LET THEM SPEAK!: VOICES OF URBAN BLACK HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES IN SAN BERNARDINO CALIFORNIA

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LET THEM SPEAK!: VOICES OF URBAN BLACK HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
IN SAN BERNARDINO CALIFORNIA

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Luquanda Hawkins
June 2019
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Approved by:

Marita Mahoney, Committee Chair, Education

Susan Jindra, Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined Urban Black high school students’ pathways to academic success through their own voices. Three research questions were explored: (a) What are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors, (b) what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, and (c) what coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges?

Eight female Urban Black high school graduates from San Bernardino, California were interviewed. Data analysis resulted in 143 meaning units that were subsequently grouped into 40 emergent themes that were then organized into 7 supraordinate themes (relentlessly pursuing success, receiving support from others, creating a conducive environment for graduating, practicing self-care, stress in the home, lack of others’ support, and teacher-based racism) and five categories (reasons for success, obstacles to success, experiences of racism, advice to students, and advice to administration).

Results were organized into five categories: reasons for success, obstacles to success, experiences of racism, advice to students, and advice to administration. Results suggested Urban Black high school graduates achieved academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors is to identify and focus on their goals, circumventing what obstacles they could and cognitively and emotionally coping with what they could not. Participants primarily
relied upon family members, community members, school staff, and college-bound programs as support mechanisms. Participants described employing coping mechanisms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies that enhanced their focus on the goal, reduced their stress, helped them avoid distraction, and promoted their achievement of the goal. These strategies indicated that the students possessed grit and a growth mindset.

This study’s findings only partially supported CRT and STT literature. More study using different methods is needed to further examine the nature of racism and stereotyping experienced by urban Black youth in contemporary school systems. Longitudinal research also may be helpful for revealing the challenges, racism, and stereotypes students experience as they happen, along with the sensemaking, coping strategies, and support mechanisms they employ to persist through to completion.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In 1960, the Civil Rights Movement was ignited by youth and student protestors (Anderson, 2015). However, many individuals are not aware that significant moments involved younger Black students who led the forefront to tackle disparities and systemic factors in the educational system (Anderson, 2015). Malcolm (1964) emphasized Blacks were not fighting for integration or separation but to be recognized as human beings, which were greater than civil rights.

Although youth engagement is increasing, adults remain unable to view adolescents as equal cohorts in the decision-making processes that involve them, instead, they want them to grow up (Anderson, 2015). High school students’ autonomy, opinions, desires, and their longing to participate are a critical component of the student voice and schools that participate in the process have greater success in their students. “The student-voice movement is mobilizing around the sense that students are ignored as active agents of their own destiny” (Anderson, 2015, p. 7).

Grant and Dieker (2010) found voices of Black male students were rarely heard related to their viewpoints on education. This statement can easily include Black female students as well since there is minimal literature found in the subject. The exclusion of Black student voices and opinions is a cause for
concern since teachers miss vital aspects, which can improve the educational system for the students (Grant & Dieker, 2010).

Background of the Problem

The gap regarding the academic achievement from the high school student’s voice perspective living in poor cities has not been a prominent focus of today’s literature. A deeper understanding of why the gap exists could illuminate many of the causes and bring us closer to a solution. As educators, we should be concerned with Urban Black students academically struggling in many school districts within California. One must discuss this subject understanding that all Black students do not fit in a one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, high school urban children’s struggles and challenges must be viewed as separate entities with their unique needs.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the social movement started a new thinking suggesting younger individuals had viewpoints to share with educationalists and teachers (Buckley, Skiba, Dennis, Martinez, & Wong, 2016; Levin, 2000; Rudduck, 2007). The movement, according to Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, and Maczuga (2016), revealed higher achievement gaps occurred possibly to the lack of opportunities. Urban Black students growing up as minorities in a multicultural society experience the lack of support on many occasions. Through this descriptive, cross-sectional, exploratory, qualitative study, the social factors of
Urban Black students in Southern California located in San Bernardino school district will be examined to expose areas for change.

Statement of the Problem

There is a problem in the K-12 schooling system as it pertains to the academic achievement gap between Black and White students (Rowley & Wright, 2011). The last Star Test results for the San Bernardino City Unified School District showed that approximately 72% of district’s African American students in grades 2–11 scored below the proficiency level in English Language Arts, while 64% scored below proficiency in Math (San Bernardino City Unified School District, 2018). Despite the preponderance of research and programs created for the specific purpose of preparing Urban Black students for college, the population of Black college-ready students continues to dwindle (Camera, 2016). White students seem to excel in all area academic areas, and the achievement records of both groups are widening (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Academic achievement is associated with job security, permanent employment, and self-sufficiency (Mocombe, 2012).

The problem has negatively impacted the Black community, as unemployment, low job security, financial constraints, and shrinking economic opportunities result in increased incidence of poverty (Mcloyd, 1990). Many Black individuals lose hope and turn to crime, which can be seen as violent
acting out of the hopelessness they face daily (Bolland, Lian, & Formichella, 2005). This study, which examined the experiences of Urban Black students who succeeded, despite adversity, in graduating from high school, will provide insights and inspiration to Black students and those who want to support them in achieving academic success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine Urban Black high school students’ the social factors to academic success through their own voices. In order to understand how Urban Black students may be support in attaining success academically and enjoy the resulting occupational and lifelong benefits of doing so, it is critical to revisit the history of the Black educational experience. The research within the past 10 years illustrates a decline in the number of Urban Black students prepared for college. Black students have some of the lowest test scores, the lowest high school graduation rates, and the highest expulsion and referral rates in most of our urban schools in Southern California (Rowley & Wright, 2011).
Research Questions

1. What are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors?

2. What support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success?

3. What coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges?

Theoretical Framework/Underpinnings

The theoretical framework in this study is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) along with a variety of other factors to develop into a well-formed background. Critical race theory begins from the notion that racism is normal in American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It departs from the mainstream legal scholarship by sometimes employing storytelling criticizing liberalism and arguing that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Farley, 1997). CRT creates the relevance involved on this issue and outlines factors that have caused the academic deficiencies among Urban Black students. Without CRT, most of the concern surrounding this topic would be perceived as emotionalism and feelings unsubstantiated. Definitions central to this study are presented in Table 1.
Table 1

Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>A person from Black African descent. In this study the term pertains to Black Americans, Caribbean, West-Indians, and Africans.</td>
<td>(Merriam Webster, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>A term initially used to describe and evaluate the inequality in education. The theory was derived from the works of D. Bell and A. Freeman, who were dissatisfied with the slower pace of racial reform in United States</td>
<td>(Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement Gap</td>
<td>The difference in one’s academic performance between racial groups. Differences can also be noted in a student's potential and their actual achievement</td>
<td>(U.S. Department of Education, 2017; SEDL, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype Threat</td>
<td>A danger perceived by a stigmatized or marginalized group, which has a confirmed negative label about themselves or individuals in their group</td>
<td>(Kellow &amp; Jones, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Voice</td>
<td>A term used in the educational arena, which refers to the opinions, values, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of individual or groups of students in a school</td>
<td>(The Glossary of Education, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban students</td>
<td>individuals who live in densely populated cities where the schools are characterized by large ethnic populations, lower-economic, budget deficits, and political mayhem.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The assumptions in this study include the chosen methodology is the best likely tool to solve the research problems related to the student voice and academic achievement gap of Urban Black high school students. A second assumption is based on Creswell (2017) epistemological theory that the researcher will be involved with the participants being studied. The subjective information will be formulated on the participants view from the research conducted (Creswell, 2017). The final assumption, the students involved in the study will be forthright and honest in their responses related by the subject and questions asked.

Three limitations of the study should be noted. First is the use of cross-sectional versus longitudinal design. A longitudinal design would have enabled the researcher to identify factors that preceded and may have a causal effect upon the results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The second limitation included generalization from the findings cannot be offered since the study occurred in one high school located in a lower economic area of San Bernardino, California. The degree of similarity between the students limits the generality to the results to other populations. The third limitation is the principal researcher’s role as a teacher at the participating school. Specifically, the researcher has biases and perceptions of her own regarding how urban Black students are treated, and this influenced her as conducted the researcher.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic review was performed to understand examine research, theory, and case studies about Urban Black students’ pathways to academic success—particularly as it pertained to their experiences of racism, support systems, and coping mechanisms. Although the articles reviewed included these topics, less than 1% was related to the student voice of Black high school youth and their perceptions. The inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed studies written or conducted within the past 10 years, focused on Urban Black students’ pathways to academic success, and included voices of male or female Black students. Exclusion criteria were studies 11 years or older, studies from countries outside of the United States (U.S.), studies on non-Black students, and studies published in non-English languages. For this research study, 100 articles met the criteria of Urban Black students; however, 30 articles met further criteria measures. Research that focused on student voices, stereotype threat, critical race theory, and grounded theory were included in this study.

