, it was expected that the slave would share his or her knowledge and teach literacy to others (Beachum & McCray, 2011).
Jim Crow and Segregation (1865–1965)

During the Jim Crow era, even though slavery was no longer legal, public facilities (schools, libraries, bathrooms, restaurants, drinking fountains, etc.) were separate. Blacks used their own poorer-quality, inferior facilities while Whites used superior ones. African Americans were considered the lowest class and did not have the ability to vote or even sit at the front of a bus. The racial differences were formalized during the Jim Crow period and continued until the Civil Rights movement. Jim Crow was strongest in the South, where Whites’ desire to maintain racial supremacy was often supported by the local police and community (Beachum & McCray, 2011).

African American School Leaders, Pre- and Post-Brown

The first African American principals and headmasters led all-Black schools in the Pre-Brown era, which lasted from the end of slavery into the early 1950s. During this time, African American students, school leaders, and communities were segregated and did not have equal educational opportunity with Whites. Schools were designed to provide African American students with the knowledge necessary to thrive in a democratic society. African American males and females contributed to the success of these schools—public, private, and religious—at both the K-12 and higher educational levels. These all-Black schools lacked many of the resources of White schools; nevertheless, their leaders achieved significant successes. “As principals or headmasters, these individuals held a strong belief that while Blacks could be stripped of their money, civil rights, and property, the knowledge they acquired through education could not be taken away” (Tillman, 2009, p. 175). Educating and leading in segregated schools provided African Americans with the opportunity to establish standards, confidence, and excellence. In their efforts to counteract the rule of the day—racial
supremacy—African Americans reinforced what it meant to “be a human, be a person, to be counted, to be the opposite of a slave, to be free” in schools (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 26). African American schools taught the 110% rule, which implied that African Americans could not settle for 100% but must strive to achieve 110% (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Kunjufu, 2002). African American youths were taught that they could “be somebody” through education (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Perry et al., 2003). Although many of the segregated schools were hampered by inferior resources, many high-quality schools for African Americans thrived in the Pre-Brown era (Horsford, 2009).

In 1954, the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision meant that schools would no longer be separate but equal with regard to race or resources. All schools were obliged to become integrated. African American students, teachers, principals, and headmasters could become part of White schools. Although the integration was now the law, true integration of schools would take time (Moody, 1973). Brown v. Board of Education coincided with the mass migration of African Americans to the North, where they fled in hopes of finding desegregated, equal opportunities. Instead, they were forced into urban ghettos and integrated into historically White public schools, resulting in White flight from urban schools (Beachum & McCray, 2011). Another consequence of forced integration was that African Americans generally attended poor, urban, underperforming schools, while Whites attended higher-performing, middle-class schools. Although many African American students were bused into predominately White schools after Brown v. Board of Education, they were often placed on tracks for slower learners while White students were placed on accelerated tracks. Tracking helped to continue the bias of segregation, thus removing the benefits of integration (Bell, 2004;
Harvard Law Review, 1989). Schools have become more segregated since 1971, and resegregation of schools is still seen today (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Kunjufu, 2002).

**History of Independent Schools**

Historically, independent schools have a reputation for academic excellence (Baird, 1977; Kraushaar, 1972). Independent schools are known for their high-quality college preparation programs, from which the name prep school is derived. In addition, independent schools have a history of being elitist, because they “train students from socially and financially select families” (Baird, 1977, p. xiii). Independent school students are often carrying on a fourth- or fifth-generation tradition, and many of their graduates have become key political leaders (Baird, 1977). Independent schools have impressive academics, including small classes, low student–teacher ratios, a wide variety of courses of study, large campuses, extensive facilities, national and international student populations, and study-abroad programs (Baird, 1977).

Ashburn (1956) explained that the term *independent* as it relates to schools is a recent term. For almost three centuries, independent schools were called *private* schools—all nonpublic schools shared the same label. Independent schools constitute a subset of private schools, are typically not-for-profit, and are administered by a board of trustees (Ashburn, 1956; McLachlan, 1970). The first independent schools can be traced back to the 1600s, around the time of the Massachusetts School Law of 1647 that required the establishment of schools in every town (Ashburn, 1956). The laws in Massachusetts (1647) and Connecticut (1650) required every town of a hundred families to have a Latin grammar school.

Chamberlain (1944) divided the evolution of independent schools into four periods: (a) colonial times, up to 1778; (b) 1778 to the Civil War, (c) the Civil War to 1900; and (d) the 20th century. The colonial period saw the formation of *grammar schools* and *Latin grammar schools*,
closely resembling the English grammar schools with which the early Puritan colonists were most familiar (Chamberlain, 1944). Some of the earliest independent schools in the U.S. were the Collegiate School, founded in 1638; the Boston Latin School, founded in 1635; the Roxbury Latin School, established in 1645; the Hopkins Grammar School from 1660; the William Penn Charter School, founded in 1689; and King William’s School, founded in 1696 (Chamberlain, 1944). These schools focused on educating young men in classical languages such as Latin, French, and Spanish, along with (in some instances) Greek and Chinese. They aimed to prepare young men for the ministry and for college (Kraushaar, 1976). In fact, Harvard, the only college in New England for nearly 70 years, created the academic standard for secondary education (Chamberlain, 1944). All schools in the American colonies were day schools until the middle of the 18th century (Chamberlain, 1944).

During the period from 1778 to the Civil War, academy and boarding schools were established, including such institutions as Phillips Academy, founded in 1778; Deerfield Academy (1797); Western Reserve Academy (1826); and St. Paul’s School, established in 1856 (Chamberlain, 1944). Kraushaar (1976) highlighted 1823 as a monumental year in independent schools, because in that year the Round Hill School opened and “marked the inception in this country of the boarding school philosophy” (Kraushaar, 1976, p. 46). Many of these academies were governed by a board of trustees and were not-for-profit institutions (Chamberlain, 1944). A rise in military and privately organized and endowed schools occurred after the Civil War and until 1900. Brearley School (1883), Groton (1884), Howe Military School (1884), Bordentown Military Institute (1885), Taft (1890), and Choate (1896) were founded during this period (Chamberlain, 1944). The number of independent schools increased in the 19th century and expanded beyond the Northeast where they were most prevalent. During this century, military
schools such as Annapolis and West Point began. “By the onset of World War I, the image of the prep school was fixed for most [of] this century, not only in the East, where they originated, but in the South, Southwest, Far West, and to a more limited extent to the Middle West” (Kraushaar, 1976, p. 47).

The increase in the number of independent schools continued into the 20th century with other types of independent schools, such as country day schools (Ashburn, 1956; Chamberlain, 1944). Many different types of country day schools were formed: all-girls, all-boys, all ages (nursery or kindergarten through college), full boarding, and five-day boarding. Country day schools were appealing because they provided an exceptional education outside the city, with large campuses and extensive playing fields (Chamberlain, 1944). Students could benefit from the school community environment during the week and return home to their families on weekends or evenings (Kraushaar, 1976). In the boarding school, the notion of a strenuous life was formed; students adhered to demanding schedules, engaged in intensive study, and had tightly structured free time (Chamberlain, 1944). Some independent schools were established by educational foundations with substantial gifts of property or endowment, such as The Cranbrook Foundation in 1926 and the Cranwell Preparatory School in 1939 (Chamberlain, 1944).

In the 1960s, as a result of the earlier progressive movement, new experimental schools formed, such as “free,” “community,” or Montessori schools (Kraushaar, 1976). The NAIS was founded in 1962; in 1969, it established an Office of Minority Affairs (NAIS, 2012a). In 1986, the first National Conference for Teachers and Administrators of Color in Independent Schools, a precursor to the NAIS People of Color Conference (PoCC), was held in Reston, Virginia (NAIS, 2012a). NAIS school membership grew from 660 member schools in 1963 to over 900
member schools in 1982 (NAIS, 2012a). By 1993, there were more than 1,000 member schools, and the membership now exceeds 1,500 (NAIS, 2012a).

**History of African American Students in Independent Schools**

“Although many of the elite [independent] schools have welcomed minority students from their founding, others have not been so open” (Baird, 1977, p. 36). African American students were present on independent school campuses in the late 1800s, but in very small numbers—perhaps one per class or even just one in the entire school (Speede-Franklin, 1988). Mallery (1963) indicated that “Phillips Academy at Andover, Phillips Exeter Academy, and Mt. Hermon school have had Negroes in their schools for nearly a hundred years” (p. 5). Kraushaar (1972) stated that many long-standing independent schools had been racially liberal since their founding, including Andover, Exeter, Northfield, Mt. Hermon, Wooster, Windsor Mountain, Collegiate, Georgetown Day, Francis Parker, and a number of Quaker schools. Putney School, which opened in 1935, enrolled six to 10 African American students in its total population of 180 students for the last ten years (Mallery, 1963).

Independent schools first began to “voluntarily desegregate in the 1960s . . . during that era and since then, Black students and their families have increasingly participated in these institutions, as have Black faculty” (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988, p. 9). In 1967, there were 3,720 African American independent school students nationwide. According to the NAIS Minority Group Survey from the 1969–1970 school year, of the 752 reporting schools, 595 schools had Black students enrolled, admitting a total of 7,617 Black students, or double the number from 1967 (Kraushaar, 1972). In 1972, the number of African American independent school students reached 9,629, or 6.3% of total student enrollment (Speede-Franklin, 1988). Minority student enrollment was 8.4% for the 1980–1981 academic year and 11.2% for 1986–1987 (Speede-
Franklin, 1988). But according to the 2014–2015 “NAIS Facts at a Glance,” African American students represented 6.2% of students overall, actually lower than the percentage in 1972. Moreover, the prevalence of African American School Heads has remained at about 2% (Profit, 2007).

**Similarities between the School Head and a Superintendent**

The independent school headship is very similar to the function of a superintendent. “If you are leading an independent school, you are—in everything but in title—the superintendent of a school district” (Case, 2006, p. 2). Independent School Heads and superintendents are responsible for curriculum and standards, personnel, maintenance, transportation, budgeting, special education, and legal issues (Case, 2006). Like superintendents, the School Head is selected by the school board; indeed, this is the school board’s most important function (Driscoll, 1982; Miller, 1975; NAIS, 2012b; Stanton, 1989).

**History of African American Public School Principals and Superintendents**

While the *Brown v. Board of Education* had great positive impact for African Americans, one devastating side effect was the elimination or displacement of many Black principals and headmasters (Horsford, 2010; Tillman, 2009). Due to the decrease in the number of African American principals, their impact on Black students’ education has not been the same since the 1950s (Horsford, 2010).

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, African Americans had the freedom to apply for leadership positions in any school. Not until the 1970s, however, did researchers begin to focus on African American superintendents, at which point the enrollment of African American students in the public schools increased. Prior to the 1970s, there were four known African American superintendents (Scott, 1980). A study in the early 1970s determined that, out of
20,000 U.S. school districts, there were only 21 African American superintendents, 17 of whom were regularly appointed and four of whom were acting superintendents (Moody, 1973). African Americans thus accounted for 0.1% of the total population of school superintendents. In 1974, the 44 African American superintendents accounted for 0.25% of the total (Scott, 1980). By 1982, African Americans occupied 0.7% of the superintendent posts (Tillman, 2009; Valverde & Brown, 1988). The number rose to 1% in 1985 (Banks, 2007; Jones & Montenegro, 1985), 1.2% in 1987–1988 (Jones & Montenegro, 1988), and 2.5% in 1991 (Banks, 2007); however, it fell to 1.9% in 1992 (Banks, 2007; Saks, 1992). Tillman (2009) found that 323 of 14,383 school districts, or slightly more than 2%, were headed by an African American.

Like African American heads of independent schools, African American superintendents are more likely to lead schools with large African American and minority enrollments, and their appointments are often racially based. Qualified “African American candidates must contend with the pervasiveness of race as a measure of their competence and African American women must contend with race and gender—there is no getting around these issues” (Tillman, 2009, p. 263). Generally, African American superintendents are hired by districts and communities that have larger-than-average minority student populations and that are underperforming. African American superintendents rarely lead successful, well-funded, predominantly White districts (Scott, 1980).

W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) stated in his famous work, The Souls of Black Folk, that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line, which refers to a divide or barrier preventing African Americans from having equal access to opportunity. That color line exists today and contributes to the African Americans’ limited access to headship appointments. Banks (2007) stated, “Racism results in barriers that restrict people of color from access to power
and privilege within the institution” (p. 305); however, other factors also restrict African American males and females from gaining equal access to independent school leadership positions. These factors include tokenism, institutional bias, and the glass ceiling.

**Tokenism**

African Americans have token status and representation in most independent schools (Hall & Stevensen, 2007; Hasberry, 2013) owing to the fact that independent schools are predominantly White. Although some consider the concept of tokens to be based on percentages (i.e., less than 15% of the population; Kanter, 1977; McDonald, Schweiger, & Touissant, 2004; Witherspoon, 2009), racial tokenism does not occur only when a minority (i.e., African American male or female) is in a predominately White environment. “Tokenism is likely to be found wherever a dominant group is under pressure to share privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with a group which is excluded” (Hall & Stevensen, 2007, p. 2). By this definition, African American independent School Heads are tokens, given that they are “functioning in skewed groups (numerical scarcity of African Americans) and have nonprivileged status (as minorities in a predominately White setting)” (Hall & Stevensen, 2007, p. 9).