Introduction (Statement of the Problem)

A problem currently exists within the K-12 educational system. The problem in question is the academic achievement gap between Black and White high school students. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the Southern
California Urban city school system. Rowley and Wright (2011) found discrepancies in the grade point average (GPA), suspension and expulsion rates, and graduation rates of Urban Black students in a large Southern California city. Urban Black students in approximately 50% of cases had higher suspension and expulsion rates and were found to have 35–50% lower GPA and graduation rates than White students. “The academic achievement gap between White and black students has barely narrowed over the last 50 years, despite nearly a half of a century of supposed progress in race relations and an increased emphasis on closing such academic achievement discrepancies between groups of students” (Camera, 2016, p. 1).

Let Them Speak

Conley (1999) found a decline in percentages in academic performance, K-12 program performance, and the number of high school graduates entering college for Urban Black students. The problem of poor academic performance has negatively impacted the Black community, financially reinforcing their status of being below or close to the poverty level with high rates of unemployment (Conley, 1999). The current study will bring to the forefront voice of Urban Black high school graduates. We can learn from these successful students and provide a road map for all students to overcome various difficulties, so they experience successes. A qualitative study gives voice to Urban Black high school graduates.
who overcame psychosocial impediments and identify how they were successful. This insight would provide information on how to support Urban Black students. The purpose of this study allows Urban Black high school graduates to tell their own stories about their successes, failures, and the greatest impact on achieving the goal of becoming a high school graduate.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations for the present study are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Stereotype Threat theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT will assist in interpreting the experiences of Urban Black high school graduates from the perspective that discrimination is normal in American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT departs from the mainstream legal scholarship by employing storytelling critiquing liberalism and arguing Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Farley, 1997). CRT creates the unique perspective supporting such factors (relating to the psychosocial impediments of Urban Black students) history of illiteracy, extreme levels of poverty and an academic achievement gap. These factors are associated with academic deficiencies among Urban Black students. CRT provides a framework to understand the expressions of the concern surrounding Urban Black students, which otherwise would be perceived as emotional with unsubstantiated feelings. CRT is a framework to interpret evidence, experiences, to uncover the effects of racism and the damage endured by the Black culture and Black students.
CRT is a theoretical framework developed in the social sciences utilizing the theory to scrutinize society and culture in relation to race, law, and power (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The movement began in American law schools in the late 1980s reworking the critical legal racial studies. The theory suggest that White supremacy and racist influences have been illuminated overtime and that certain laws have played a role in the process. Today, CRT is taught in the areas of education, medical, political science, and women’s and ethnic studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Kellow and Jones (2008) explored the stereotype threat of African American students during test taking using mathematical reasoning. This 2008 study replicated a previous Kellow and Jones (2005) study that used an investigative versus the quasi-experimental approach. The cross-sectional, quantitative study was conducted to investigate experiences students felt while taking a high-stakes test, which was a predictor of success related to the academic achievement gap. A purposive sample of 101 high school freshmen students participated in the study (Blacks 42%). Stereotype threat was assessed with four potential mediators: (a) one’s perception of their ability and expectancy for success; (b) achievement goal orientation; (c) anxiety; and, (d) one’s perceptions of a stereotype threat. Participants answered 27.8 out of 50 questions. The fact that only 16.7 items were successfully answered out of 50 supports the argument of
the debilitating effects of stereotype threat involved when prompted by thought provoking tasks.

*Stereotype Threat* is a situational predicament where individuals believe they are at risk to conform to the stereotypes related to their ethnic group; this threat decreases an individual's academic performance by decreasing their self-efficacy, thereby, impeding the development of a growth mindset (Steele & Aronson, 1995). If negative stereotypes are existing related to a particular group, group members are likely to show increased anxiety of their performance. More importantly, anxiety will not allow them to achieve at the optimal level. It is significant for one to understand an individual does not need to contribute to the stereotyping for the process to be activated; the anxiety mechanism decreased one’s performance by diminishing working memory.

*Stereotype Threat* is the perceived stigmatized collection of experiences within a group or race of people, which affects their performance directly or indirectly, confirming undesirable information related to themselves and members of their race/group (Kellow & Jones, 2008). *Stereotype Threat*, representing deep-seated negative expectations, is a byproduct of *Stereotyping* contributing to the gap accompanying the results of standardized exams usually completed during the 10th or 11th grade year (Steele & Aronson, 1995). *Stereotype Threat* is an appropriate theoretical framework in the present study as it identifies psychological mechanisms of stressors congesting the learning process, which
delays Black students and furthers their academic achievement failure (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013). Kellow and Jones (2008) included facts about stereotype threat from the Ployhart, Ziegert, and McFarland (2003) study. Stereotype threat may influence each student differently, however, the inhibiting results are the same (Kellow & Jones, 2005).

Problem Context: American Blacks’ Education Experience

Dubois and Edwards (2008) famously stated:

Merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the negro problem, and the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this land of their fathers' father, and in the name of human opportunity. (p. 1)

Laws Against Educating Blacks. DuBois and Edwards (2008) emphasized the overall struggle of Black people and laid the groundwork for understanding the plight of the Urban Black student. This plight began in America after slavery as laws supported racist acts of prohibiting the education of Black people. A statute passed in North Carolina 1830 during the slavery era stated that Blacks were not permitted to learn reading or writing (Pathways to Freedom, 2017). During this time, anyone caught teaching a slave to read or write was punished
(Woods, 2003). Hence, Black families relied on religious institutions, churches, and their families for knowledge (Roberts, 1980).

**Emancipation Proclamation.** Toward the ending of the Civil War (1861-1865), President Abraham Lincoln signed an executive order, the Emancipation Proclamation bill, which declared freedom for all slaves (Sandburg, 1936). The bill required the military to enforce slaves’ freedom and receive former slaves into the military (Bill of Rights Institute, 2017). In 1863, Colyer, an army chaplain, opened the first school for freed slaves to prepare them educationally for life after the Civil War (Renfer & Sandifer, 2017). Many White soldiers volunteered their free time to teach former slaves how to read and write. A ripple effect was created; children learned from their teachers, while older family members learned from the children. The classrooms had different generations learning to read for the first time. The struggles to receive higher education continued as Blacks were not permitted to attend White schools, therefore, having to fight to receive a quality education (Dubois & Edwards, 2008; King, Davis, & Brown, 2012).

**Segregation.** In 1954, the verdict of Brown vs. Board of Education declared segregation in schools was unconstitutional allowing Blacks to attend White schools (Warren, 1954). The decision did not completely offer desegregation within the public-school system. However, it did place the U.S. Constitution on the side of racial equality and propelled the Civil Rights Movement into quick action (McBride, 2006). Although the law was in place,
Blacks continued to experience challenges within the educational system. Whites and White school administrators resisted acceptance of Blacks to receive equal education as Whites grappled with issues pertaining to race and ethnicity (Thompson, 2004). Black students found it difficult to discover their place within the White educational system while experiencing the indifferences of feeling left out of a system not created with them in mind (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Racial Inequality in Education

**The Gap in Progress.** Racial inequality in education is associated with a significant gap between the academic achievement of Black and White students. Black students scored 50% less on standardized testing in Mathematics and Language Arts than other ethnic groups (Jencks & Phillips, 2011). In comparison to White students, Black students had inferior grade point averages (a letter or two grade levels below) and entered college at lesser rates; the sample space in the Jencks and Phillips (2011) study was 4,051 Blacks in 1964, as well as 7,362 in 1993 along with 5,022 Whites in 1964 and 1,842 in 1993. Jencks and Phillips found lower standardized test scores and grade point averages were related to deficient scores at entry-level grades in English and Mathematics of Black students, up to 30% to 40% lower in point value on entrance exams than White students.

**Math, Reading, Standardized Testing and API.** Carver (1975) found in mathematics and reading the average Black student in the 12th grade placed in
the 13th percentile in mathematics and reading. Approximately 87% of average White students in the 12th grade scored at least 30% higher than the average Black 12th grader in 50% or more of their classes and/or standards-based exams. Fifty years later, this academic achievement gap has barely narrowed as evidenced by Hanushek’s analysis who advocated using economic analysis in order to improve student performance (Barton & Coley, 2010). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2013) the average 12th grade Black student placed in the 19th percentile on standardized tests (mathematics and reading); on average the 12th grade White student placed in a higher percentile on all coursework/standards-based tests overall than Black students.

In reading, after half a century, the academic achievement gap improved slightly for the lowest scoring student, as the median Black student scores remained in the 22nd percentile (Camera, 2016). NCLB Act (2001) was designed to require all schools to provide a quality education regardless of a students’ demographics or academic abilities. If the school failed to accomplish adequate yearly progress, as measured by the Academic Performance Index (API), parents could remove their children and place them in another school. The API used a rubric to measure whether schools reached their goals to promote academic achievement for all students in every demographic group. API scores usually ranged from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. Over 80% of Urban Black
students attended schools with API scores resembling that of struggling schools (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Steele and Aronson (1995) discussed the inclusion of Black students in standardized testing. In specifics, this process shined a light on the deficient skill level of Blacks without providing any background of the issue and/or a support plan to remedy the problem. The purpose of standardized testing is to evaluate the mastery of a particular subject area students have obtained in hopes of providing support thus strengthening their academic weaknesses. However, standardized testing has highlighted the low academic achievement of Black students, thus furthering negative stereotypes, which have influenced Black students’ viewpoints of themselves. Diversity means an inclusion of cultural backgrounds addressing the specific needs of the students. Cultural inclusion necessitates the creation of systems that meet similar needs across all individuals. These systems would support the needs of each population, while discouraging the promotion of standardized testing which emphasizes cultural differences. White students scored higher than African American students, particularly when informed that their test performance was indicative of their testing statewide. Furthermore, results showed Black students were at a disadvantage in relation to their knowledge and skills during high-stake standardized testing. Black students discussed shame in their performance in comparison to White students in the same testing environment. The definition of
a stereotype threat is a perceived stigmatized collection of experiences by a group, which affects their performance directly or indirectly.

**Historical Accounts.** Historical accounts have been consistent in finding the vast academic achievement gap between Black and White students (Noguera, 2012; Rowley & Wright, 2011). The reasons for lower performance on academic achievement measured by Black students include psychosocial impediments of slavery that created a generational ripple effect of poverty, illiteracy, and destruction of the familial structure (Noguera, 2012). Rowley and Wright (2011) set the groundwork for the discussion on the causes of the academic achievement gap and how psychosocial impediments are associated with the lack of academic achievement in the lives of Urban Black students.

**Blacks Left Behind**

Black students had to overcome insurmountable odds in the fight for justice and equality. Although Blacks have progressed in reading, the devastating effects of such injustice such as discrimination, segregation, and racism have yielded years of doubt in self-worth, self-image, and self-respect (Dubois & Edwards, 2008; King, Davis, & Brown, 2012). In reference to non-tenured and untrained teachers, it has been my experience of over 27 years in education to witness this population of educators highly represented in poor, urban areas where many of our struggling Black students reside and are educated. Inexperienced teachers serving this population of Urban Black students is a
detrimental factor due to the preexisting psychosocial impediments such as stereotype threat, systemic academic achievement gap, poverty, etc., imbedded from slavery.

NCLB. A broader examination of the NLCB Act implicated need for higher employment averages globally among African American Black males was needed (Paul, 2004); there were deficiencies in the area of employment readiness skills. An investigative report, from Paul, found discrepancies between federal education policies and necessary skill requirements for the workplace allowed for an understanding about the quality of education Black male students were most likely to receive. African American male students received a sub-par education that did not meet the educational policy requirements nor provide them with essential workplace skills (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008). 20 to 50% of the time Urban Black students had a disproportionally higher rate of non-tenured, inexperienced teachers, were disciplined more frequently (e.g., receive higher rates of referrals, detentions, suspensions, etc.), and had higher referrals to special-education programs than White students (Donnor & Shockley, 2010).

Although the NCLB (2001) addressed greater opportunities for academic success in low-income communities, other factors comprise the necessary steps for a student to achieve higher accomplishments. Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated family involvement, a student’s attitude toward school, lower dropout
rates, and community support related to education was crucial for a student’s development and willingness to succeed. Families who were involved in their children’s learning process created an environment for them to excel regardless of economic status, ethnic background or parental education levels (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). Past experiences, cultural differences, racial status, and identity influence one’s potential academic achievement and directly related to academic potential and achievement (Taubman, 1989). Society’s perception and opinion of Urban Black students have influenced their self-perceptions and expectations.

Achievement Gap. Taubman (1989) analyzed the associations between psychosocial factors (e.g., poverty, being an Urban Black student, stereotype threat, etc.) and the academic achievement gap. The psychosocial factors influenced the academic achievement gap by producing lower performance scores as measured by standardized test scores, student performance, school environment factors, and the role as the teacher (Jencks & Phillips, 2011). Many Black students are taught by lower quality teachers and do not attend high-performing schools (Rowley & Wright, 2001). Poverty and one’s socioeconomic level dictated housing and neighborhoods, which resulted in inferior academic performance by Black students than White students within the range of 20 to 50% lower in numerous cases (Riegle-Crumb & Grodsky, 2010).
Impediments. The impediment of academic achievement of the Urban Black student is partially attributed to discrimination and poverty (external forces) and self-perception (an internal force), which persists to keep oneself marginalized. These students are vulnerable to the widening academic achievement gap and the psychosocial impediments they face. Unfortunately, discrimination endures, despite government policies designed to solve the issue. Self-perceptions and beliefs (internal factors) are initially shaped by the outside factors (discrimination) in early development. It has been theorized, by Thompson (2004), that individuals become less reliant on external messages and more on internal views as one matures; no assumption is made that all messages are either all positive or all negative. One must understand this movement from external to internal messages is not always possible or achieved. Racial Inequality has, at its roots, many layers that makeup its foundation. The academic achievement gap between Black and White student performance, the psychosocial impediments, struggles of Black students, as well as the NCLB practices, are just a few leaves on this tree of indifference. Letting Urban Black students speak about their triumphs and pitfalls in their journey towards success is the missing link in this conversation.

The term “academic achievement gap” conjures up lively conversations with academic professionals, politicians, and parents in Southern California. It refers to the “disparities in standardized test scores between Latino and White students,
recent immigrant and White students and Black-and-White students” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.1). The federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB, 2001) act mandated each state to collect and report on academic achievement and test scores and disaggregate these results using race, demographic, and educational characteristics.

Annual results were to show how schools were performing and progressing toward meeting proficiency goals. The goal of NCLB was to guarantee all students progressed at an acceptable rate, with the results reported according to “poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency” (PBS SoCal, 2014, p. 1). Kamenetz (2014) found proficiency rates in reading and mathematics were below 50% for every non-White racial and ethnic group, except for Asians. These findings publicly exposed the academic achievement gap between Black and White students (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2008).

One of the most common phrases used in today’s education literature is the “academic achievement gap” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to Ladson-Billings (2006), this term refers to testing disparities between Blacks and other minorities in referenced standardized test scores. The term academic achievement gap is used by individuals from both ends of the political spectrum who argue over its meaning or importance. According to the National Governors’ Association, the academic achievement gap is “a matter of class and race”
(Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). Across the United States (U.S.) the academic achievement gap persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their White counterparts; becoming one of the most pressing educational policy challenges states currently face (Johnston, 2011, p. 1).

For the past two to four decades, there has been a vast difference, as much as 50%, in the academic achievement of Black and White students (Rowley & Wright, 2011), with Black students scoring below their White student counterparts. This discrepancy in academic performance is not a recent phenomenon, as historically Black students were denied access to formal education in the United States (Dubois & Edwards, 2008). Mocombe (2012) found 46% of Black adults in comparison to 14% of White adults scored low on the National Adult Literacy survey, demonstrating Blacks had inadequate skills in understanding written information.

Dubois and Edwards (2008) described Black students as not finding their place in an educational system designed for White students. The making public of results from NCLB brought to the forefront an awareness of the widening of the academic achievement gap between Black and White students (Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013). The experiences of Urban Black students inside and outside of the classroom can give valuable insight into their academic achievement level deficiencies and the struggles they face (Thompson, 2004).
Standardized test performance is not always the best determinant of potential for college success (Thompson, 2004). However, standardized assessment results are used to determine college readiness (Concordia University, 2012). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for Urban Black students only 7% scored as proficient or higher in math and 17% scored as proficient or higher in reading; while their White counterparts had scored three times as much. These scores are a measurement of a student’s skill set according to their grade level (Camera, 2016). The discrepancy between Black and White student proficiency on standardized assessments further reinforces the academic achievement gap and can be discouraging for students looking forward to their high school graduation and college experience.

White Privilege and a Gap in Resources

In a description of the White family dynamic, Ullucci (2006) found 20% to 50% of White children have family support, financial security, live in neighborhoods with academically prepared teachers, and lower violence rates. Therefore, 50% to 80% of White children do not have as many distractions as Black children to overcome daily, which allows for greater academic opportunities for advancement given by their local schools (Case, 2007). I have experienced and witnessed a relationship between schools in Urban areas that are lacking in resources and financial capital, having some of the widest gaps in academic
achievement between Black students and those of other races. Schools with highly qualified teachers, who receive middle to high-income salaries, and that offer supportive supplemental resources are in predominately White areas (Williams, 2014). I have also witnessed the social-economic status (SES) of White people is much higher than that of Black people; which affords certain comforts, securities and luxuries that are not experienced in the life of an Urban Black student.

Most White people live in better areas, that lack ongoing crime and constant negative civic disturbances (Dubois & Edwards, 2008). They pay higher taxes and are afforded attendance in schools that have greater resources, seasoned teachers and high achieving programs. Whites do not experience negative stereotypes or stereotype threat as American society was shaped by their preferences, opinions, and way of life. White Americans have not experienced slavery and do not have to contend with the haunting history that frames the existence of those once enslaved. In the U.S., White is the acceptable and celebrated race. White people are in power, and have not been beaten down by society and made to think their existence, and the color of their skin is shameful, cursed, and beneath others. In my professional opinion grounded in twenty-seven years of service in this field, it seems as though, the U.S. education system was designed with Whites in mind (unlike the Black culture, they are not normally denied access), standardized tests trends are normed on Whites, etc.
Student Debt

Student debt has connections to the academic achievement gap between Black and White students; a double jeopardy of academic pressures and financial hardship (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Although this issue tends to be associated with higher education, gaps in academic achievement impact students long after high school. In a qualitative study of Urban Black students, Ladson-Billings found public concern regarding the increased level of student debt and racial disparities were associated. The psychosocial impediments of the Urban Black student (Stereotype Threat, Academic achievement gap, Poverty and the Historical Plight of the Black student) have resulted in the increasing dropout rate, non-graduation rate, and non-college entry rate among Urban Black student.