The notion of African Americans working in a historically White institution or organization is the foundation of Black racial tokenism. African American experience high visibility, assimilation, and contrast (Hasberry, 2013; Kanter 1977). Visibility refers to the distinction in race between African Americans and White Americans due to their skin tone and physical features. Assimilation is the experience in which the African American token is seen as representing all things African American and as conforming to preexisting stereotypes and generalizations. As a result, tokens are forced to take on characteristics that deny their individuality (Kanter, 1977). Finally, contrast refers to African American tokens feeling
excluded. The dominant group tends to focus on commonalities that create a polarization between the token and the dominant group. This leads to isolation of the token. African Americans experience racial stereotypes and exclusion, which further contribute to their feelings of isolation (Catalyst, 2008).

Writings on African American as tokens tend to deal with African Americans in predominately White institutions where there are several other African Americans in the same role (e.g., students, faculty, or administrators; Hall & Stevensen, 2007; Hasberry, 2013). African American independent school students, teachers, administrators, and heads of school are tokens and deal with isolation.

Institutional Bias

White males are the preferred candidates for most positions as School Head in independent schools. This preference is historical in nature: Independent schools have traditionally been led and managed by a homogeneous group of White men, also known as founding fathers, who were responsible for institutionalizing many of the norms found in organizations created decades or even centuries ago (Cox, 1993). This institutional bias or preference for hiring only White male School Heads has perpetuated the color line, thus limiting full participation by African Americans, other people of color, and women. “One major consequence of these historical events has been the continual undervaluing of others with core identities different from those of Western European, white heterosexual, physically able-bodied men” (Cox, 1993, p. 208). African Americans often are not promoted to the position of School Head because of this bias. Organizations that support diversity are more likely to promote minority leaders (Cook & Glass, 2013). This phenomenon occurs in all sectors of the American workplace, including corporate America, independent schools, and university sports teams.
“Institutional racism is the most injurious form of racism applied against African Americans in contemporary American society. It denies people of color access to power and privilege within organizations” (Gregory, 2006, p. 22).

The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling is an invisible barrier that prevents African American men and women from gaining access to elite positions such as independent School Head (Davies-Metzley, 1998; Kerr, Miller, Reid, & Edwards, 2008; Profit, 2007; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2014; Witherspoon, 2009). Coleman (1998) defined the glass ceiling as “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in organizations into management-level positions” (p. 5). These barriers present themselves in the form of discrimination, bias, racism, preconceptions, and stereotypes (Catalyst, 2008; Wilson, 2014; Witherspoon, 2009). The U.S. Department of Labor has stated that the glass ceiling refers to artificial barriers based on bias—attitudinal or organizational—that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward (Martin, 1991). African Americans must work twice as hard to reach the same level as the majority, the White male group (Wilson, 2014). The glass ceiling, like segregation and the color line, separates African American men and women from equal access and opportunity.

Racial progress is undeniable in America. Never before have we had such a colorful menagerie of professionals in business, education, politics, sports and the labor movement. Glass ceilings have been pierced—not smashed—by extraordinary persons of color. Overt forms of discrimination have been attacked and forced to become more covert. Yet the legacy of white supremacy lingers—often in the face of the very denials of its realities. (West, 2001, p. viii)
Only a few African Americans have shattered the glass ceiling and achieved the elite leadership position of independent School Head. The glass ceiling is perpetuated by the privileged, elite independent schools’ traditions (Profit, 2007). Advanced education and social capital are not guarantees for these individuals (Wilson, 2014); instead, a combination of school acceptance, board approval, and timing positively affected the appointment of these African American independent School Heads (Brown, 2012).

**Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination**

Stereotypes are generalizations about people. Stereotypes of African Americans are mostly negative (Gallagher, 2009). In fact, African American stereotypes have contributed to and supported the barriers to equal opportunity in the United States (Cushman, 1995; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Valencia, 1997). With regard to education, African Americans are stereotypically perceived to be unintelligent, *ghetto*, and lazy, and they are not expected to achieve academically or professionally (Johnson, 2008; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Unfortunately, these characteristics are not desirable in a prospective School Head and are potential deterrents for African American candidates seeking a headship. “Stereotypes regarding minorities’ inability to lead limit minorities’ access to leadership positions” (Cook & Glass, 2013, p. 170).

In addition to stereotypes, African American men and women experience prejudice and discrimination (Banks, 2007), both of which are direct, negative effects of racism. Prejudice is an attitude of negative bias toward another person based on a characteristic; discrimination is behavioral bias toward a person based on that individual’s group identity (Cox, 1993). Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination all contribute to the perpetuation of negative views of potential African American leaders. Stereotypes contribute to racist biases in overt or subtle ways (Johnson, 2008).
The Independent School Board

The independent school board is “the official and legal governing body of the independent school” (Griffin, 1999, p. 3). The school board, which is often called the board of trustees, is responsible for hiring and firing the School Head and sets the policies that the School Head is expected to follow and implement (Driscoll, 1982; Stanton, 1989). The school board is responsible for (Ingram, 2003; NAIS, 2003; Talmadge, 2008):

1. Determining the school’s vision, mission, values, and purpose;
2. Selecting the School Head;
3. Supporting the School Head and assessing his or her performance;
4. Ensuring effective organizational planning;
5. Ensuring adequate resources or raising money;
6. Exercising fiduciary responsibility and oversight;
7. Determining, monitoring, and strengthening the school’s programs and services;
8. Enhancing the school’s public standing;
9. Ensuring legal and ethical integrity and maintaining accountability;
10. Recruiting and orienting new board members and assessing board performance.

School boards are usually composed of a combination of parents, alumni, teachers, community members, leaders, and business-minded professionals, all of whom have a genuine interest in the success of the independent school. According to Profit (2007), the “recruitment and search processes in NAIS schools include race-based ‘gatekeepers’” (p. 127).

School Head Appointment

The selection and appointment of a School Head is considered to be the most important job of the independent school board of trustees (Driscoll, 1982; Ingram, 2003; Miller, 1975;
NAIS, 2012b; Stanton, 1989). The success of an independent school requires a harmonious relationship between the school board and the School Head (Griffin, 1999; Parkman & Springer, 1974), because the School Head is hired to carry out the goals set forth by the board—most importantly, the school mission and vision shaped by the board. Because the School Head is the highest leadership position within an independent school, prospective candidates for the headship must pass multiple screenings before being offered the job. Much of the screening process happens prior to the initial interview. According to Miller (1975), the following qualifications and characteristics of candidates are considered: (a) evidence of leadership capacity, (b) academic background, (c) teaching experience, (d) administrative experience, (e) public relations success, (f) fund-raising experience, (g) educational philosophy, (h) personality, (i) cultural background and interests, (j) wife/husband and family, and (k) social skills.

The characteristic to which Miller refers as cultural background can encompass race, an important cultural factor. School boards may make cultural assumptions about people of color. These assumptions often marginalize women and people of color, with the result that members of these groups are not selected as School Head. “Decisions about who is recruited and hired, and who does or does not get promoted [to School Head] are made within a social context in which women and people of color experience an inferior social status and are often objects of negative stereotypes” (Banks, 2007, p. 303).

Given that school boards take into account the culture of a candidate, and given that most candidates of color indicate that race was a factor in their appointment (Bassett, 2011), it can be concluded that the candidate’s race ultimately plays a role in school board members’ perceptions of a candidate’s culture. The independent school board members, often referred to as gatekeepers, determine the racial background that they desire in the incoming School Head
People of color serving as School Heads, when asked to comment on their selection process, overwhelmingly stated that the school board had decided beforehand the desired race and gender of the candidate (Profit, 2007). Thus, it is critical to understand the importance of race in influencing the decisions of search committees selecting a School Head. This qualitative study is intended to explore the ways in which race affects the selection process for African American School Heads.

Candidates are located through many sources, including the NAIS School Head Clearinghouse, referrals by current school heads, other boards that have conducted search processes, and consultants (Miller, 1975). Frequently, a new head of school is recruited through specific referrals made by the current School Head, whose support for a particular candidate is an attractive and highly considered feature for the school board. References, both those listed by the applicant and others researched independently, are checked before the interview. Once a candidate is offered an opportunity to interview, the spouse will also be interviewed. Often the candidate also interviews with faculty, students, and parents. It is important to receive the input of various school constituents, because this strengthens the voice of a search committee, provides transparency in the selection process, and helps to build consensus in the appointment decision process.

**Schools Led by African American Heads**

African American School Heads are appointed to lead schools that are nontraditional with respect to their model and diversity (Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012). While most independent schools are rich with traditional elite customs and ceremonies, African American School Heads generally lead progressive, liberal independent schools (Profit, 2007). In fact, African American School Heads are most likely to lead Montessori, community-based, and nongraded independent
schools (Profit, 2007). These schools have endowments well below the NAIS average (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012). African American School Heads are more likely to be found leading small, elementary schools with percentages of faculty and administrators of color that are above the NAIS averages (Profit, 2007). Schools situated on the East Coast or West Coast have the highest percentages of African American School Heads (Brown, 2012).

**Educational Factors Affecting Appointment**

Several educational factors are advantageous when one is seeking an independent School Head position. First, it is helpful to be a graduate of or to have been employed at an independent school. Second, having graduated from of a top-tier or Ivy League postsecondary institution is advantageous. Finally, a successful candidate should have significant ties to the independent school network. Women and people of color appointed to the School Head position are overwhelmingly alumni of independent schools, have enrolled their child(ren) in an independent school, and/or have worked in an independent school as a teacher, director of diversity, dean of students, or assistant head of school (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012). These ties to independent schools give candidates an advantage; they already fit in with the school culture.

**Professional Links to Independent Schools Affecting Appointment**

On average, School Heads of color have significantly more education than do their White counterparts. These heads tend to hold advanced degrees or have graduated from top-tier or Ivy League institutions (Brown, 2012). African American independent School Heads have less administrative experience in independent NAIS schools than do heads from other racial groups (Profit, 2007). This fact supports the claim of the Batiste& McGovern (2011) that lack of experience as assistant head of school is one factor explaining why more people of color are not appointed to headships. Social capital is gained when aspiring African American School Heads
network through NAIS programs, such as the PoCC, or participate in the Aspiring Heads Fellowship (Brown, 2012).

**The Leadership Challenge**

To lead is to “go ahead so as to show the way” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1984, p. 120). A leader can show the way to followers in many ways. As such, leadership is a complex, multidimensional process. The many definitions of leadership provide a comprehensive, cohesive understanding of a process that continues to evolve. Researchers who study leadership in theory and in practice have created models to provide insight into how leadership is practiced, defined, obtained, and maintained. Many such researchers have focused on how leadership works in everyday situations, because effective leadership is critical to an organization’s success in attaining its goals.

Northouse (2013) and Gardner (2007) defined leadership as a process that involves influence and occurs in groups. More specifically, leadership is concerned with how a leader influences “a group of individuals who have a common purpose” (Northouse, 2013, pp. 5-6).

Among the many models of leadership, this study will focus on a transformational leadership model called the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). When a leader demonstrates the ability to change people, the leader is transformed. “Transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 185). Because a transformational leader is heavily involved in creating change within an organization, it is important to understand the day-to-day leadership style of a transformational leader. Transformational leaders often integrate charisma and vision into their leadership. Successful independent School Heads are considered most effective when they have charisma (Cookson & Persell, 1985).
Kouzes and Posner’s (1987) five-step model was developed based on leaders’ descriptions of their best experiences. The five leadership practices common to successful leaders are (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart.

Kouzes and Posner’s five-step model enables “leaders to get extraordinary things accomplished” (Northouse, 2013, p. 198). This model considers the perspective of both the leader and the followers. Although the leadership challenge model requires practice, the model supports the notion that everyone can become a leader. Followers expect their leader to be credible, and credibility is established by leaders who follow the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) and who do what they say they will do (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

In this study, the leadership challenge model is used to investigate the daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. Through in-depth interviews, I examined whether and how Kouzes and Posner’s five exemplary leadership traits are present in these School Heads’ daily leadership. The leadership challenge model has stood the test of time—these five practices are “just as relevant today as they were when we first began our investigation more than twenty-five years ago” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 15). If leaders model one or more of these traits in their day-to-day leadership, their effectiveness should improve.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Participants

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the influence of race on the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight current African American independent School Heads. Participants were selected from NAIS data, which include the name, school, and contact information for each School Head. The heads solicited for the study lead predominately White schools in several states across the country.

Of the eight School Heads who participated in this study, three classified themselves as African American and five considered themselves to be either biracial, Jamaican, African, or West Indian. Six were male and two were female. Their ages ranged from 42 to 57, with an average age of 47. All but one of the School Heads was married, and six of the seven married School Heads had children.

Three of the eight School Heads reported growing up in a close-knit family in a small town in the rural United States. These School Heads were raised in communities where they were one of the few African American students or families—sometimes the only one. Two of the School Heads grew up in low-income families, one of them on welfare. Two were raised overseas, and the remaining three School Heads were born and raised in U.S. cities.

Two of the eight School Heads were raised by single mothers; the other six were in two-parent families. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the eight African American independent School Heads.
Table 1

Profile of African American Independent School Heads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents the data regarding the eight independent schools led by study participants. These eight schools are located in all major regions of the country; four are in the Northeast, one in the West, two in the South, and one in the Midwest. Three of the schools enroll students from ages 3 (nursery) through Grade 8, three schools educate students from kindergarten or earlier to Grade 12, and the other two schools have grades 6 to 12 and 8 to 12, respectively. The school sizes range from 125 to 1,630 students, with a median of 391 students. One of the schools is single-sex.

Table 2

Data Regarding the Eight Independent Schools Led by Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Student enrollment</th>
<th>Endowment</th>
<th>Founding</th>
<th>Day/Boarding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreK-12</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery-G8</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>$2 million</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JK-G12</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>1630</td>
<td>$46.2 million</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-G12</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>$15 million</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8-G12</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>$344 million</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Boarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery-G8</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>$40 million</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery-G8</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>$5.5 million</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6-G8</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>$5 million</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the independent schools in the study are non-profit. Their endowments range from zero to $344 million, and the years in which they were founded range from 1884 to 1998. Only one of the eight is a boarding school.

Procedure

The background and biography of each School Head were explored through interviews. I audio-recorded all interviews but two and also took notes for future analysis. I provided an explanation of the study and the motivation underlying the research prior to each interview. Once a rapport had been established, the interviews proceeded in open-ended fashion, though following the same general set of questions with each participant. Assurances of confidentiality were provided in the letter of consent (see Appendix A) signed by each head. Neither the heads nor their schools are identified by their real names in this study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has been an acceptable form of research since the 1980s in many academic disciplines. Prior to the 1980s, qualitative research was used primarily by a small group of sociologists and anthropologists (Barbour, 2008). Now, educational researchers frequently use qualitative research methods in education due to their dependence on human interaction, a fundamental component of educational practices (Barbour, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research provides avenues for rich descriptions that give insight into the world of the participants.

The goal of qualitative research is to understand, through the collection of rich descriptions, how people make meaning of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored (Creswell,
This can occur in a number of situations—for example, when voices are silenced; when a complex, detailed understanding of an issue is required; or when empowering individuals to share their stories is a goal. Through understanding human experiences, qualitative researchers seek to understand “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). The richly descriptive nature of qualitative research uses words and pictures instead of numbers to describe a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research involves the collection of soft data “that is rich in description of people, places, and conversations (p. 2)” through participant observation and in-depth interviewing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

There are five approaches to qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2012). Narrative research explores the life of an individual; phenomenology focuses on understanding the heart of the experience—that is, lived phenomena; grounded theory deals with theory development; ethnography involves describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group; and case study deals with in-depth description and analysis of a particular case or cases (Creswell, 2012). Gall, Gall, and Borg (1999) stated that the purpose of qualitative research is to describe, explain, and evaluate a social phenomenon. In this qualitative study, the social phenomenon being studied is the lived experiences of African American independent School Heads; hence, a phenomenological study is the most suitable approach. Through interview-based research and supporting documentation, the experiences of African American headmasters are investigated and their stories are analyzed.

In addition, there are five features of qualitative research: naturalistic, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive, and meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Naturalistic refers to the context of qualitative research—making observations in the setting in
which it occurred. Descriptive data refers to the richness of qualitative data provided in the form of words or pictures. Concern with process focuses on the journey, not the destination. Inductive means that qualitative researchers do not seek to prove a hypothesis; instead, the research takes shape and form through data collection and analysis. Lastly, meaning refers to the researcher’s goal of understanding how participants make sense of their lives.

A qualitative study is ideal for this research because its purpose is to collect and interpret the stories and experiences of a representative sample of the few African American independent School Heads is desired. These heads have stories to tell, and their silenced voices need to be heard (Creswell, 2012).

For this study, qualitative research is preferred over quantitative methods for several reasons. First, there are few African American independent School Heads (currently only 30 in more than 1,500 NAIS member schools). Second, there is a lack of research on this population. As such, the voices of these African American independent School Heads have not been heard. In a qualitative research study, these silenced voices can be heard through in-depth interviews that enable me to ask previously unanswered questions about their journeys to obtaining a headship and their daily experiences. Third, in this study, the goal is to gain a close understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Through interviews, member checks, and document analysis, I aim to “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10).

Data Collection

Triangulation

In this qualitative study, data about African American independent school heads were collected through three methods: interviews, member checks, and documents. As the researcher,
I am the primary research instrument in the study; as such, there is a risk that my presence could introduce bias and reduce the validity of the study.

Validity is vital to effective qualitative research; invalid research is worthless. Therefore, paying attention to validity and reliability throughout the course of a research study is essential (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The validity and reliability of a qualitative research study can be strengthened through “careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). Although qualitative research is not intended to define a particular truth, Merriam (2009) considered the following five factors essential to the credibility, validity, and reliability of a qualitative study:

1. Triangulation, involving comparisons and cross-checks with multiple sources of data
2. Member checks or respondent validation, asking the interviewees for feedback about the research findings
3. Adequate engagement in data collection, which refers to observing and interviewing enough people to reach saturation and thus gain the clearest understanding of participants’ experiences possible
4. The researcher’s position or reflexivity, a process which involves critical reflection on the part of the researcher to explain any biases
5. Peer examination or peer review, which involves inviting others to read and comment on a research study and findings.

To eliminate bias in this qualitative study, it is imperative that the stories shared during interviews are interpreted correctly. Therefore, member checks were included as part of the triangulation effort. Triangulation means the use of more than one method of data collection to
establish a fact (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); it is used to provide greater credibility to the research and to support the reliability and validity of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Denzin, 1978). Denzin (1978) stated that researchers can rise above personal biases and overcome deficiencies that result from using only one method. Triangulation enriches the researcher’s understanding of the participants or processes under study. In this study, the methods of data collection included (a) in-depth interviews, to gain firsthand understanding of participants’ thoughts, feelings and opinions; (b) member checks, by which the interviewees reviewed and validated the study’s conclusions; and (c) written documents, containing detailed information relating to the participants. These three modalities are the primary sources from which qualitative findings grow (Patton, 2002).

Even though reliability and validity relate to one another, a study can be reliable and invalid as well as unreliable and valid (Best & Kahn, 1986). Best and Kahn (1986) defined reliability as the degree of consistency demonstrated by a procedure, whereas validity is the quality of the data-gathering procedure—in other words, ensuring that the data are measuring what they are intended to measure. These qualities are difficult to determine with qualitative research methods such as observation and interviews. As such, it is important to consider both factors as fundamental to the credibility of a research study.

Reliability in research implies that if the study were repeated, similar results would be found. For qualitative studies, this would mean that people’s experiences are static, which is not possible (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, reliability in this study refers to the accuracy and precision of the research process. This is particularly challenging in a qualitative study when the experiences of participants are dynamic and always changing (Merriam, 2009). For this reason, it is important for qualitative researchers to describe as fully as possible what actually occurs in
the setting of a research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). “Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 40). Replicating a qualitative study will not necessarily yield precisely the same results; however, if the findings of the study are consistent with the data, the study is dependable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

**Interviews**

Interviews are often the main source of data collection for qualitative researchers, and questions are generally open-ended rather than tightly structured (Merriam, 2009). Interviews are conducted to understand the perspective of others and to gain insight on thoughts and feelings that cannot be obtained through observations (Patton, 2002). This requires flexibility on the part of the interviewer, as well as careful listening and asking for clarification when something is not understood (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

A good interview is like a conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin, 1978). At the beginning of an interview, it is best to remain neutral and ask for descriptive information (Merriam, 2009). “The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). The interviews in this qualitative study concentrated on exploring, through the stories of African American independent School Heads, the factors influencing their appointments and their day-to-day leadership.

Prior to the interview, each participant provided general information on a data sheet, including answers to demographic questions as well as queries about the interviewee’s educational background and family life queries. The same question protocol was used with each interviewee. All responses were audio-recorded.
Patton (2002, p. 342) defined three types of interviews according to the type of question used:

1. The informal conversational interview, consisting of spontaneous generation of questions and best used in ethnographic studies.
2. The general interview guide approach, which uses an outline of issues to be discussed with the interviewee before the interview; the actual interview questions often are not determined prior to the interview, thus allowing the researcher to change the questions based on the situation.
3. The standardized open-ended interview, involving set questions carefully worded and arranged with no variation among interviews and best used with a large group or when deviation should be minimized (p. 342).

The general interview guide approach was used in this study. Because qualitative research centers on listening to the experiences of others, Merriam (2009) suggested asking fewer and relatively open-ended questions rather than a greater number of relatively structured questions. Doing so reduces restrictions on the researcher and avoids eliciting yes-or-no answers that cause participants not to fully tell their own stories in their own words (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each interview was approached in a similar manner; rapport was established during the first five minutes of the interview and then the same general, open-ended questions were asked. I encouraged each School Head to feel relaxed and comfortable talking about his or her experiences with race and leadership (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Each of these interview types requires the interviewer to hear the experiences of the interviewee and allows the interviewee to define his or her own terminology and share his or her own story. Patton (2002) recommended that the following types of interview questions be
integrated into a study: sensory, knowledge, demographic, experience and behavior, opinion and value, and feeling questions. In accordance with Patton’s (2002) suggestions, the questions used in this study (see Appendix B) incorporated all these elements.

**Member Checks**

According to Stake (2010), member checking is defined as asking participants to confirm the researcher’s reporting. This involves providing a recording or a draft copy to participants so they can make comments and add corrections (Stake, 2010). Researchers integrate member checks (respondent validation) into a study as a form of data triangulation intended to reduce bias. Member checks give each participant the opportunity to validate and confirm the researcher’s interpretations. This process helps researchers to confirm that their facts, interpretations, and descriptions are correct. Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered member checking to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Stake (2010) called member checks “a process vital to qualitative research” (p. 127).

To ensure accuracy, I thoroughly applied member checking in this study. During the interviews, participants were informed that member checks would be expected. Each participant was provided with the summary of the research findings so that he or she would have an opportunity to validate my conclusions and interpretations.

**Documents**

The third source of data for this qualitative study was be documents, which are often a major source of data in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2011; Merriam, 2009). A qualitative researcher can collect documents from three sources: public records, personal documents, and physical material, also known as artifacts (Merriam, 2009). Public records include government documents, police records, and U.S. Census reports; personal
documents can include diaries, autobiographies, letters, and photos. Personal documents provide insight into the lives of participants and foster rich descriptions of their attitudes and beliefs. Lastly, physical material refers to objects that the researcher finds in the setting of the research study. Examples of such physical materials could be e-mails, school newspapers, and bulletin-board postings.

The collected documents were analyzed in conjunction with interview data and member checks to provide more information about the research participants and to cross-validate the information obtained. Such documents play a vital role in validation because, unlike interviews and observations, documents do not require participants’ cooperation in an interview, nor are documents intrusive as observations are (Merriam, 2009). Specific documents collected or inspected in the study included recruitment materials used during the head search, school diversity statements, school newspapers, online videos, school websites, and articles published about each African American independent School Head. The rich sources of information available on the Internet widened the scope of document collection (Merriam, 2009).

**Research Design**

Each participant in this qualitative research study was interviewed by telephone or in-person. The questions used to guide the interview are listed in Appendix B; I used follow-up questions to draw out further information from each interviewee based on the responses to my initial probes. These questions cover the appointment, leadership experiences, and backgrounds of the interviewed African American independent School Heads.

**Coding and Data Analysis**

Coding and data analysis are critical in a qualitative study. These fundamental components make sense and give meaning to the words spoken in interviews, the researcher’s
observations, and the documents collected. Schutt (2011) prescribed the following five techniques for qualitative data analysis:

1. Data collection: the process of gathering and documenting data
2. Coding: organizing and categorizing data into concepts
3. Connecting: showing how a concept determined from the data can influence another concept
4. Legitimizing: evaluating different explanations
5. Reporting: representing the findings.

As noted, data collection consisted of interviews, member checks, and document collection. During the data collection period, I compiled notes indicating emerging themes and patterns in the data (Schutt, 2011). After completing the interviews, I transcribed the field notes and audio files verbatim. During the review of the field notes and audio files, participant responses were coded to determine similarities, differences, and trends among the responses. The connections among the stories—that is, the themes and patterns that emerge from the data—helped me to classify and categorize participant responses, thereby providing meaning to the words transcribed (Glesne, 2010) and identifying prominent concepts. “Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced” (Glesne, 2010, p. 184). The final analysis was used to answer the research questions.

**Limitations**

This study was designed to explore the lived experiences of African American independent School Heads—a small population of school leaders. The small number of potential participants is one limitation of this study. Also, the study focuses on the background and
experiences only of African American independent School Heads, rather than on those of a larger group of independent school heads, such as all School Heads of color. As such, the results of this study may or may not be transferable to other people of color in similar positions. Lastly, the audio-recording of interviews may have inhibited some participants’ willingness to respond truthfully. To minimize this risk, prior to each interview, appropriate assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were provided. Each respondent acknowledged his or her sense of comfort and a genuine willingness to share as much information as possible.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study investigated the influence of race on the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. Eight African American independent School Heads were interviewed and asked in-depth questions about their appointment to their position and their leadership. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What role did race play in the hiring of African American independent School Heads?
2. How does the race of African American independent School Heads contribute to their daily leadership?

The NAIS has reported that there were 30 African American independent School Heads out of more than 1,500 NAIS member schools as of February 2015 (A. Torres, personal communication). Eight of the 30 participated in this study, engaging in in-depth interviews. Three of the interviews were in person and the remaining five by telephone. Six of the interviews were recorded. I transcribed and coded all the interviews and then used a cataloging system to keep track of the data and emerging themes. Each School Head verified the results of the study through member checks and was encouraged to provide feedback where appropriate.