Goldrick-Rab, Kelchen, and Houle (2014) found twice as many Black students borrowed money and received student loans to pay their college fees than other racial groups for the same academic degrees. The higher student loan rates for Black students is due to their greater financial need, lower credit ratings and higher debt to ratio levels. Concern increases as Black student borrowers are twice as likely than White student borrowers to drop out of college or university without completing their degree (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016). Ladson-Billings (2006) noted the national debt, and budget deficit had implications relating to the academic achievement gap as an accruing liability found within the
academic system; similar to the national debt, this academic achievement gap is increasing with no solution insight to overturn its destructive effects.

There are issues of inequality within the framework of the United States educational system and the academic achievement gap. An example provided by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2014) stated racial disparity occurred in families who need to borrow money for college. Black students are twice as dependent on access to student loans than White students, which will leave them with greater debt at the end. The consequences of a family’s inability to finance a Black student’s desire to finish or complete school without inheriting a financial burden themselves create the connection between the steady increase in the academic achievement gap and the national debt. Goldrick-Rab et al.’s research supports the viewpoint that there is a direct relationship between having money or debt and academic scores. Parents who have the ability to pay for college for their children, removes the stress from the student of accruing debt, thus opening the door for academic success. In addition, a lack of money or high debt is a mediator of academic failure or success; it is found to actually produce failure.

Community Impact

As a professional educator who has worked for 27 years directly with Black high school students, my experiences reflect the research findings of common themes which impede Black student success. The themes focused on in this study include: negative self-talk; and, stereotype threat. Negative self-talk results
from systemic factors of poverty. Stereotype threat is the belief that one is judged for and acts out negative cultural societal beliefs and there is no way to overcome negative preconceived stereotypes. Although a lack of proficiency on standardized assessments does not determine success or failure as a student, it is related to a negative impact on Black communities. Dubois and Edwards (2008) described how the relationship between a lack of academic proficiency and a negative community impact shaped the negative self-talk and mindsets in Black students. A lack of academic proficiency negatively affects the Black community with a lack of job placement and opportunities for advancement, resulting in a cycle of helplessness and a continuation of poverty.

Poor performance on standardized assessment tests resulted from factors associated with inequality (Reeves & Halikias, 2017). A few of these factors include an increase in poverty, lack of job placement, financial freedom, and economic opportunities (Camera, 2016). These factors greatly impact Urban Black communities in the Inland Empire region of California. To assist Urban Black communities, we must listen to the voices of its’ students. Hearing the voices of Urban Black students who have experienced the success of graduating from high school despite numerous psychosocial impediments will add rich commentary to the body of research in the area of student voice.
Context/Focus of Study

Residue from Slavery. Psychological stressors and poverty. It may be perceived that economically challenged Urban Blacks have lost a respect for lawful existing, resorted to lives of crime, and frequently act out in waves of violence leaving the cities in which they live in under deprived conditions (Basch, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This statement is an example of negative stereotypes that reinforce and support the stereotype threat theory. Leonard et al. (2015) found 128 eleventh-grade students who dealt with chronic stress experienced lower academic performance. Evan and Kim (2013) in their study with Urban Black students found chronic negative impacts of stereotype threat were associated with the academic achievement gap. Participants experienced challenges in self-regulating and developing coping strategies(such as obtaining Grit, Growth Mindset and Self Efficacy) to deal with psychosocial stressors such as academic achievement gap, systemic poverty, and stereotype threat.

Lack of Identity. For Black students' high school experience to be scholastically successful, educators must listen. An Urban Black student without a sense of identity often lacks the fundamental tools to reach simple societal achievements such as shelter, employment, and educational opportunities (DuBois & Edwards, 2008). The actual test of the Black individual's struggle and spiritual incentive of freedom is related to the struggle of individuals whose emotional trauma is greater than their strength. This paraphrased statement of
powerful quote previously stated, refers to mental slavery as a state of mind where discerning between liberation and enslavement is twisted. Where one becomes trapped by misinformation about self and the world. Someone can claim to be conscious, read all the books, and recycle popular rhetoric; however, still be unable to balance real-world priorities and self-interest.

**Mental Slavery.** Mental Slavery is considered to be even more insidious than physical acts of slavery because the shackles of mental slavery, although not observable, tend to pass from one generation to another, enslaving parents, children, grandchildren, and their descendants (Dubois & Edwards, 2008). If slavery was merely a physical phenomenon, African people would have easily transcended the limitations of enslavement rather than succumb to the socioeconomic issues that universally beleaguered African people across nations and cultures. Instead, mental slavery, race-based institutionalized oppression, and other forms of discrimination have produced the telltale signs of dysfunction within the African diaspora, and these have infused each subsequent generation. Slavery’s lingering effects are deeply instilling the idea that being African means being less than equal, less than competent, and simply less than worthy. These core beliefs are accompanied and reinforced by additional ways of thinking that undermine African individuals’ growth and development. The experience of Black students is played out by the history of a race; Dubois and Edwards gave us
great insight, indicative of what to look for and to identify as the Black experience.

Class, Race and Prejudice. Black students in the United States (U.S.) continue to live through the struggles of their past, as stereotype threat theory suggests is a result of society’s ignorance born nearly 250 years ago. Many have not had opportunities to advance financially, excel academically, or mentally and emotionally expand beyond their neighborhood. The negative occurrences in the lives of Black individuals is the foundation for the opinion that there is a plague within this community (Gilborn, 2013). It seems in Urban Black families, as in other cultural groups, the adults frequently think, speak, and make decisions for youth without their input on pertinent issues specific to their situation (Foster, 1998). Adults would be surprised to find out just how valuable a contribution today’s student would make on relevant topics (Foster, 1998). The voices of Black students have been disregarded and not considered during decision-making, and implementing educational policies and strategies (Thompson, 2004).

The academic achievement gap, or education gap, between White students and their minority peers is an experience many American students encounter (Burke & Lander, 2010). The National Governor’s Association (2009) stated the academic achievement gap was associated with a certain class and race. By listening to Urban Black high school graduates, who were academically
successful despite systemic impediments, the present study will identify their perceptions on how the educational system addressed their needs.

**Blacks in Need of Support.** Black student experiences are dissimilar from Whites and must be considered when creating educational programs, projects, and systems to assist them (Thompson, 2004). According to Thompson (2004), Black students require more support, reassurance, and guidance as they matriculate through high school towards graduation. Thompson interviewed 175 educators who received information on Black and White students related to academic achievement. The findings indicated Black students thrived on relationships where a connection was made with school leadership, counselors, administrators, and teachers who supported them. Black students have wisdom regarding their personal experiences and the supports needed to assist them in overcoming psychosocial impediments.

Thompson’s (2004) study further emphasized it was unfair to evaluate Black students according to standards not developed specifically for them. Black students continue to struggle to succeed in an environment that is foreign to them (Dubois & Edwards, 2008). In many Black Urban households struggling in poverty, high school students do not have individuals who are scholastically advanced enough to help them with reading and comprehension of their materials (Thompson, 2004). Often, single-parent households are run by an individual working multiple shifts or longer hours during the day. In my
professional and personal experience, growing up in an Urban Black poverty saturated environment, these students may become ashamed of their parents’ lack of involvement that is sometimes translated as a lack of care or concern. A lack of parental involvement is associated with a lowered academic achievement rate which is associated with students withdrawing their efforts in school activities.

As an educator, this researcher has witnessed teachers making judgmental statements about Black students and treating them negatively. Teacher’s comments and perspectives can influence a student’s self-efficacy and perception about themselves; thereby, affecting self-esteem, grit and growth mindset (Thompson 2004). During the past decade, the researcher has witnessed high school teachers judging Black students’ lack of parental participation and academic support as a deficiency in their scholastic ability. Unfortunately, when parents do not collaborate with teachers or attend parent-teacher conferences, a disconnection between school and home life results. Thompson (2004) emphasized Black students live in shame diminishing their creativity and their ability to learn and focus. In my opinion, and one who was raised experiencing severe childhood trauma with several psychosocial impediments obstructing my academic achievement, I was determined to provide a different experience for my children. In observing my children’s successful middle-class upbringing and scholastic experiences, I learned a healthy student
life consists of peaceful living arrangements and a stress-free environment for studying.

Many researchers assert various psychosocial factors are related to academic achievement that can help African American students become high achievers (Strayhor, 2013; Yeager & Walton, 2011). Healthy relationships with supportive parents and siblings, mentoring and nurturing are requirements needed for greater academic achievement. Other factors for a healthy environment include mealtime used as an opportunity for positive dialogue between family members. Most Urban Black households, which do not have a family structure conducive to healthy student life, such as financial stability, two-parent household with a sharing of responsibilities, and crime-free neighborhoods, have difficulty producing scholastically prepared children (Thompson, 2004).

Let Them Speak. An allowance for student voice provides Urban Black students with opportunities to contribute in school decisions, which shapes, empowers and positively affects their lives (Mitra, 2006). The concept of student voice arose in the 1960s and 1970s, an era in which a new way of thinking suggested a young person had valuable knowledge to share (Buckley et al., 2016). Buckley et al. acknowledged the importance of student perspectives to allow educators the opportunity to improve their efforts on how to support students in a classroom setting. Recently, Rowley and Wright (2001), Ladson-
Billings (1998, 2006), Burke and Lander (2010), Barton and Coley (2010), Basch (2011), Noguera (2012), Johnson (2011), and Kellow and Jones (2008) addressed closing the academic achievement gap and identified psychosocial factors (e.g., poverty, stereotype threat, health implications, etc.) that impeded academic achievement of Urban Black students. However, none of these researchers provided an opportunity to hear the voices of Urban Black students. Therefore, there is a need to hear students’ perspectives on these issues.

President Obama’s administration focused on the country’s education, particularly on gender and racial disparities in college enrollment and success rates (Week, 2011). A goal of the Obama administration was for the United States (U.S.) to lead in the number of college graduates by 2020 globally, and to lead in the number of students who were college ready. The American Education Council’s (2008) report on minorities and higher education, found 38% of Black Americans’ obtained an associate degree, while 26% of Black Americans’ ages 25-37 years old obtained a bachelors’ degree. The significance of a Black individual receiving higher education is related to their ability to have substantially higher incomes, which affects the economic security of their families and communities (Week, 2011). This statement has even more implications for the Inland Empire Urban Black student as San Bernardino is the second poorest city in America (Gazzar, 2015).
Urban Black Students’ Perspectives

Dweck (2000) identified students need to have a *growth mindset*, meaning a belief that success comes from effort, versus a *fixed mindset*, which suggests that a person succeeds because he or she is born with intelligence or talent. Dweck stated the essence of successful individuals is their personal value in the area of effort. These individuals push forward when faced with obstacles and challenges, and help to uncover information about those students with a growth mindset.

Grit is a child’s persistence and desire to achieve long-term goals and is a better indicator of future earnings and happiness than intelligence or talent. Dixson, Roberson, and Worell’s (2017) study of 105 Black high school students found psychosocial constructs/impediments (grit, ethnic identity, other group orientation, and growth mindset, etc..) in reference to the success/failure of Black and African American students. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) used a brief self-reported informant report and version of the Grit scale that measured trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Four population samples engaged in a variety of challenging domains across the lifespan completed the scale: (a) the class of 2008 (n= 1,218) completed the Grit–O scale upon entering West Point, (b) the Cadet class of 2010 completed the Grit–O scale in June 2016, (c) a sample of finalists in the 2005 Scripps National Spelling Bee (n=175), and (d) 139 Ivy League undergraduates.
Urban Black high school students’ perspectives on how they were successful despite academic achievement gaps and psychosocial impediments that have been previously researched. However, this perspective has possible ties to psychosocial constructs such as stereotyping, and the complexities associated with culturally specific practices of Black students (Dixson et al., 2007; Kellow & Jones, 2008). No research studies related to Urban Black student voices from Southern California were found. Research studies that were available involved teachers’ perspectives of student voice and opportunities for changing their pedagogical method of teaching to address the needs of Urban Black student population. A value placed on student’s voice offset discriminatory educational practices and aid in socialization and learning while dialoguing in small groups (Johnson, 1991). This gap in research in reference to the absence of Urban Black student voice sheds the light on the need for school administrators, principals, teachers, and state legislators to listen to the voices of Urban Black students. We must “let them speak” on their behalf and learn from their perspectives.

While there is no formal definition of student voice, student voices (although not of Urban Black students) have been used to strengthen aspects of learning communities (Johnson, 1991). In this author’s professional opinion based on 27 years of educational experience, allowing a student to speak on their own behalf is a liberating experience. This powerful tool could prove to be empowering for
Urban Black students, affording them an opportunity to influence societal perspectives regarding his or her life’s journey (Johnson, 1991). The methodology used in Johnson’s study was a narrative and discourse theory suggesting student voices were more than mere verbalization. Instead, a student’s voice is ongoing discourse by which students understand themselves and the world in which they live. This voice is a conduit into their participation in a continuous dialogue of awareness as they take part in the learning process. Listening and learning from Urban Black high school graduates regarding their success despite numerous psychosocial impediments is imperative to understand how to support these students. The student’s voice has become a focus and seen as a viable tool for school reform.

Buckley et al.’s (2016) qualitative case study focused on the understanding of an urban student’s life, and factors involved in academic success. Buckley et al. emphasized students must have the opportunity to voice concerns related to the psychosocial impediments found in their environment. Recently, research has addressed eliminating the academic achievement gap, with a focus on social factors impeding achievement of Urban Black students (Buckley et al., 2016). Students provide a critical aspect of their journey that cannot be duplicated by computerized data or another person’s perspective on their experience; the stories are incomplete without the inclusion of students’ voices.
An urban school district was studied. Instruction was primarily student-centered, with discovery occurring through an inquiry-based framework (Marx et al., 2004). The six participants in the study could discuss their academic achievement and learning experiences impacted by the pedagogical approaches via observations, focus groups, and interviews. Unfortunately, no opportunities for gaining depth in understanding, engaging in meaningful discovery style learning, or developing higher-order thinking skills were found. The title of this study was quite misleading because inquiry-based learning was not available at their school site (Buckley et al., 2016). The students who participated had old perspectives brought into the new environment and consequently, if the viewpoints were negative, the shift in perspective had a difficult transition. This would have been a great opportunity for an infusion of student voice. Inquiry-based instruction is only as good as the feedback retrieved from those that are being served.

The data analyzed by the previous study revealed observations, continuous reflections and the interpretation process from the students’ viewpoint. The six student participants involved in the study discussed their experience in three categories (a) teacher engagement (b) student expectations of teachers, and (c) school environment. Most significantly, all participants indicated the important factors to their success were related to having exposure to teachers with a balance between conventional structures, elevated expectations, and rigor.
Other signs of success included: small, safe, engaging and nurturing approach to personal attention. The most significant feedback retrieved from the students was a desire to participate in the decision-making process in the school and be rewarded in their efforts.

The academic climate did not have to conflict with students’ group orientation, even if the students were negatively stereotyped regarding academic performance (Dixon, Roberson, & Worrell, 2017). African American students’ poor academic performance was a continued source of worry, illuminating the significance of educators to study the relationship among cultural identity variables and achievement (Worrell, 2007).

The Phinney (1992) study has contributed to current literature; the findings showed EI attitudes are noticeable to academically able minority students as to other students. The study raised a question related to the implications for the findings for the stereotype threat phenomenon (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Phinney (1992) suggested African American and Latino students were classified as stigmatized minorities, which enhanced the disparity relationships within other psychological and academic paradigms. African American students incurred a withdrawal to their ethnic identity (an undesirable outcome). The academic setting should not be in a struggle with students’ reference group orientation, even if they come from stereotypical negative groups linked with academic performance.
Conclusion

Many issues surround the academic achievement gap seen in minority students, particularly in Urban Black students. There is a vast academic achievement gap of approximately 50% or more between the number of Black students who succeed academically and that of White students who succeed academically. Educators, teachers, school administrators must understand and learn different strategies to promote higher academic achievement in minorities. The voices of Black students must be considered when making decisions, creating policies, and implementing academic goals (Thompson, 2002). In my professional opinion and experience, the successful Urban Black student voice is passionate, creative, and strong: I am an example of this very fact. It is the voice of a survivor, the voice of one who has demonstrated grit and growth mindset—before these terms were coined or studied. The voices of successful Black students are unique in that they are not commonly included when assembling an overall perspective of the student body. This inclusion will ensure that the perspective of every student type will be taken into consideration, and this inclusion will provide a voice for others of its kind to emulate. The goal of all educators should be to include the students’ cultures within their educational plan as a vehicle to promote a greater sociopolitical consciousness (Donnor & Shockley, 2010). The next chapter describes the methods that were used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine Urban Black high school students’ pathways to academic success through their own voices. Three research questions were explored:

1. What are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors?
2. What support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success?
3. What coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges?

Question 1 explored the students’ experiences of stereotypes of racism within the school setting and investigated how they succeeded academically despite these adverse experiences. Question 2 inquired about the internal and external resources—whether found within themselves, their families, their communities, or their schools—that helped them persist to graduation. The third and final question examined how the students coped with adversity and challenge and managed to succeed academically despite facing obstacles.

This chapter describes the methods that were used in the study. The research design is described first, followed by a description of the procedures.
related to participant recruitment, ethical considerations and confidentiality, data collection, and data analysis. Validity and reliability measures are outlined, and the researcher’s subjectivity statement is provided.