This chapter presents the results of the interviews according to the themes that emerged. The School Heads interviewed are identified as SH-A, SH-B, etc.

Career Path and Journey to Headship

All but one of the eight African American independent School Heads moved up through the ranks within independent schools, holding such positions as teacher, dean, department chair, diversity director, or assistant head within the same independent school. These seven were gradually asked to take on more responsibilities by the School Head. The one School Head who
did not previously work in other areas of the independent school, SH-H, held teaching and administrative positions at public, Catholic and charter schools prior to accepting the independent School Head job.

None of the School Heads in this qualitative study were willing to apply for or accept a position as School Head until they felt “ready” and had enough experience with the various aspects of a school. SH-D said, “There were times in my career when I felt like, why is this taking me so long when it’s not taking others so long. I was a new head at 44 . . . you know, I wasn’t ready at 38 even though I was annoyed that others were given the opportunity.”

SH-F recalled his experiences as an assistant head:

Year one through five of my assistant headship was interesting because I was consistently being called to be considered for headships. And my response for the first four years was pretty simple—it was when I feel like I have had enough experiences to go into a headship and do it well, then I’ll let you know. And [if] the right school comes along I’ll let you know. Otherwise there is plenty I still have to learn here.

SH-F added that he took advantage of his time as assistant head of school to learn about the various aspects of running an independent school. He said, “Let me get some experience here with a Head that I trust and I know before I step out into leadership at my own school.”

Because none of the School Heads in the study became a School Head until they believed they were ready, all of them are seasoned administrators. Five of the eight were in their first School Head position; the other three were in their second headship.

Seven of the School Heads in this study were the first African American independent School Head in their school’s history; only SH-E had an African American predecessor. SH-E commented, “I think diversity is a hugely important piece to this institution. And I followed a
person of color. So I think for this community, for this school, unlike some other schools, I don’t think having a head of color was not … it didn’t require a deep conversation in the way that some other schools might.”

The School Heads’ Career Trajectories

SH-H began teaching in a Catholic school. She then held principal positions in both Catholic and charter schools before becoming an independent School Head. SH-D began in sales and then transitioned into independent schools first as teacher and houseparent, then in admissions, followed by positions as Middle School Head and then as Head of two different schools. SH-E began as a science researcher, then became an independent school teacher and coach, and subsequently advanced to Middle School Head, followed by Assistant Head and finally School Head. SH-F began his career as a professional athlete and business owner, then joined an independent school as a teacher and coach after consistent encouragement from a sports official. He was asked to take on more responsibilities and eventually became Dean of Students, followed by Assistant Head and then School Head. SH-A began as an independent school teacher, houseparent, and coach and then worked for independent schools as diversity director, followed by Assistant Head and School Head. SH-C began as a science researcher before becoming an independent school teacher and houseparent, then housing director, Dean of Students, Assistant Head, and Head of School; she is now in her second Headship. SH-B began his career as a public school teacher, then transitioned into independent schools as a teacher, dorm parent, department chair, dean of faculty, and Assistant Head. SH-G began as an independent school teacher, switched to a public school while still living on the campus of an independent school, but then returned to independent schools and worked as a teacher, Middle School Head and in admissions prior to becoming School Head.
In the study SH-D and SH-G indicated that their children played a critical role in their selection of the school where they now serve in their second headship. These two School Heads both explained that they moved to a new school so that their children could benefit from the consistency of remaining in the same school through their high school years.

Two of the School Heads in the study had held positions in school admissions and were charged with the responsibility of increasing the number of students of color. Only one of the African American independent School Heads in the study had been a diversity director; one each had served as dean of faculty, development director, department chair, and director of housing. On the other hand, seven had been independent school teachers prior to becoming School Heads, six (surprisingly) had been houseparents, and five had been Assistant Heads. SH-A, SH-B, SH-C, SH-E and SH-F all held the position of Assistant Head of School and/or diversity director prior to their School Head appointment. SH-D and SH-G both served as Middle School Head prior to their appointment as School Head. None of the School Heads in the study held the position of Upper School Head or Lower School Head.

**Educational Background**

Growing up among a family of educators was a common trend, shared by four of the eight interviewees. Of these four, the grandmother of SH-A taught at the independent school he attended from nursery through Grade 12. SH-E’s mother taught at the university level as well as teaching independent school students during her career, and SH-E’s father was also a teacher. SH-E explained:

My mother was an educator; she taught college level and high school level, she went to an independent school … my father also taught as well in law school. I had this family of people who were very committed to education and understood its value and its power.
SH-E’s mother encouraged him to apply for a teaching position at an independent school since teacher certification was not required. “Actually it was my mother’s idea. She said, ‘Why don’t you teach at an independent school, you don’t need to be certified.’ ” SH-C also reported having been encouraged by a friend to apply at an independent school because teacher certification was not a prerequisite.

SH-H’s mother taught and encouraged her to teach after she finished her undergraduate studies. SH-H said, “She kept pushing for me to come home and to teach. She actually got me an interview at my old school.” SH-F’s mother was also a teacher. Among the four School Heads that indicated there were no educators in their family, the mother of SH-G made education a priority, the father of SH-C never earned his high school diploma, SH-D’s father attended an independent school and eventually went to medical school, and SH-B described his family as being very political:

I come from a very political family. … I’m probably the fourth or fifth generation of members of my family who believe that through education you can liberate the people. Without education, you will make gains and gain equal rights but you will not liberate the people. Very nuanced difference, you know. Equal rights just enable you to say you are equal.

Four of the eight African American independent School Heads attended an independent school during their primary and/or secondary years. All of these were in the Northeast: one in New York and three in Massachusetts. Two of the three in Massachusetts were boarding schools where the students lived on campus. Of the four School Heads who did not attend an independent school, the two females in the study both attended Catholic schools, SH-B attended “no-name” schools as a child, and SH-F attended a rural public school.
The four School Heads who did attend an independent school attested to the fact that their experiences as students positively influenced their careers and their climb to a headship. These School Heads became familiar with the independent school culture at an early age and benefited from the close-knit environment of small classes, nurturing teachers, and ample extracurricular activities. SH-E recalled his independent school student experience:

I probably had one of the more formative educational experiences … going to an independent school. … It for me was transformational in that I still remember a lot of the teachers I had then. It was really the place where I sort of learned the importance of education, and I learned how to be a writer there. … It was a small setting … you called your teacher by his or her first name—very warm, nurturing, and it just felt like home.

Through the support of a mentor, SH-E was put in the right position at the right time. SH-A, meanwhile, said that while he was an independent school student, he had a close relationship with the School Head, who encouraged him to return to the school after completing his undergraduate degree to teach, coach, and lead a minority summer school program. SH-D stated that he would not be where he is now had he not attended an independent school, and SH-G mentioned that his experiences as an independent school student gave him the confidence to aspire to a headship.

Two of the eight participants in the study described themselves as “average” students. One of them held the position of student council president while an independent school student; the other, who came from a family of educators, swore that he would never have a career in education.

Three of the eight participants shared a particular passion for the sciences. Following their undergraduate studies, both SH-E and SH-C conducted scientific research before embarking
on to their careers within independent schools. These two indicated that they applied for a teaching position in an independent school after learning that teacher certification was not a requirement. SH-B temporarily left his teaching position at an independent school to pursue a doctorate in the sciences. He then returned to the same independent school to pursue an administrative role, for which he had been recruited.

Six of the eight participants attended prestigious top-tier universities (Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and Brown) for their master’s degree. Three of them participated in the Klingstein program at Columbia University’s Teachers College. None of the African American independent School Heads hold a doctoral degree, but one completed all of a doctoral program’s requirements except the dissertation.

**Research Question 1: What role did race play in the hiring of African American independent School Heads?**

While race may not have played a dominant role in the successful appointment of the African American independent School Heads in this qualitative study, several common factors positively influenced several of the appointments. Each of the African American independent School Heads in this study fit one or more of the following criteria:

1. Attended an independent school
2. Obtained a master’s degree from a prestigious university
3. Benefited from mentoring
4. Took care of their careers
5. Became part of the independent school culture by holding various roles with independent schools
6. Focus on and care for the children and their learning
7. Having the look
8. Good fit PoCC

Responses from several participants indicated that independent schools typically have a desired profile or “look” that successful applicants possess. These attributes could be physical, professional, or a combination of both. SH-H indicated that she did not have the “right look” when applying for an Upper School Head position at a large, elite independent day school in New York City. She had an excellent hour-long phone interview with the Head of School, in which she was almost guaranteed the job. However, once she arrived on campus for the person-to-person interview, she was rushed and no longer considered a candidate. She stated:

I sent in my resume. … I got a phone call right away from the incoming Head … we had this phone conversation. He was pretty much was like, “You are a perfect candidate for this job and can you come in tomorrow?” I went in to meet and I knew instantly that they were not going to hire me. I just didn’t have the look. It literally was that … I had never met him before. … I spoke with him on the phone for about an hour. … They really had no questions for me when they saw me. … That [my race] was only thing that they didn’t know. That was the only variable. … I sound white, I’ve been told on the phone. And I think many people are surprised when they meet me and they see that I’m a black woman.

They knew everything else about her except that she was a person of color. She said, “I recognized that I didn’t look the part … I wasn’t what they needed me to be. I saw that.” While applying for her current School Head job, SH-H remembered viewing the school website and not seeing any people of color. As a result, she again felt apprehensive about her candidacy and
whether she had the “look” required. Fortunately, this time she had the look, and color did not negatively influence her appointment as School Head. She said:

I can tell you that I didn’t think they’d hire me when I went on the website. … I’m the only black person here. … The faculty is an all-white faculty. When I was hired everyone was … when I came here, when I looked at the website to apply for the job, I said there is no way they are going to hire me. I thought they clearly don’t want anyone black in the school … they hired me and it was never an issue … it was never talked about.

Having the right look is a reason why SH-H believes there are only 30 African American independent School Heads:

When you say that people go through this whole thing and then they are still never appointed; that’s a real thing. That is a real thing that happens. And I don’t know if schools are willing to admit that it is about sometimes there is a certain look you need to have to be a head. I think there is a certain look that you need to have. It’s not necessarily a color look … you need to look the part. Everyone needs to look the part in whatever part they are playing. A teacher has to have a certain look. … That is a real thing that can impact a person of color getting headship in an independent school especially if the population is predominately white.

SH-D commented that although he doesn’t think race was a factor in his attainment of the School Head role, he believes that he “looks” like what independent school boards are used to. He has the right resume, with a very traditional career path (i.e., going up the ladder the right way), having transitioned from teacher to division head and attended colleges on the prestigious list that independent school boards look for. SH-D explained:
Actually, when I talk to folks who are aspiring to leadership, I think that those folks who are of color and have the traditional resume have a huge advantage. If you went to an independent school and you went to the colleges that are on that list, you know, you in some ways look like what they are used to and that being of color is a value added. It’s tougher, I would think, if you hadn’t gone to an independent school; if you went to Morehouse … [that] doesn’t mean that you aren’t smart, capable and all those things. You just aren’t of the world … it’s like other worlds, connections matter. … I can talk independent schools because I went to an independent school.

Like SH-H, SH-D said that having the right look was not just a physical look, but a professional and educational look that he perceived as desirable by independent schools. SH-D mentioned several times in the interview that he wouldn’t be where he is his now had he not attended an independent school.

Two of the School Heads in the study considered it important to work in a school where they were hired because of their qualifications, not because they were African American. When SH-H was applying for an Assistant Upper School Head position, the school made it clear that hiring her would help the school with its diversity initiative. She said:

I had a decision to make. I could either go on that track—the private school elite track … once you’re on that track … Assistant Head of Upper School, then Head of Upper School, then Head of School. Or you can go on the no-name track. … I want to create. I want to build something. … They wanted a person of color as their leader. They didn’t have any people of color in their faculty at that time. “We want diversity. You are great and you would help us to do that.”
As SH-H was leaving, she recalled a student saying “We need you,” yet she knew that that school was not a good fit for her. Similarly, SH-F felt it was very important to be appointed at a school that wanted him to be School Head not because he was a person of color, but because he was the best person for the job. He made that point very clear with the board, saying that his race should be seen as an added bonus, not just a way for everyone to say “We have an African American independent School Head”:

I remember telling search consultants when they would call and ask about a school … do you know if the school is ready or willing to hire an African American male to run their school? Because if you don’t believe they’re ready, then there is no reason for them to send me their information. I can’t tell you how many times back then, well, wow—I guess I’ve never been asked that question, that’s a good question … and nobody is going to say “No, we are not ready to hire” … nobody is going to get themselves into that kind of lawsuit. … But if I didn’t put it in their mind that it was on my mind that I wouldn’t even become a candidate if they weren’t willing to hire. … I hope that I put in their heads when all is said and done is that you have to be committed to hiring the best person possible and not think about it in terms of race.

SH-F addressed the search committee at his final interview for his School Head position:

I said, “But I do have to make a statement,” and the entire search committee was quiet and listening. “If you are looking to hire an African American Head of School so that you can hire an African American Head of School, do not offer me the job. If I happen to be the right candidate … and you see me leading your school and I happen to be African American, offer me the job and I will take the offer very seriously.” And I think that left
them with the knowledge that this is about the job, right? And not about, you know, anything but about my ability to do the job.