Research Design

This qualitative study will utilize a research interview design. Qualitative methods allow for a depth of inquiry using a small set of cases to explore a variety of variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This contrasts with quantitative researchers, where a large set of cases is examined relative to a small number of variables. Moreover, the flexible, unfolding qualitative design allows researchers to record human experience in its depth, breadth, and nuances (Kvale, 1996). Research interviewing, in particular, allows researchers to capture fewer tangible data such as nonverbal language, probe deeper into participants’ feelings and thoughts, and develop greater intimacy with the participant compared to other qualitative approaches (Kvale, 1996). Qualitative research interviewing was considered appropriate for this study due to the lack of in-depth literature about the study topic, the wide range of variables being investigated, and the need to probe participants’ thoughts, feelings, and meanings in depth.
Participants

The sample consisted of eight participants, consistent with Kvale’s (1996) guidance concerning the number of participants needed for a qualitative study. Each participant met the following inclusion criteria:

1. Candidate is a high school graduate.
2. Candidate graduated from participating high school in San Bernadino, California.
3. Candidate is 18 years or older.
4. Candidate self-reports his or her ethnicity as Black or African American.

Exclusion criteria were:

1. Candidate did not graduate from high school.
2. Candidate did not graduate from participating high school.
3. Candidate is under 18 years old.
4. Candidate self-reports his or her ethnicity as something other than Black or African American.

Participant recruitment commenced upon approval by the Institutional Review Board and lasted 2 weeks. The participating high school provided a potential participant list along with email and telephone contact information for each graduate who met the inclusion criteria (see School Letter of Support in Appendix A). The participating high school was a new school and, at the time of
this study, only had graduates for two classes: 2017 and 2018. The size of the population who met the inclusion criteria was 75.

All 75 individuals identified by the school were sent the Punchbowl online invitation from a temporary email assigned to the researcher by Punchbowl. Each recipient only saw his or her own email address as a recipient (see Appendix B).

The Punchbowl invitation introduced the researcher and the study, outlined the selection criteria and nature of participation, and provided instructions for how participants could volunteer. Invitees were instructed to respond by March 15, 2019.

Punchbowl maintained the list of invitees and whether they accepted, declined, or did not answered. Punchbowl also allowed the researcher to resend the invitation or message the invitee. The list of invitees was visible only to the researcher. The invitation was active for 7 days.

From those that RSVPed “yes,” indicating they volunteered to be interviewed, eight were randomly selected to be interviewed based on the following system:

1. Each volunteer was assigned a number.

2. A random number generator was used to select eight participants to be contacted for an interview.

3. Each selected volunteer was contacted by email (see Appendix C) using the contact information provided by the school. The email described the
researcher, the study purpose, and the nature of participation. They were asked to respond with the days and times they were available for an interview.

4. Two days after sending the email, if the volunteer did not respond, the researcher contacted him or her by telephone (see Appendix D) using the contact information provided by the school. In the phone call, the researcher would have introduced herself, described the study purpose and the nature of participation, and scheduled an interview. However, eight participants volunteered and scheduled an interview, precluding the need to call potential participants.

5. If a volunteer fails to participate, did not respond, could not be reached to schedule an interview, or did not complete an interview, another volunteer would have been selected using Steps 2-4. This recruitment process would have continued until all eight participants completed an interview. One original participant did withdraw from the study due a death in the family.

The informed consent form (see Appendix E) was presented to each interviewee upon arrival at his or her interview time. The graduation status, age, and ethnicity were confirmed by self-reporting as each candidate replied to the invitation to assure he or she satisfies the inclusion criteria. Gender was captured during the interview for demographic data. Every interviewee that participated in the interview received a $10 Starbucks gift card, no matter the duration of the interview.
Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

 Upon approval obtained from the IRB of California State University of San Bernardino (see Appendix F), potential participants were supplied with informed consent forms that outline the nature of participation and potential risks and benefits of doing so. All participants were instructed of foreseeable risks, which were minimal for this study. A foreseeable risk, although minimal, related to the loss of individual identifiers. Aggregated results will be shared with the participating high school administration without personal identifiers.

 All responses remained confidential. No key or mechanism was put in place to associate participant names with the pseudonyms they were assigned. The results are reported only in the aggregate and not by individuals.

 The primary investigator adhered to the confidentiality and research standards of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, [ACA Standards A.2.a., B.1.c., G.1.b., G.2.d., & G.4.d]. Participants were informed of the procedures to audio record the interview and safeguard the data. Audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were transferred onto a password-protected folder on the researcher’s personal computer (ASUS laptop) and will be kept for seven years before being permanently deleted. Study data were coded with a participant code. Participant codes and consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home separate from the study data. The computer remained in researcher’s possession at all times or locked in the

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researcher’s home office. After seven years, all study data will be permanently deleted. Hard copies of the data will be taken to Staples in Riverside and inserted to a large locked bin and collected by Iron Mountain to destroy the information.

Data Collection Procedures

The study procedure consisted of one one-on-one, in-person 45-60 minute semi-structured interview conducted with each participant. This method allowed for the researcher to guide the conversation and gather detailed, in-depth participant accounts. The use of open-ended questions enabled the researcher to follow the dynamics of the research conversations and capture the nuances of each participant’s story (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Kvale, 1996). These data may be inaccessible to the researcher using other approaches. Although the process was time consuming, the participants had the knowledge and experiences needed to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

Interview Script

The interview script created by the researcher for this study consisted of ten questions organized into four sections (see Appendix G):

1. Warm-up questions. Two questions will be used to ease participants into the conversation, reflect on their high school experiences, and build rapport with the researcher. First, they will be asked, “If you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?” The researcher may
probe their response to generate sufficient understanding of the participant’s views using questions such as, “Can you tell me more,” “What does that mean to you,” or “How does that make you feel?” Next, participants will be asked, “What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you think about your upcoming graduation?”

2. Context setting questions. Participants will be informed that the researcher particularly wants to understand their journey academically through high school. Four questions will then be asked to establish participants perceived starting and ending points of their high school experience. First, they will be asked, “Thinking back to when you started high school, how would you describe yourself academically” and then asked to briefly speculate, “What do you think explains your level of success at that time?” Probes and prompts will be used as needed to generate a clear understanding of the participants’ perceptions. These two questions will be repeated to ascertain participants’ perceptions regarding their academic success and reasons for that at the time of the interview.

3. Core questions. Having established rapport and an understanding of participants perceived high school starting and ending points, the researcher then will ask, “Please walk me through your experience, telling your story in as much detail as possible.” The researcher will encourage the participant to tell his or her story with as little interruption as possible, probing only to gather a rich and detailed story. Possible probing questions may include “What support systems
did you rely on at that time,” and “What role, if any, did your ethnicity play in this,” among others.

4. Closing questions. Three questions will be used to wrap up the conversation and bring the interview to a close. Participants will be asked to recap their three biggest challenges that affected their academics and the coping strategies and sources of support that most helped them overcome their challenges. Finally, participants will be asked to share anything else they believe important to the study.

Administration

Interviews were held one-on-one and in-person in a classroom at the participating high school after school hours.

The interview began with an introduction to welcome and thank the participant and to reiterate the confidentiality procedures:

Thank you for meeting with me. Today, I would like to learn about your experiences in high school and how you have navigated your way to graduation. As a reminder, your responses will remain confidential. I will use fake names in place of your name and any names you provide. Your answers will be combined with other participants’ answers, and analyzed as a group. So, I can focus on our conversation, I’m going to record our conversation. Do I have your permission to do so? Do you have any questions before we begin?
Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes. Data were captured using three means for digital audio recording to facilitate the creation of accurate, complete accounts: a standalone Tascam DR-22WL machine, the iTalk app for iPhone, and the Call Recorder app (https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/call-recorder-intcall/id521680097). The researcher took supplementary notes to help her track the conversation and as a safeguard measure in case problems with the recording. One audio-recording of each interview was sent via encrypted email to Rev.com for the creation of a transcript. The researcher compared the audio-recording to the transcript and corrected any errors.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview data were examined using thematic analysis procedures consistent with those described by Braun and Clarke (2006), Kvale (1996), and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013). The following steps were used:

1. All interview notes were read multiple times to develop an understanding of the nature, breadth, and depth of the interviews and the data gathered.

2. The answers participants provided for each question were then reviewed one at a time, line by line. Descriptive, simultaneous coding was applied. Descriptive codes are words or phrases that capture the essence of the data. Simultaneous coding means that each block of text were coded with multiple codes, if appropriate.
3. After all transcripts were coded, the data were organized by code.

4. The list of codes, the foundation for each code, and the data associated with each code were reviewed to evaluate the appropriateness of each code and each code’s wording. Codes were reworded, combined, or expanded as needed.

5. After completing the coding, the codes were reviewed and synthesized as appropriate to create categories and themes. The number of participants reporting each code, category, and theme was then calculated.

6. A second coder who is an educational professional familiar with high school graduates reviewed the data analysis for three interviews to determine whether the results appeared to be valid. The second coder was provided with the interview notes and asked to follow Steps 1-5 of this procedure. The researcher and second coder compared their results and, where discrepancies were found in the analyses, the researcher and second coder discussed and agreed upon how to revise the analysis. The initial interrater reliability was 60%. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved, until 90% interrater agreement was achieved. The resulting themes were used to review and adjust the remaining analyses.