This School Head added frankly in the interview:

But you and I both know, far too often … you don’t get a chance to say, ‘If this is about race and ethnicity, don’t offer me the job. If this is about my ability to do the job, measure by that yardstick, not by some other yardstick.’

Mentor Relations

Several of the eight African American participants commented on how they benefited from having a mentor—a senior-level administrator, often the preceding Head of School—supporting and assisting with the development of their career. The mentors played an important role for six of the eight participants in their successful attainment of a headship. SH-E commented that his mentor “saw things in me that I didn’t know at the time.” He carefully cultivated his career with each move and was able to experience and work in many different areas of school life prior to accepting the position of School Head. “He [the prior School Head] was phenomenally supportive of me. … I will forever be indebted to him for putting me in the right positions to get the right experience to get a job like this. … He saw something in me that I did not see in myself at that point.” SH-E described how he was recruited for an Assistant School Head position.

At the PoCC in 2006 … over lunch [the School Head] said, ‘Look, I know you want to be a Head, you’ve run a middle school, [but] you don’t have the development experience. Why don’t you come back and be the Assistant Head of School … you’ll get the full view of admissions, help with hiring.’
This particular School Head also said he “wouldn’t have gotten here—not as quickly, without [the School Head’s] support, mentoring, and guidance.”

SH-A was heavily influenced by his School Head as an independent school student and was determined to focus his career development on becoming a School Head.

When I was in middle school, we got a new head of school that I made a substantial relationship and connection with … so much so that when I had finished college, he encouraged me to come back to the academy to work. … My mentor, the Head of School, encouraged me and guided me along my career and journey to the headship.

SH-A prides himself in having been strategic about his journey to the headship.

Similarly, SH-G referred to two mentors, both of which were School Heads and encouraged him to apply for administrative leadership positions.

Having a strong mentor positively influenced the career path of several of the School Heads in this study. SH-B said he was “tapped” and that his mentor “had a plan for him.” He said:

I don’t know what it is about me. … I have big dreams for all children so … I think that I had a really good mentor. The Head of School … she mentored me all the way through … she had a plan for me.

SH-F said his mentor put him in the right positions at the right time and was deeply committed to preparing him for leadership:

The Head of School, who is absolutely one my best friends and mentors … was absolutely preparing me even when I didn’t know it. For instance, we had an advancement director who we had to let go. Instead of the Head saying “You know what, I don’t know how we’re going to deal with this, we’re going to move somebody else up,”
he said “Let’s do a search, I’ll make you interim director of advancement on top of assistant head and the two of us will lead a search for a new director of advancement.”

And that’s what we did. While I [was] doing 16-, 17-, 18-hour days I [was] thinking, “This is great experience!”

These two School Heads in particular, SH-B and SH-F, indicated that they were recruited for all their positions in independent school and never had to solicit jobs. SH-F became a teacher after a colleague continued to encourage him to visit his school, and eventually he was offered many headships prior to his successful appointment. SH-B was recruited to teach in an independent school and was also offered many headships, since search firms were always “coming for him.” SH-B said, “I have not solicited any school for a job. … I’ve been fortunate. … I’ve been recruited in many ways throughout my entire career.”

**Research Question 2: How does the race of African American independent School Heads contribute to their daily leadership?**

To understand how being African American influenced the leadership style of the independent School Heads in this study, each participant was asked about his or her overall experiences of being African American and specifically how that related to their daily leadership. Interviewees were also asked to describe their daily leadership along with a typical day as School Head. While the responses varied, several themes emerged. These common trends include: (1) shared experiences of being African American; (2) leadership styles described as authentic, balanced, collaborative, and hardworking, and (3) eagerness to gain as much leadership experience as possible. In describing a typical day as School Head, most participants noted a demanding meeting schedule and a need to be visible to the school community by walking the halls, attending assemblies, and visiting classrooms. For most School Heads, children were
always the focus.

**African American Experience**

SH-F discussed childhood and how his parents often reminded him that he had to do the job better to be considered equal. This frequent message from his parents was ingrained into him at an early age. SH-F believes that if one trains and put in the time to master something, one can be great at it. He also remembers that during his childhood, people taught him to do things all the way, not halfway. SH-F stressed that race influences how he leads:

I can tell you now that I was probably discounted many times because of race and ethnicity. I can tell you about instances … one in particular I was treated very poorly and they ended up terminating a security guard who behaved that way … but those kind of memories leave a painful but real kinda scar on you that you remember and affect the way that you lead, right?

SH-F also mentioned that being African American required him to work twice as hard. His parents instilled this notion in him and reminded him of it often:

We have a generation of folks who are my age [and] African American whose parents told them you have got to do it better to be considered equal. … You’ve got a guy who’s the first African American male hired at a school. He becomes Dean of Students. His parents’ ethos is “You’ve got to do it better to be considered equal.”

SH-A commented that the school he leads took a risk in appointing him. He continued, “If we are going to see a growth in the number of African American independent School Heads, schools need to take a chance like they did with me.” SH-A vividly recalls attending an independent school from nursery to grade 12 where his white grandmother was also a teacher. At the time,
his black father was not allowed on campus. Aside from his sister, this School Head was the only person of color at the school. He said:

I was born on the other side of the tracks . . . my black father was not allowed on campus. . . . I remember when the school had a ballroom dance. All families but ours were invited. My grandmother fought it but the country club was white only.

SH-D recalled his father trying to prepare him for the world. He said:

In terms of race . . . I remember him sort of preparing me for his world and the way the world saw him but that wouldn’t necessarily be the way the world saw me . . . and times had changed. . . . I really resented it . . . on the other hand it was helpful . . . as that shit does eventually happen to you eventually . . . to be forewarned was helpful.

This same School Head said he had an “aha moment” when he realized that the only teachers he remembered, aside from the teachers at his boarding school, were the two black teachers he had as a child. He went on to say, “When I went to boarding school, and even more so than an independent day school, you see teachers as people and you have this relationship that goes well beyond the time in class.”

Pride was a valued attribute for SH-G, who is proud to be an African American independent School Head and feels that his presence is very significant. When he had to decide early in his career where he could make the most impact as an African American man—in public or in private schools—he chose private independent schools since that setting was most comfortable for him and what he knew best, having attended an independent school. SH-G recalled his experiences after completing his master’s degree in education:

I then puzzled about what I wanted to do . . . whether or not I wanted to be in public or private schools. . . . As an African American male I started thinking about where I would
have the most impact. The public school world and independent school worlds are so different. There was some pressure that I needed to be in a public school setting. SH-G also talked about often being the only African American male in the independent school and the frequently questioning sentiments of others:

There are just those moments when you wonder, does that have anything to do with who I am? There is no one to run that by … it can be tricky but those moments don’t happen very often. For the most part, I look at it as a challenge to work, to be a presence … to be an example and a model to influence people to how they think about persons like myself with my skin color, with my background.

Two of the School Heads in the study commented that they live on campus and have African American artwork in their home. SH-B said:

I’m occupying a place on the campus of the school where I am the first black person to ever live there and I have made it very clear that space is really big and has pictures of people who look like me everywhere … so I’m not apologizing, I actually like being black and so … and I’ve made it very clear to the trustees that race matters … and I drink my tea black without milk, without sugar—I drink it black like me.

When asked if the pictures previously displayed at the home were of former white School Heads, he said:

You know what, I don’t even know who they were—right now there is Mandela there and others as well … Archbishop Tutu is there too … and my books reflect everything. … There is a lot of stuff about race that sometimes offends others when they know that it is there … that’s who I am … and the students often remind me never to forget that …
that they chose me, and if anything goes wrong [it’s] from them, not from me. I should just be myself—this comes from the kids.

The School Head feels comfortable and confident as an African American leader and appreciates the support that he receives from students. He added, “I leave some time for my activism as well, as a black man living in America.”

Two School Heads commented that African American parents appreciate and enjoy seeing them in the position of School Head. In fact, SH-G said that parents are often so overjoyed to see him that they shake his hand and do not want to let go:

In this community, I think it is important that I am here … not just for the kids of color. … I know that it doesn’t necessarily occur to all of them … I think that unconsciously there is a certain level of comfort when they see me. … I know when the parents see me … some of the times I shake hands with some parents and I feel like they don’t want to let go of my hand. They’re like “Man, it’s good to see you.” … We stand and smile and I know exactly what they are thinking … they don’t want to let go of me … there is a certain sense of pride … [and it transfers] to the school taking the steps to do that [hire me]. … I’m constantly thinking about the various ways in which my being an African American head of school has an influence on how I do the job.

SH-H pointed out that sometimes people are surprised when they find out that she is the School Head and make distinctive comments. SH-H said, “I think that people are surprised. I get a lot of ‘You’re the Head? You know, there’s never been a black head here.’ ” She believes that this may be due to the fact that there are no people of color on the school website, the whiteness of which had caused her to doubt that the school would hire her. Nevertheless, it did her and, from her perspective, race has never been an issue.
**Authentic Leadership Style**

SH-G and SH-C both commented about being authentic in their leadership and connected this characteristic with the use of humor. SH-C said, “It is important that I can be myself everyday. … I have a strong sense of humor.” SH-G said:

I’m not a formal guy. You’ll see me joking around with the director of admissions and enrollment management. … I tend to want to make the fact that we work with kids a reason why we shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously.

SH-G also stated, “I really like my job. … When I’m on the street and I see a parent, it’s not like I have to pretend to be a head now. … It’s a natural for me.”

**Hard-Working**

Several School Heads credited their hard work with contributing to their successful appointment. SH-H stated that she is a “worker bee” and not “afraid to roll up her sleeves”: “I will get out there and knock on doors … this school needed a builder and I’m a builder”. She believes that this quality was something the school board found to be an attractive characteristic. The other female School Head, SH-C, commented that her parents instilled in her the ethic to work hard at an early age.

Two School Heads made a point of discussing their long work hours, as they work with their schools’ capital campaigns, hiring, financial aid, fundraising, and development. These additional skills were nurtured with the support of their prior School Head who also served as a mentor. SH-F said, “I get up between 4:45 and 5:00 … do some work on the treadmill. … I try to make-it to the office by 6:45 … on an average night I’m home by 8 … I work a lot of hours.” While serving as Assistant Middle School Head, SH-E said, “I learned the job, I worked really hard that year as assistant … it was an amazing job, an amazing experience, great leadership
skills I developed.” As Assistant Head, SH-E said, “I was in the role which was all about learning. … I sat in as many meetings as I could … I was also the Director of Financial Aid.”

**Child-Centered Leadership**

Several of the School Heads indicated that the children are the focus of their leadership. The School Heads referred to “wanting to make a difference in the lives of children” (SH-F), “having big dreams for children” (SH-B), or the fact that “my first priority is the children and second is the parents” (SH-H). They also shared sentiments about making a difference in the lives of all children, not just serving as a role model for children of color. SH-G said:

In this community, I think it is important that I’m here, not just for the kids of color. … They’re not going to be like ‘Oh, I’m glad you’re here, you’re an African American like me.’ … I think unconsciously there is a certain level of comfort when they see me.

SH-H stated:

I only care about really one thing and that’s the students and the families. It’s the students first and the parents second. Whatever is in their best interest is what I do. Regardless of what that means for anyone else or any other group. I believe in what’s right—or at least what I perceive is what’s right.

SH-B said that his leadership “is all about the children.” SH-F said, “I’ve done this six years now … it’s been rewarding, it’s been challenging, it’s been all the above as long as kids are at the center of it and student growth and education are at the center of it, it makes it worth doing.” Only one of the African American independent School Heads in the study, SH-B, currently teaches. This School Head stated that he would not have accepted the post of School Head without also having the opportunity to teach. For SH-B, teaching is his connection with the kids and inspires him to be a great leader. He said, “I never stop teaching … I told the people who
were hiring me, ‘If I cannot teach, you need to find another person.’ … If I can’t have inspiration from students on a daily basis as a teacher, not as an administrator, I cannot do my job well.”

SH-E, on the other hand, pointed out that his main responsibility as School Head is managing adults. He said:

In this school, a lot of my time is spent in meetings with adults. One of the things that I’ve come to realize as being Head of School [is that] when you become Head of School you actually are in charge of adults—the parents, the faculty, alums, teachers, administrators. And I get to connect with kids, but I have to make sure that I put that in my schedule. I do things to make sure I stay connected and that the kids know me but my main responsibility is adults. … I try to be accessible.

**Transformational Experience**

Two School Heads indicated that, earlier in their careers, they saw a situation unfold at their school that gave them a negative view of the administration. These experiences left each person determined to join the administration so that they could make a positive change. SH-H recalled the effect of a change in leadership during her first teaching experience:

There was a new principal and things just went downhill from there. People didn’t respect her. … I recognized how important administration is and how important leadership is in the life of a school. … At this point I really enjoyed education and teaching … the way to really make an impact in the life of a school is to be an administrator at the school. It is the only way to effect change and to ensure quality.

As a result of this experience, SH-H applied for a master’s degree program in education.
SH-G had a similar career-changing experience. After a new School Head was hired and didn’t get along with SH-G’s mentor, a senior-level administrator at the school, the mentor lost his job. SH-G believes that this result occurred because his mentor and the new School Head “didn’t see eye to eye on things,” and he was left “confused by the politics of independent schools.” SH-G continued in his position and said that although he was “frustrated with some of the administrative pieces … I thought I could do it better.” This experience, as with SH-H, catapulted him toward pursuing a master’s degree in education.