Validity and Reliability

Validity is achieved in qualitative research through credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007; Smith, 2007). Credibility
indicates the extent to which the findings are believable or trustworthy. Credibility is achieved through richness of the accounts, and will be enhanced by use of a semi-structured interview and limiting the number of questions to allow for in-depth research conversations. Credibility also is enhanced through member checking, where the participants themselves evaluate the findings from the interview and comment on their accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher emailed each participant a report of the findings from his or her interview and request comment by email. Aggregating participants’ responses to generate group findings also enabled triangulation, another means of assuring credibility.

Transferability indicates the degree to which the study findings may apply to other contexts (e.g., similar settings, populations; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007). Transferability was enhanced by fully describing the sample, thus supporting readers in applying findings appropriately to other situations. Confirmability refers to the extent to which study findings reflect the data collected, based on analysis by other researchers (Smith, 2007). Confirmability was achieved by subjecting the analysis to a second rater who reviewed the researcher’s analysis. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved until 90% interrater agreement was achieved.

Although reliability is critical to the quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2014) argue that reliability in qualitative research is a
consequence of its validity. Various authors have endorsed examining both the study’s process and product (e.g., raw data, results of data reduction, process notes) for consistency to demonstrate reliability (Campbell, 1996; Clont, 1992; Hoepfl, 1997; Seale, 1999). In this study, reliability is evidenced through its validity (described earlier in this section) and is further enhanced by carefully documenting the research methods, as outlined in this chapter. Any changes or unexpected occurrences were noted, along with ongoing research memos, to maintain an accurate account of the research process.

Subjectivity Statement

My interest in this topic stems from my life and career experiences. I am an Urban Black individual from an economically disadvantaged home who was identified as being at-risk in childhood. Although I experienced disadvantage and economic hardship, I also was given leadership roles in middle school and high school, and I knew that my opinions mattered. My school experiences and the support of my community transformed my perspective and my life, empowering me to pursue my own life aspirations.

Today, I am a certified K-12 public school educator who teaches secondary students facing increased risks for school and life failure. My experiences have shown me that success in education is enhanced when teachers have the autonomy to advocate for the most appropriate methods for teaching their own
students. In my experience, students who believe their education is customized for their needs tend to attain greater academic success, and I have seen them thrive when they feel heard and included in the campus-related decisions. I believe that students develop a strong foundation for success in adult life through academic achievement, positive connections to school and teachers, and a deep sense of self-efficacy.

Throughout this study, I remained cognizant of my own beliefs and biases and consciously set them aside in order to attend to the data emerging from the research, consistent with the practices of *bracketing* described by Husserl (2012) and Moustakas (1994). In addition to recording my preexisting knowledge, biases, and experiences in advance, I also recorded memos about the experience of interviewing, carefully noting any biases that arise. I considered these along with my stated assumptions and biases as a data source during data analysis and interpretation.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine Urban Black high school students’ social factors to academic success through their own voices.

Analysis Process

Raw transcripts of the data are enclosed in Appendix H. Data analysis began with first identifying meaning units. A meaning unit refers to a group of words or statements that relate to the same central meaning, and could consist of a few words, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). In this study, 143 meaning units were identified (see Appendix I). Each of the 143 meaning units was assigned a descriptive theme, consisting of words or phrases that capture the essence of the meaning unit. Meaning units which represented similar underlying constructs were grouped into themes. Simultaneous themes were applied, where each meaning unit could be assigned to more than one theme, if appropriate. The theoretical framework through which the participant responses were analyzed were CRT (perceives that prejudice is engrained in the texture and arrangement of the American culture) and stereotype threat (when someone affirms negative generalizations around a person's racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, or social gathering).
Once each of the 143 meaning units were assigned to at least one theme, the themes were reviewed to assure the participant responses were accurately depicted. Themes then were reviewed to evaluate their appropriateness. Themes were reworded, combined, or expanded as needed.

Next, the 40 emergent themes were reviewed and considered for how they relate to each other, if at all. Similar emergent themes were grouped into supraordinate themes. Meaning units were then reorganized according the theme structure. The number of unique participants reported each theme and supraordinate theme was then calculated.

A second coder who is an educational professional familiar with high school graduates reviewed the data analysis for three interviews to determine whether for interrater reliability in the data coding. The second coder was provided with the interview notes and asked to follow the analysis procedure described in Chapter 3. The researcher and second coder compared their results and, where discrepancies were found in the analyses, the researcher and second coder discussed and agreed upon how to revise the analysis. The initial interrater reliability was 60%. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved, until 90% interrater agreement was achieved. The finalized data analysis is presented in Appendix J.
Sample

Eight high school graduates, all female, were interviewed for this study (see Table 2). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 20 (M = 19.1, SD = .64). Two graduated in 2017 and six graduated in 2018. Five participants were in college, one had finished college, three were working, and another was planning to go to college.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>High School GPA</th>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Current Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amara</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Planning to go to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brayonna</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>In college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cenisa</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>In college, working, supporting daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darnique</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Working to support family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>In college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeneice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Finished college, working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiara</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>In college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiana</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>In college, awaiting military deployment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all participants were female*
To establish context for the study and to understand the situation the students perceived they faced throughout their secondary experience, participants were asked to describe themselves in high school (see Table 3). The participants emphasized positive characteristics such as being active, involved, and inquisitive \((n = 5)\) or helpful \((n = 2)\). Imani simply described herself in three adjectives: “loud, fun and outgoing,” while Tiana described, “I was really involved in school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance.” Imani reflected on her experiences doing community service, commenting:

I feel like it humbles you, because you see a lot of people who don’t have a lot things you have, so you look at things differently in the outside world outside of school. You see someone who needs help. You're like, “I'm going to help them.”

Table 3

*Participants’ Self-Descriptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Descriptor</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active, involved, inquisitive</td>
<td>Amara, Imani, Brayonna, Cenisa, Tiana</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Amara, Imani</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried or sad</td>
<td>Jeneice, Brayonna</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(N = 8\); Most participants used several adjectives to describe themselves
Jeneice and Brayonna acknowledged the difficult emotions they experienced. While Brayonna simply commented, “[At] some points [I was] sad,” Jeneice emphasized the stress she felt entering high school due to concerns about her ability to do well:

I'll say I was nervous, scared, and worried, because getting out of middle school, it's like, “Oh, here we go.” … I was scared because I'm like, “Oh, we're getting higher up in the level and just hoping we can focus and that'll help us.”

Participants were asked to describe their academic performance (see Table 4). Half the participants described themselves as achieving students, defined for this study as earning mostly Bs, or having a grade point average of approximately 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Amara escribed, “It was kind of easy but then again, it was like I don't remember this, it was so long ago. But it was pretty easy. I was like a B student,” while Imani elaborated:

Academically I was a good student. I only had two times where I was struggling with grades, trying to keep them up. Other than that, I was good academically. … I was more like a B. I had only two Cs, so yeah, more B, A.

Kiara reported she was high achieving, describing that she was: “very book smart, I guess. Well, my overall GPA is a 4.2, with honors.” The remaining three reported they were average students, defined in this study as having approximately a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. One participant stated
that compared to other students, “I would say I was in the middle. Because you have good kids, and you have kids that’s just crazy. And I was a little bit in the middle,” while another stated, “I feel like I was average.”

Table 4

*Participants’ Self-Reported Academic Performance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Performance</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High achieving (“A”) student</td>
<td>Kiara</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving (“B”) student</td>
<td>Tiana, Amara, Imani, Jeneice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (“C”) student</td>
<td>Cenisa, Brayonna, Darnique</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N = 8

When asked to describe their perceptions of high school, half the participants expressed that it was “very challenging” (see Table 5). While Brayonna simply said it was “tough,” others explained their view of it being an arduous process, likening it to a “trial,” (Darnique) a difficult path (Amara), or having many “ups and downs.” (Imani)

Amari described:

Challenging. Because high school is like a rocky ... It’s like a rocky road that you go down. When I first went to high school, it was like, “Oh, this is way
much harder than middle school," Because ... when I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even in middle school.

Two participants described their perceptions of high school as “fun” and “exciting”. Cenisa, who is now a working mother pursuing a college degree, shared, “Exciting. Because high school was the best time, ever. It wasn't as hard as now. … It was just easy and fun.” The other two participants described high school as being an experience “filled with learning.” (Kiara)

Jeneice elaborated:

It's like we're going through phases when we get to high school, and we learn so many things that we never thought we would know, and they're teaching us how to get out in the world—things that we need to know when we get a job or when we're on our own.

Table 5

Participants’ Perception of High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of High School</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very challenging</td>
<td>Amara, Brayonna, Darnique, Imani</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun and exciting</td>
<td>Cenisa, Tiana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full of learning</td>
<td>Kiara, Jeneice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 8
Six of the eight participants expressed that at their high school graduation they felt “excitement and happiness” about having achieved this major accomplishment (see Table 6). Amara commented that the achievement was particularly exciting because she was the first high school graduate in her family and her achievement made her family members happy. She described:

I was excited. I was excited because I'm my mom's first child to graduate and there's six of us. My big brother and my dad, my older brother, he didn't graduate on my dad's side. And then my mom's kids, so I was her first to graduate. So I was happy to make them happy, and I was happy to actually graduate.