**Why They Were Chosen as School Head**

All participants were asked what they thought caused them to be selected as School Head. Overall, they indicated that they felt they were the most qualified and had leadership qualities and characteristics desired by their schools. Several School Heads commented that the search committee saw leadership traits that they found valuable. “I think I may have shown enough people my leadership potential,” SH-B commented. SH-F said:

They saw leadership in me that was valuable to them … highly intellectual … there was a level of dedication that they may not have seen in others. There was an ability to build a strong sense of community that went far beyond any of the stereotypical factors of race and ethnicity. … I was honest, could tell people hard things and still have them appreciate the person.

Two of the School Heads worked hard while serving as Assistant Head of School to learn the job of School Head. During this time, they became familiar with all aspects of school life including development, fundraising, creating and developing a capital campaign, admissions, hiring, and financial aid.
When asked about his first headship and why he thought he was appointed, SH-G said, “I think oftentimes these headships call for a certain type of person based upon who was doing the job before. … I think the school wanted someone who was personable, who wanted to be a part of the community, who knew independent schools very well.” SH-E believes that his fundraising experience was an attractive quality that greatly contributed to his selection. He explained:

I think my fundraising experience, having worked on that capital campaign … I think that the search committee was thinking about “we need somebody who has the skills that are directly applicable to our challenges right now” and so fundraising was one of them. I think diversity was another. That’s a hugely important piece to this institution. … I followed a person of color. For this community and this school … having a person of color didn’t require a deep conversation about this aspect in the way that some other school might. . . . And the diversity piece, I don’t know if it was so much experience with diversity as much as it was being a candidate of color, which I think was important to them. Certainly I’ve been able to support the diversity agenda here I think in a way that someone else couldn’t have. I’ve had to learn a lot about it, in particular the curriculum. . . . There’s always more work to be done in terms of kids and faculty and recruiting faculty of color and kids of color. But our numbers are pretty good. And I think having a head of school of color is helpful to those efforts … having been here for six years and knowing how important diversity is to the institution, that is my feeling [as to] what people were thinking.

The two biracial School Heads indicated that they could straddle the line because of how they look and how they grew up. They stated that they either could “pass” and/or appeared
“non-threatening.” Both indicated that they were very aware of race not only during their childhoods but also as school leaders. The two biracial School Heads said that either they were lucky to be chosen or that the school took a risk by appointing them as School Head.

All the School Heads in the study mentioned that they were a good fit for their schools, not only because they could be their authentic selves, but also because their leadership style and motivations align with the attitudes of the school board. SH-D said:

Look, there are only at least for the National Association of Independent Schools, which is about 1,400 schools, there’s only about 60 faculty, Heads of color not just African American so very small, so right? I would say that … so I have to give credit, you know, they didn’t have to hire me and that would be easy not to, but they did for a variety of reasons. I don’t think for them race played a real part in it. I think they thought I was the best candidate, period.

Another common trend was that seven of the eight School Heads had assembled significant support from faculty, the school board, parents, students, and the community as they worked their way up the ranks within their school. The fact that the school knew them already and had already seen their leadership potential made their candidacy attractive.

**Daily Leadership**

The School Heads in the study expressed a desire to be visible on a daily basis and kept that feature as a priority in their leadership. While there were some commonalities in the daily work of the School Heads, the focus varied from setting the tone to trust and from forming a strong team to creating a healthy work-life balance.

SH-B described his daily leadership by dividing it into three categories: strategic, practical and immediate. He even divides his Sundays into these categories:
I divide my day into strategic, practical, and immediate-term things that need to be done. I wake up and I think strategy, not something I am going to do that day. There are certain projects that are on my desk (my desk is a mess) that are ongoing projects. And then some things just happen, not short-term but immediate-term. … I divide my day that way, every day, including Sunday.

SH-B described how his daily leadership activities are spread between these three categories:

You’d see me sitting in chapel … you’d see me come into my office and going through the practical things that need to be done because you wouldn’t see me doing strategic because that is private and done at home. … You’d see me dropping in and checking in on my administrators and seeing what is on their plate, occasionally checking in on my colleagues to see how they’re doing. … I go home during the day for some reflection. …

I try to respond to everyone who writes a reasonable e-mail.

SH-C said, “Most of my day is spent meeting and greeting people within the community to establish strong ties with the school and the community.” This School Head has to “carve out time to be with students” and makes it a priority to attend assemblies as well as to meet with staff.

SH-C and SH-E believe that balance is an important aspect of their daily leadership, whether that means work-life balance or the various components of professional leadership such as maintaining an intense meeting schedule while staying present and in the moment. SH-E described how he tries to balance his days. He said that he is constantly “struggling with the balance of trying to be present and in the moment … balancing that with the relentless meeting schedule … it feels like it’s meeting after meeting after meeting … and balance that with the to-do list.” While SH-E realized that he could easily spend his entire day in the office, he makes it
a priority to be visible. He said, “It’s a time management sort of thing … if there is a day when I haven’t even walked down the halls, that bums me out a little bit … look, I could be in here [my office] all day … that’s not why I was hired. I don’t think that’s the role of a head.” SH-E went on to say that he also struggles with balancing his work and home life. “That’s another balance I have to strike outside of here … right now it’s hard … there are moments when I have to get-up at 4:30 in the morning to get to those emails from two days ago.” SH-F, on the other hand, admitted his lack of balance, saying, “If your next question is how do you balance, then I might have to tell you that you need to ask someone else. I work a lot of hours.”

Being optimistic and positive was a key characteristic of SH-B’s daily leadership style. He feels that it is important to maintain a “nothing is impossible” attitude despite challenges and shortcomings. SH-B said, “Education is a very optimistic endeavor … and the one who is the leader, the headmaster, the Head of School has to be very optimistic—nothing is impossible.”

SH-E described relationships as a primary aspect of daily leadership, explaining that work is done through relationships with staff, colleagues, and parents that is “born out of the capital you earn being present.” This leader also finds it important to value every voice, including those of parents, and to take the time to respond to the littlest of complaints. SH-E also has found peace knowing that it is part of the job to deliver bad news and that it is impossible to make everyone happy.

SH-H described her role as School Head by saying, “My main job here is to set the tone, set the culture, set how we behave and interact with each other, set our priorities, outreach to the community about us, increase enrollment, fundraise, be the outward face … the people I meet with and talk to all the time, all day long are the administrators.” SH-H, SH-C, SH-F, and SH-G all described a key aspect of their leadership style as empowering others. SH-H said, “I
empower the managers, the directors to be able to resolve problems … everyone knows in no uncertain terms that I’m the one in charge … that’s exactly how I think it should be. … It’s about being consistent … they know I’m the court of last resort.” SH-C describes her leadership as collaborative; she focuses her efforts on “building a strong administrative team” and “fosters communication through weekly meetings and regular retreats as well as goal setting.” SH-F noted that he has empowered his Dean of Students to arrange a series of guest speakers.

Both SH-C and SH-G explained that building a strong administrative team was important to them. SH-G indicated that his administrative team is strong and that he depends on them to take leadership in their area of the school. This requires SH-G to empower others:

I like to make sure that people manage their own area of the school. … I try to have individual members of the school know that I depend on them to be the boss of their area. I can’t do their job. I look to them to be innovators. … We have a pretty robust administrative team. I work really hard with those adults, my senior administrators, because that’s my team. Sort of like a sports analogy—I work really hard to make sure that each member is very strong and works together nicely. I literally go about it like putting together a team. Whenever there is a vacancy, I work to recruit a top-notch player.

SH-G described his leadership style as built on trust, which he establishes by being consistent. He said, “When there are difficulties and decisions to be made, I think about process, think about transparency and being clear because these are hard … because people work so hard to minimize problems and difficulties they face. When these issues do hit my desk, I know I need to buckle down and get things done.”
Humility is the quality that SH-B values most strongly in a leader. While he is not sure if people would describe him as humble, he said, “I’m drawn to those people more than anything else even if I’m not viewed that way.” On the other hand, SH-F displayed humility in its reluctance to talk about his achievements: “I’m really not very good at talking about myself. … I’ve never been really good at talking about things I’m good at. … If I want to be defined by something, define me by the things I’m doing now, not the things that I did. Define me by the work I’m doing now, not the work I did.”

Diversity Initiatives

Several of the School Heads in this study are involved with diversity initiatives, but the two female School Heads in the study, SH-C and SH-H, both indicated having no concrete diversity initiatives. SH-H said that there are no African American faculty or administrators at her school, whereas SH-C stated that perhaps because her school is already so diverse, no concrete initiatives are needed. Both SH-H and SH-C believe that diversity work is not just one person’s job, and neither has a diversity director at the school. SH-H said, “If there is only one person who job is to be the Diversity Coordinator, then there is only one person doing diversity work.”

SH-A was determined not to be “pigeonholed” into a race and diversity umbrella as he had seen with many other African Americans who aspired unsuccessfully to become independent School Heads. He said, “I was asked to become the diversity coordinator and initially wasn’t going to accept the position unless it was under my terms. … I had to be strategic and make the right moves. … I negotiated my title, salary and position so that I was part of the senior administrative team.”
Since SH-A knew he wanted to be an independent School Head by age 21, he had the opportunity to be strategic about his journey to the headship. “I didn’t want to go there with race initially,” he explained. SH-A emphasized that he perceived himself to be “non-threatening and not outspoken,” and that he considered these two characteristics necessary for him to become a School Head. He said, “Being biracial and light-skinned, people thought I was less threatening” and capable of differentiating diversity work from general independent school work. As dean of multi-cultural programs, SH-A negotiated with his school that he would “be part of the senior administrative team, attend board meetings, have a senior-level administrative salary, and if the school was serious, they would agree to these stipulations.”

Several of the School Heads held positions with a focus on diversity prior to becoming School Head. SH-A performed the role of diversity director, and SH-A and SH-B were both coordinators of a “Student of Color” summer initiative to attract urban students to independent schools. SH-D and SH-G both worked in admissions with a focus on increasing the number of students of color.

As School Head, SH-F is proud of the fact that he grew the percentage of faculty of color from 8% to about 24% at his school. SH-A, SH-B, SH-D, SH-F and SH-G are actively involved with mentoring and nurturing aspiring School Heads of color. SH-B stated, “I leave some time for my activism as well, as a black man living in America.”

Of these five, SH-D and SH-G mentor aspiring School Heads informally, whereas SH-A, SH-B and SH-F are actively involved in affinity groups that promote leadership through workshops for aspiring leaders of color or assist universities by allowing aspiring independent school leaders of color to shadow them. SH-A explained, “I am the co-chair of an organization
that we founded to support aspiring leaders of color in independent schools. Each summer, we host a workshop … each year the number of participants increases.”

When asked about how diversity initiatives were implemented in his first School Head position, SH-F said:

In terms of really starting and maintaining a real discussion about issues of diversity, multiculturalism, difference, privilege, any of those, I feel I was woefully unsuccessful. I didn’t want it to be my agenda; I wanted it to be our agenda. I never quite cracked the code. … There were certainly kids of color and a few faculty of color; however, there was really no discussion about any of that. … I had my hands full, to give myself some type of excuse.

While SH-F acknowledged his inability to implement any diversity initiatives in his first School Head position, he observed that his current school “was way far ahead of really any school where I had been. There had already been a full-time diversity coordinator, and diversity was already such a value and practice.”

All of the School Heads mentioned the NAIS PoCC except SH-B. SH-B indicated that he is actively involved in diversity work in his free time and added, “I’m on the board of an organization that deals with providing education for liberation for all kinds of people boys and girls everywhere. I have no qualms about doing that, which some people call radical work, openly and without any fear.” Through SH-B’s leadership, he “has created an ethos of inclusion” where his students know that “you can’t have diversity without inclusion … if you wake up every morning thinking about diversity without inclusion, you’re missing a chapter.”

For SH-E, the PoCC was coincidentally instrumental in his journey toward and attainment of the School Head position. SH-E recalled being asked to become Assistant Head of
School at a PoCC in December 2006, calling it “the offer I can’t say no to … a golden opportunity placed right in front of me.” While attending another PoCC, SH-E found out he had been offered the position of School Head:

I remember again, the PoCC for whatever reason plays a significant role in me getting jobs. I stepped off the plane in New Orleans in 2009 and I turned my phone on and I had a message from the president who said, “We’d like to offer you the Head of School position.”

**Family Considerations**

SH-F took into consideration his daughter’s age and that she would be entering the upper school when he transitioned to his second School Head position. SH-F said, “It was sort of time. I wasn’t unhappy but I was looking for something else. My daughter was just about to graduate from eighth grade. So it was sort of the perfect time to look.”

SH-G reflected on his decision to change schools, explaining:

I really took a step back to try to figure out how long I was going to say here because the girls were also at the age where I needed to determine if we were going to move or if we were going to say put. The truth is, headships would be around for many more years [and] I would only be more experienced after the girls graduated from high school. But I didn’t want to have them to get into the high school and then have us move. And so while they were in middle—one was in sixth grade and one was in seventh grade—I thought that was a great year to look around. If something worked out then and it was ideal, I would go for it.
SH-E also mentioned that he took the position of Assistant Head of School for various reasons including being closer to extended family: “We wanted to start a family so it made sense to come back.”

**Why So Few African American Independent School Heads?**

All the School Heads who participated in the study are aware of the very small number of African American independent School Heads. In fact, this close-knit community comes together annually at the NAIS PoCC, which many of the 30 attend. When the School Heads in this study were asked why there are so few African American independent School Heads, SH-G focused on the history of independent schools, pointing out that independent schools were founded by white, wealthy elite to provide the best education for white, wealthy elite children. The independent schools have a history of being dominated by white males. This dominance makes diversity work difficult, because there is a continual dominance of white teachers and leaders in independent schools.

SH-G also mentioned the pipeline mechanism. The pipeline to which he referred involves aspiring African American independent School Heads obtaining administrative positions within independent schools and being mentored to take on more responsibility. For example, a teacher at an independent school may become a division head, then dean of students or department chair (often through the support of a senior-level administrator) prior to becoming School Head. But SH-G also observed that there are few African American independent school teachers, perhaps partly due to the relatively low teacher salaries at these schools:

I am quite conscious of it. I always think about it. I certainly think about the lack of African American males in the education arena. I think about the lack of African American independent School Heads for sure. . . . While I am used to being a minority
in a school like this … I don’t notice it consciously every hour of the day but there are
moments when I realize I am the only black person here. And while I am not intimidated
by that and that does not cause me pause, it sometimes can pose problems in interpreting,
sort of what people mean by certain things. . . . There are certain moments when you
wonder, “Does that have anything to do with who I am?” . . . For the most part, I look at
it as a challenge . . . to be an example and a model to influence people in regard to how
they think about a person like myself with my skin color with my background in this role.
. . . I see that as a challenge and an honor.

SH-D said it would be “tougher if you hadn’t gone to an independent school but went to
Morehouse,” which would not make that individual part of the independent school world. SH-D
also mentioned that there is an “old boys’ network” and that those who benefit from it are able to
“skip steps.” On the other hand, for African Americans wishing to advance, “there are definitely
barriers”:

There are a lot of us to who are really trying to work to help and mentor folks . . . there
are definitely barriers, I don’t think there is any question about that. . . . There is an old
boy network in the world for sure. There are lots of heads of school who were taken
under somebody’s wing and you know they got to skip steps and get opportunity . . .
some of us are here now [and mentor aspiring School Heads because that is] an important
thing to do.

SH-F also commented that he mentors aspiring School Heads. “I serve as an adjunct
where they put Heads of School with three, four, sometimes five graduate students. . . . I oversee
a project of their choosing and help out with that.” Lastly, SH-D said there should be more
African Americans in the pipeline now since there has been a growth in the number of African
American independent school students. He is hopeful for an explosion in the next five or six years but said, “I wouldn’t hold my breath.”

SH-A shared that he had seen many African American aspiring School Heads fail to secure a position because they were not “strategic about their journey to the headship.” SH-A discussed how many of them had become “pigeonholed as being the diversity director, the person who focuses only on race.” He said, “Far too often, independent schools hire a diversity director who is a person of color, young, and with no administrative experience.” SH-A held the title of Dean of Multi-Cultural Programs, following two diversity directors who had come before him.

**Summary**

Several themes emerged from the perspectives of the eight School Heads interviewed in this study. School Heads tended to have ties to independent schools as students and to have held various positions within independent schools prior to becoming School Head. As such, all but one of the School Heads were in the independent school pipeline prior to their appointment. They had master’s degrees from Ivy League universities and often came from a family of educators. They believed that diversity work is not one person’s job. They benefited from a mentor—someone who encouraged and supported their development and ascent to the School Head position—and all but one attended the NAIS PoCC. In Chapter 5, the conclusions of the study will be presented along with links between participant responses and the literature.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

While the number of African Americans continues to increase in the United States, African Americans remain underrepresented in educational leadership positions. Furthermore, the number of African Americans serving as School Head in independent schools is disproportionately low (Driscoll, 1982; Kane et al., 2008; Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012). Of the more than 1,500 NAIS member independent schools in the United States, only 30 were led by an African American as of February 2015 (A. Torres, personal communication).

Independent schools are historically conservative, white, elite institutions that provide a highly academic and prestigious educational experiences to students (Brown, 2012; Kane, 2003; Kane & Orsini, 2004; Kraushaar, 1972; Mallery, 1963; Profit, 2007; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988; Vargas, 2012). Although some elite independent schools have enrolled African American students since their founding, most independent schools did not (Baird, 1977; Mallery, 1963; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). Since the Civil Rights Movement, NAIS schools have made it a priority to increase the number of students, faculty, and administrators of color in their schools and have created several initiatives to reach these goals (Batiste & McGovern, 2011). The NAIS is proud of its recent success in increasing the number of students of color in its schools. The portion of African American students is currently at 6.2% (NAIS, 2015) as opposed 5.0% in 2000-2001, 5.7% in 2005-2006 and 6.0% in 2010-2011 (Batiste & McGovern, 2011). Moreover, the number of teachers of color in independent schools more than doubled between 1987 and 2003, from 4% to 8.4% of all teachers (Kane & Orsini, 2003). Despite these gains and the recent focus on diversity initiatives in independent schools, the number of people of color holding a
School Head position remains small (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007). Because of this lack of African American independent school leaders, the NAIS is falling short in achieving its goal of preparing students to thrive in a diverse, global world (Kane & Orsini, 2004).

Although independent schools seek to provide all students with an environment that prepares students for a diverse and inclusive world, students are not seeing African Americans in their administrative leadership, especially in the position of School Head. The NAIS has created a fellowship program designed to support and educate aspiring leaders of color. However, while it has been successful in attracting participants, it has not been equally successful in increasing the number of people of color securing appointment as School Head (Batiste & McGovern, 2011; Torres, 2011). Researchers cite age, lack of experience as Assistant Head of School, and geographic limitations as reasons why few women and people of color are obtaining these positions (Batiste & McGovern, 2011; Torres, 2011). For many of the School Heads in this study, these factors were not relevant because they either held the Assistant Head of School position prior to becoming School Head or had no geographic limitations that impeded their School Head appointment.

This study focused on learning about the experiences of the few African American independent School Heads. Through in-depth interviews, it explored how race influenced the appointment and daily leadership of these School Heads. The research questions were:

1. What role does race play in the hiring of African American independent School Heads?
2. How does the race of African American independent School Heads contribute to their daily leadership?

Few studies have examined African American School Heads in independent schools (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007). This qualitative study contributes to the limited body of literature,
as eight of the 30 NAIS identified African American independent School Heads shared their stories as educational leaders. Each participant was interviewed in depth, and interviewees also participated in member checking to review the results and verify the accuracy of the findings.

Analyzing the experiences of eight School Head uncovered trends and commonalities among them, as well as some differences or characteristics unique to only one individual. Generally, the study showed that the School Heads succeeded in attaining their position as School Head because they were, in virtually every way other than their race, traditional candidates who came up through the independent school pipeline. They thus had the “look” (at least for schools that were open to diversity in leadership), and in many cases they had previously held the position of Assistant Head of School, allowing them to become familiar with the independent school culture. Most of these School Heads earned their bachelor’s and/or master’s degree from an Ivy League school. Lastly, having a strong mentor within the independent school community and attending the NAIS PoCC were common features in the participants’ trajectory. The value of education and mentorship were two major findings of this study as it pertains to the appointment of African American independent School Heads. Another finding of this study is that African American independent School Heads are transformational in their leadership style.

Discussion

Research Question 1: What role does race play in the hiring of African American independent School Heads?

The low number of African Americans in the independent school pipeline to become School Heads is the main factor contributing to the existing racial disparity (Torres, 2011).
Without more African American students, faculty, and administrators aspiring to become independent School Heads, there is not likely to be a rise in the numbers in the future.

The absence of African Americans in independent schools is a result of the CRT tenet of the permanence of racism. Racism is a constant, permanent fixture in American society and is systemic. From the days of slavery until today, African Americans have been marginalized.

With respect to educational opportunity, African Americans are victims of the black-white achievement gap and are less likely to graduate from high school, more likely to be suspended, less likely to perform in reading and math at grade level, and more likely to be held back for remediation. Nevertheless, many African Americans do beat these odds. African Americans who have had the opportunity to attend and/or work in an independent school deliberately chose that school. African American adults choosing to work at an independent school do so intentionally to give back to the school community as an independent school alumnus, to act as a support for students of color, to serve as a mentor and role model for other students and adults of all races by demonstrating an African American’s ability to perform competently in a position of power and influence.

African Americans have token representation in most independent schools (Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Hasberry, 2013), at all levels from student to School Head (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007). Kanter (1977) described tokens as persons whose experiences are dominated by visibility, assimilation, and contrast, which lead to isolation and exclusion. Tokenism, as it relates to African Americans in independent schools, was investigated by Hasberry (2013), whose findings support the claims of Kanter (1977). Hasberry (2013) found that African Americans in independent schools are highly visible physically as well as socially. In addition, the contrast that African American independent school teachers face leads to isolation, as they do
not feel that they are part of the majority group and are purposefully left out of social conversations and gatherings (Hasberry, 2013). On the other hand, Hasberry (2013) also indicated a process of assimilation as tokens contrary to Kanter (1973), as African Americans in independent schools intentionally work to act contrary to stereotypes in an effort to fit in.

Being a token makes it difficult for African Americans to thrive in predominately white independent schools. African Americans in independent schools experience great pressure and stress due to their belief that they have to do their job better than whites to be considered equal, that they are responsible for being the spokesperson for all things African American, and that they must serve as role models not only for African American students, but for all students (Hasberry, 2013; Kane & Orsini, 2003). These factors can be exhausting for African American faculty and administrators in independent schools. African American administrators spoke about tokenism and how they were perceived as racial minorities in their schools in a similar vein to students who spoke about heightened visibility and their minority status (Arrington & Stevenson, 2006).

The majority of potential African American independent School Heads were previously students and/or teachers in independent schools. While the NAIS has been successful in increasing the number of African American students, the vast majority of African Americans attend their local public schools. Independent school students represent only 1% of the total student population, and just 6.2% of them are African American (NAIS, 2015). Despite recent increases, African American teachers are also underrepresented in independent schools, and the percentage of African American independent School Heads is even smaller (Torres, 2011).

Once an African American chooses to pursue an education in an independent school, he or she experiences a high level of academic rigor, along with the opportunity to interact with
elite white culture and/or to gain access to prestigious colleges and universities. Quality of education and the school’s reputation were the most important factors for parents of color who selected an independent school education for their children. Other factors deemed significant were the small class sizes and the belief that attending an independent school would lead to a successful university placement (Arrington and Stevenson, 2006). African American graduates of independent schools are more inclined to pursue high-paying careers in business, engineering, law, science, or medicine, rather than in education, a discipline with a reputation for not being as highly respected or highly paid. When African Americans attain top-salary positions, they receive a return on their investment of the expensive tuition.

This study showed that African Americans aspiring to become School Heads are more successful in attaining appointments if they had prior ties with the independent school culture. This requires the African American to have either attended or worked at an independent school—which requires considerable persistence, strength, and courage.

While attending and working in an independent school offers many benefits, there are an equal number of obstacles and challenges for African American students, faculty, and administrators. These obstacles are race-based and result from the permanence of racism as described in CRT. Racism is a systemic part of American culture and the dominance of whites in independent schools has been a mainstay since their origin.

African American students in independent schools have to deal with stereotypes characteristic of being Black. These stereotypes include being on welfare, living in the ghetto, and having a poor educational background. “Despite the presence of middle-class Black students, misperceptions about socioeconomic background fueled stereotypes that all Blacks were poor and all Whites were rich” (Speede-Franklin, 1988, p. 24). The testimonies of the
School Heads in this study supported the CRT notion of counter-storytelling that works to dispel stereotypes through personal stories. The CRT tenet of whiteness as property focuses on white privilege and the notion that whites have access to high-quality education, whereas African American independent school students are recipients of this education only through financial contributions and assistance from the privileged whites.

Independent school faculty of color often feel isolated and compelled to be the spokesperson for all people of color (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988).

Role models on campus can counteract the effects of being in an environment where all the visible signs, and many of the subliminal messages, indicate that White skin is the most valued, and that White students are the most highly accepted (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988, p. 63).

Often, when independent schools do hire African Americans, their decision appears to be driven in large part by interest convergence; that is, teachers of color are hired to support students of color, to support the school’s diversity initiatives, and to give a favorable appearance of diversity. Since the 1960s, independent schools have made significant efforts to increase the number of students of color (Kane, 2003; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). These efforts have shifted from increasing diversity in numbers to attaining a community of inclusion, acceptance, and support.

African Americans in independent schools are often assumed to be the spokespeople for race-related matters and tend to feel isolated in an environment that contains few African Americans (Kane, 2003; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988, Gardner, 2007). This notion has been cited in the literature ever since Mallery’s (1963) description of the token African American student in
elite independent schools. Being African American in an independent school can be isolating (Hasberry, 2013).

African American students need adults of color for support. This is important not only for students of color but also for white students who may not have experience with people of color in positions of authority. Having these experiences gives students of all races a chance to work with adults from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988; Kane, 2003). “Interactions with teachers of color during the formative years of schooling is a necessary precondition for breaking down stereotypes white students may form about people who are different from themselves” (Kane, 2003, p. 2).

“Teachers of color are important role models to White students, as they shape white students’ images of what people of color can and do achieve” (Kane, 2003, p. 10). The presence of teachers of colors is important in providing culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy to which “may be steeped in white, upper-middle-class traditions of culture and education” (Kane, 2003, p. 12).

Torres (2011) considered the lack of School Heads of color to be a result of the small number of aspiring candidates in the independent school pipeline. The independent school pipeline metaphor refers to African Americans who have climbed the ladder in independent schools and held various positions, usually beginning as teacher and working up through senior-level administrative positions to become School Head.

The establishment of support services and the aggressive recruitment of non-White faculty members are the first steps in the long journey private schools must undertake to be truly representative of the diversity that is found in their student population and in America (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988, p. 68).
Holding the position of independent school teacher is considered an integral part of building the credibility of a School Head (Torres, 2011). Kane and Orsini (2003) stated that an African American independent school teacher is 20 times more likely to have attended an independent school than the average American student. A typical African American independent school teacher comes from a middle-class upbringing (Hasberry, 2013) and has graduated from a private college or university (Kane & Orsini, 2003). Having a middle-class childhood and stellar educational experiences helps aspiring School Heads of color to display the traditional “look” that search committees are accustomed to seeing (Torres, 2011).

Successful School Head candidates have significant ties to the independent school network (Batiste & McGovern, 2011; Brown, 2012; Torres, 2011). Women and people of color appointed to the School Head position are overwhelmingly alumni of independent schools, have enrolled their child(ren) in an independent school, and/or have worked in an independent school as a teacher, a director of diversity, a dean of students, or an assistant head of school (Brown, 2012; Profit, 2007; Vargas, 2012).

Aspiring African American independent School Heads are not considered traditional candidates (Batiste & McGovern, 2011; M. McGovern, personal communication, March 13, 2015), so if these aspiring leaders have a traditional resume and experience working in independent schools, they are more likely to be appointed as School Heads (Torres, 2011). A stereotypical School Head is a white male (Torres, 2011) and an Ivy League graduate who studied the classics (Griffin, 1999; Mahoney, 2008). As such, for an African American, having graduated from an Ivy League school is a significant asset (Brown, 2012). Having an Ivy League education, strong ties within the independent school community from attending and/or working in independent schools, and having a School Head as a mentor were all prominent
characteristics of the African American School Heads in the present sample. Four of the eight African American independent School Heads in this study attended an independent school themselves, seven of the eight worked various positions within an independent school prior to being appointed as School Head, and six of the eight had a School Head as a mentor.

Brown (2012), Torres (2011), and Profit (2007) found that having a School Head as a mentor was an advantage to School Heads of color. While Brown (2012) noted that the majority of the School Heads of color in his study had a mentor who increased their social capital within the independent school community, Profit (2007) found that the African American independent School Heads in her study lacked a supportive mentor.

While this study found that the School Heads benefited from mentoring, this form of intense one-to-one support is not always readily available for aspiring African American independent School Heads (Profit, 2007; Torres, 2011). Perhaps this lack of mentorship is a key reason why there are only 30 African American independent School Heads, despite all the NAIS initiatives and fellowships. It is possible that more mentoring needs to occur within the independent schools and not through an outside institution or NAIS program.

Aspiring African American independent School Heads must do more than attend an NAIS-sponsored fellowship or graduate from an Ivy League institution; they must also fit into the independent school culture as an employee and be supported by the guidance and advocacy of another School Head. Future African American independent School Heads will have an advantage if they have attended an independent school and “are of that world” or “attended the colleges on that list,” as SH-D said. They also must “take care of their career with each move,” as SH-E stressed. And if an aspiring African American School Head has a mentor who is committed to that person’s development and success, this is an enormous advantage.
Graduates of independent schools represent 25% to 30% of all Ivy League students and are considered to be future leaders (Goode, 2010). Perhaps this is why few African Americans who become independent school students continue in academia. Most African American independent school alumni attend an Ivy League institution and then pursue an advanced degree leading toward a career in a high-paying profession like law, medicine, or business.

**Research Question 2: How does the race of African American independent School Heads contribute to their daily leadership?**

Kouzes and Posner (2007) defined the five practices of exemplary leadership. Their transformational perspective of leadership “enables leaders to get extraordinary things accomplished” (Northouse, 2013, p. 198). These five practices include: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. This leadership model is centered on the leader being credible and keeping their word.

Having a credible leader requires the followers to trust the leader. African American independent School Heads are authentic, collaborative leaders that practice a child-centered leadership style. As collaborators, these leaders made it a priority to empower others and support their subordinates by being consistent. African Americans are called to lead independent schools confidently and naturally; to lead schools where they can freely “be themselves” everyday. African Americans bring their culture to independent schools and thus influence the school community by providing another view, perspective, and insight. SH-G said, “I’m constantly thinking about the various ways in which my being an African American head of school has an influence on how I do the job”. Similarly, cultural background heavily influences leadership style (van Emmerik, Euwema, & Wendt, 2008). Ardichvili, Mitchell, and Jondle
(2009) found that people of color usually have a more nurturing, inclusive, dynamic, engaging, and inspiring leadership style. This style of leadership can be classified as transformational.

Being from an underrepresented group, African Americans lead with that sensitivity. Okozi, Smith, Clark, and Sherman (2009) found that ethnic minorities engage in a leadership style that is generally in direct opposition to the dominant white culture. This style includes an ability to connect with others in a meaningful manner that sets them apart from leaders in the dominant culture. SH-F said:

I can tell you now that I was probably discounted many times because of race and ethnicity … those kind of memories leave a painful but real kinda scar on you that you remember and affect the way that you lead.

Historical and modern-day racism and discrimination have played a major role in shaping the leadership style of ethnic minorities. The long history of intergenerational trauma seems to unconsciously shape the way in which ethnic minority leaders view and interact with the world; these experiences help to create a leadership style that is genuine and participatory in nature, with clearly defined goals and objectives. “Ethnic minority leadership style is different from White leadership style, and has been shown to have a positive impact on those they lead, specifically in regard to the interpersonal skills used to communicate and interact with subordinates” (Okozi et al., 2009, pp. vii-viii).

**Implications for Future Research**

The racial disparity in independent School Heads continues despite NAIS initiatives (Profit, 2007; Torres, 2011; Brown, 2012). This study found that race is a factor influencing the appointment and daily leadership of African American School Heads. It is clear that something needs to change if these numbers are to rise in the future.
With regard to the impact of race on appointment decisions, it would be beneficial to explore who is in the pipeline and on the path to becoming future African American independent School Heads. Interviewing aspiring School Heads in various leadership programs (e.g., the NAIS Aspiring Heads program, Columbia University’s Klingstein research program, and NAIS’s PoCC) may provide further insight into this disparity. More specifically, future research could investigate how these aspiring African American independent School Heads ascend in the independent school pipeline. Another potential exploration could involve interviewing current African American Assistant Heads of Independent School to investigate their leadership journey as well as their plans for the School Head position. Lastly, interviewing African American alumni of independent schools might provide insight into why they did or did not choose to pursue a career in an independent school.

With regard to the second research question, on the daily leadership styles of African American independent School Heads, the results from this study indicate that these School Heads are authentic, collaborative, empowering, hard-working, and child-centered leaders. Future research could investigate the factors contributing to these common leadership characteristics by exploring how the African American experience affects and influences the leadership style of School Heads.

**Implications for Education**

There is a growing demand for aspiring independent School Heads. Many of today’s School Heads will retire in the next 10 years (Brown, 2012; Torres, 2011), providing a greater number of opportunities for African Americans to take on this leadership role. Having more African American independent School Heads would not only diversify independent school leadership, but would also provide independent schools with an added dimension of culture and
community. African Americans in independent schools bring their culture and community with them to the campus (Hasberry, 2013). With more African American School Heads, the independent school pipeline mechanism would be strengthened, since more African American School Heads would be available to mentor aspiring African American leaders.

Black students from independent schools are amassing a similar track record of achievement and influence. … Growing numbers of Black students identified as gifted, talented, and possessing leadership potential are passing through the doors of independent schools and predominantly White colleges. In their passage, they gain access to current and future power brokers in political circles and corporate suites. They will either choose to negotiate the future of the Black community or, in choosing not to, will deflect that responsibility elsewhere. (Franklin, 1988, p. 30)

By selecting more African American independent School Heads, independent schools would be fulfilling their mission and commitment to “create a more diverse pool of candidates that will include more women, people of color, and those from other underrepresented groups” (Torres, 2011, pp. 11-12).

**Conclusion**

This study has aimed to understand the influences of race on the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. While race did influence the appointments, it mainly contributed to these School Heads gaining access to the independent school pipeline and having the support as they moved up the ranks. Seven of the eight School Heads in this study were traditional candidates in the independent school pipeline and worked their way up the ladder in independent schools, beginning as teachers. Prior to this, each of the School Heads received a high-quality education by attending an independent school, suburban
public school, Catholic school, or Ivy League institution in predominately white environments. While in the pipeline, the School Heads benefited from the mentoring of a School Head who promoted them along their career.

If independent schools truly desire to see more African American independent School Heads selected, perhaps their school boards should mandate that School Heads recruit and mentor aspiring African Americans so that there are more candidates of color who have the traditional “look” that results from being in the independent school pipeline.
References


Brown, A. C. (2012). *Color, capital, and the climb to the headship: The impact of social capital*
on people of color when applying to become a head of an independent school (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 1101850667).


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Report of Action: Approval

Review Date: January 26, 2015
IRB Protocol ID: IRB-15-01-TG-014
Project Title: The Influence of Race on the Appointment and Daily Leadership of African-American Independent School Heads
Investigator: Tia Gusya
School/Department: OSE/ELAP

Review Type: New □ Continuing □ Date of Last Review: _______ Expiration date: _______
Amendment □ Study closure □

Category: □ Exempt Category __________
☑ Expedited Category 7
□ Full Board Meeting Date: _______

IRB Action: □ Approved Date of Approval 01/26/2015

Your protocol dated 01/14/2015 has been approved for 12 months and expires on 01/25/2016

- Multiple year projects require continuing review. It is the responsibility of the researcher(s) to submit an IRB continuation protocol at least one month prior to the end of the approved period.
- Investigators are responsible for submitting amendments to the IRB for any changes to the research protocol, including changes to the research design, documents, staffing, procedures or recruitment. These changes require IRB approval before being introduced.
- If there are any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others or any complaints about the research that occurs during the period of approval, please contact the Office of the IRB immediately at (718) 817-0876 or by email at irb@fordham.edu.
- The investigator(s) identified above are required to retain an IRB protocol file, including a record of IRB-related activity, data summaries and consent forms. This file is to be made available for review for internal procedural (audit) monitoring.
APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM
THE INFLUENCE OF RACE ON THE APPOINTMENT AND DAILY LEADERSHIP
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL HEADS

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study about how race influences the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent School Heads. The goal of this qualitative research study is to answer the following research questions:

1. What role does race, specifically being African American, play in the hiring of African American independent School Heads?
2. How does the race of African American independent School Heads contribute to their daily leadership?

This study is being conducted by Tia Gueye, a graduate student in the Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy EdD program at Fordham University. She is funding this study herself.

There are two qualifications to participate in this study: being (1) African American and (2) an independent School Head.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you would be interviewed for about two hours via phone or Skype. The interview includes questions about your academic background, work experiences, the hiring process that led to your headship appointment, and your leadership style. A follow-up interview may be requested and again, the duration would be about two hours via Skype or phone. The researcher will also share the findings with each Head for verification purposes.

Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us learn about the hiring process and leadership style of African American independent School Heads. You may find answering some of the questions upsetting, but we expect that this would not be different from the kinds of things you discuss with family or friends. You may skip any questions you don’t want to answer and you may end the interview at any time.

The information you will share with us if you participate in this study will be kept completely confidential to the full extent of the law. Your information will be assigned a code number that is unique to this study. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in the Study Director’s office and only the Study Director will be able to see the list or the interview you participated in. No one except the Study Director will be able to see your interview or even know whether you participated in this study. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list linking participant’s names to study numbers will be destroyed. Study findings will be presented only in summary form; neither your name nor the school you represent will be used in any report.
There are no anticipated risks associated with the participation in this study. Because of the small sample size, it is possible that a participant could be identified if responses are associated with certain demographic information or other unique responses. To ensure that this does not happen, all names (including school names) will be fictionalized; location and other identifying variables will also be fictionalized.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Tia Gueye, (212) 920-6778, tia.gueye@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Michele Kuchera, IRB Manager, Fordham University Institutional Review Board (718-817-0876 or IRB@Fordham.edu).
APPENDIX C
GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Experience and behavior questions
1. If I followed you through a typical day as school head, what would I see you doing?
2. What experiences would I observe you having?

Opinion and values questions
1. What is your opinion of your daily leadership?
2. Describe your leadership style.
3. What do you value most in a leader? How do you show this?
4. What do you think about (your opinion) on the hiring process that led to your headship?

Feeling questions
1. What is it about you that led to you becoming head of school?
2. How do you feel as a school head?
3. How do you feel as an African American school head?

Knowledge questions
1. How did you become a school head?
2. Describe your background from birth to high school.
3. Describe your background from high school to work.
4. Describe the interview and hiring process that led to your appointment.

Sensory questions
1. What do you see when you face your school board?
2. What do you see when you lead a faculty meeting?
3. What do you see when you lead an all-school assembly?
4. What do you see when you speak at graduation?

Demographic questions
1. Age, gender, race
2. Place of residence, home/apartment/condo/etc.
3. Educational background/years
4. Work experience/years

Concluding questions
I’ve asked all the questions I had for this interview. Is there anything that you care to add? Are there any questions I didn’t ask that you think I should have? If so, what are they?