Cenisa mentioned the feeling of being celebrated and supported: “It felt like you was graduating from college or something. Everybody was rooting for you, everybody was happy, excited to see what college you was going to, it was perfect.” Imani described a different feeling: “Graduation was like a relief. Soon as you graduate, you just have this left weighted off your shoulders. No more work, no more stress, and then college is like dang. Stress came back.”
Table 6

Participants’ Self-Reported Feelings at High School Graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings Experienced at High School Graduation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excitement and happiness about major accomplishment</td>
<td>Jeneice, Amara, Cenisa, Brayonna, Darnique, Kiara</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not asked</td>
<td>Tiana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 8

At the time of the study, three participants reported they were working toward a college degree. Cenisa also had an infant daughter she was supporting. She described:

Right now I'm working, I'm going to school for medical billing and coding. I'll be done in April 2020. And I'm in church. I have a daughter, she's five months. I pay my own bills. I take care of myself and my daughter. I don't know, everything's good at the moment.

Imani remarked about her feelings of high self-esteem being a Black woman attending college. She contrasted her feelings to those she had in high school:
I go to Valley right now. Now I feel like I embrace it [my identity as a Black woman] everyday, from my hair to my feet. It's like I know my Black is beautiful, but sometimes, like you said, at high school, you can have that feeling where it's like, "Sheesh. Am I beautiful? Am I worth it?" It's like now, I know I'm worth it.

Other participants reported they were working and supporting their family of origin, were figuring out their next steps, or had finished her degree and begun her career. For example, Amara explained:

I'm still trying to figure out what's going on—what I'm going to do, because at first I was going to go to Valley. But it's too many people that I know there and I just don't want to get distracted. I'm thinking about my dad and my mom want me to go to a private college, West Coast University in Ontario, so I can get my RN. So I'm really happy about that.

Although more Black females than Black males graduate from high school (59% percent females versus 48% males; Winters & Green, 2006), the sample for this study cannot be considered to be reflective of Black male graduates’ attitudes, as no males volunteered to participate in the study.

Emergent Themes

A total of 40 emergent themes were identified based on examination of the 143 meaning units extracted from the data (see Appendix I). Fifteen of the
emergent themes described the participants during high school and at the time of the study, participants’ impressions of high school, and their feelings upon graduating, and are presented in detail in the previous section. The remaining 25 emergent themes are described in this section.

**Emergent Theme #1: Avoiding or Ignoring Racism and Stereotypes**

Six participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Kiara, Tiana, Darnique) described avoiding or ignoring instances of racism and stereotypes if they arose. Many of these participants neglected to describe specific instances, but said that whenever racism arises, they simply do not draw attention to it. For example, Cenisa shared: “Racism … it never comes out straightforward. It’s always around the corner, around the bush. So I don’t pay it no mind.” Tiana shared that when she felt uncomfortable or suspected she was being treated differently in the classroom, “I just had to ignore it and just focus on my work.”

Others participants described taking more deliberate action. Amara described that she suspected a teacher was racist when the teacher would not call on Black students in class and refused the participant’s request for help, telling her, “Do this and you bring it back tomorrow. It’s homework.” In this case, the participant successfully was switched from the class, as she describes in this story:

I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her
class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." … They changed me out of that class.

Darnique described she deliberately avoided people she thought would not understand her. She explained:

I didn’t really have relationships with teachers that weren't black. I used to come visit certain teachers just because they were nice teachers overall, but I never got close to [them]. … They don't understand where we come from, they don't understand our backgrounds, they [don’t] understand where we struggle.

**Emergent Theme #2: Believe in and Encourage Yourself**

When asked to offer advice to other Urban Black students, three participants (Kiara, Imani, Darnique), urged them to believe in and encourage themselves. Darnique expressed:

Not many of those people that are probably behind me don't even have anybody to talk to or to vent to. I just want to tell them that anything is possible. You've gotta believe in yourself. Don't take criticism. Don't let nobody put you down. You gotta just believe in yourself. You gotta believe that you can do anything if you believe you can do it. I just feel like ... There isn't anything in this world you can't do. I feel like you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. People say, “I'm not smart enough, or I will never be able to do it,” but I feel like you can. I feel like some stuff may
be hard but I feel like you can do it. Anything’s really possible, you just gotta believe in yourself. You gotta trust in yourself before you trust anybody else. It's really you. You gotta focus on you before you can focus on anybody else around you.

Imani added:

It starts in your mind first. If your mind isn't telling you that you have it and for you to keep going, you're not going to keep going, because your mind is telling you something else. That's where motivation and things come in, and a lot of people don't have that. … The workload is going to get tough; but if you want to graduate, you can graduate. You have to have that mindset. Don't let no one tell you that you cannot do it, because you can.

**Emergent Theme #3: Create More Programs for Black Students**

When asked to offer advice to school administrators of Urban Black students, two participants (Imani, Darnique) expressed that more programs should be created support Black high school students. Imani elaborated:

I say they need more clubs, because I know a lot of Black students that like to do clubs to keep everyone together. Sometimes they want extra paperwork and curricular activities to be involved, but sometimes you don’t need that. You can just have a classroom, everyone sit in a classroom and just talk. Talk about what’s on your mind, what’s bothering you. If you need
advice, you guys give each other advice, just uplift each other. That can really change someone life sometimes.

**Emergent Theme #4: Deepening Educational Connection**

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, two students (Brayonna, Kiara) described activities they pursued to deepen their educational connections. Kiara described the school-based and community-based college-bound programs she joined. She described:

Another thing I could say to was being in the Avid [program]. So, in Avid, you were required to stay on top of your grades and stay organized and stuff like that. As a Black student, it helped me because I mean we don't have a lot of programs that are really destined just for us because it's either you're in the light or not in the light. So, if you're not the top black student, then there's nothing for you really. They don't recognize us as much and so with the program, it's like you're around a lot of students who have the same abilities and strengths that you do. Because there's different requirements. You have to have a 3.0 or above so you're with students who have the same mindset as you I guess you can say. It helped me because at my own high school, we didn't really have a lot of programs like that. So, it was like I was able to connect in a different way of joining a club or something. I did a program called Black Future Leaders for my sophomore year. Yeah I found out about it my sophomore year and I did it all the way up to my senior year.
… on-campus You go to stay at Cal State for the weekend and it was run by Danny Tillman and we would do STEM projects for the week, the weekend or we would do ... I know one year it was STEM. One year it was black history so we learned about the different African cultures and stuff like that. Every time we would go we’d always have to write an essay about what we’re going to do for the weekend before we go. … We also did different things outside of our weekend that we’d have once a year. We would go to the black college expo or we would just have times where we just get together, go to Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles and stuff like that. It was a good experience.

Brayonna described activities that deepened her connection and engagement with school. She described:

Yeah I was in softball. I did track. It's not really a sport, but I did computer design. I was a teacher assistant and office assistant when I was in school. I could say being a teacher's assistant helped me because I was around other students. I helped the teachers. I got more engagement. Softball I could say helped me with leadership.

Emergent Theme #5: Did Not Personally Experience Racism or Stereotypes

When asked to describe the experiences of racism and stereotype threat they experienced in high school, five participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Darnique) reported they did not personally experience racism or
stereotypes or experienced minor or indirect incidences of it. Three participants stated they did not experience any racism or stereotypes. Amara shared, “I felt all right. I didn't really have problems with racism. … They treat everybody the same. It was no racism, nothing.” Darnique expressed, “No, not me. I feel like some other people were labeled but no, not me.” Jeneice explained:

> No, not really. … I don't think, there was nothing different. I feel like they were treating me the same, equal rights and stuff. That's what I liked about school and stuff. They're not treating you, “Oh, because you're Black, we're going to treat you a different way.”

Two participants shared minor or indirect incidences. Brayonna described:

> Where I live … there's not really a lot of Black people there. … So it's like you'll be in a classroom full of Hispanics, or Whites and everybody'll look at you when they talk about slavery or other stuff. … So they'll just give you that look of, “Does she belong in here?” or stuff like that.

Cenisa answered, “Racism? I would say I did, but it never comes out straightforward. It's always around the corner, around the bush. So I don't pay it no mind.”

**Emergent Theme #6: Emotional Abuse and Neglect**

Five participants (Cenisa, Kiara, Imani, Tiana, Darnique) reported described emotional abuse and neglect at home when asked to identify the obstacles they faced during high school. Some participants suffered the absence of one or both
parents. Kiara described, “my dad was in and out of my life a lot,” while Brayonna “wasn’t this child that grew up with my own mother and father.” Others had parents physically present but lacked a bond with them. Darnique shared, “It was mostly mom problems, I never really had a bond with her. Never. … It was kind of sad that the family treat me different, because of [my focus on school].”

Still others reported they experienced verbal and emotional abuse as home-related stressors. Cenisa stated, “My biggest [obstacle] thing that I had was with my dad. My dad is very negative, he puts you down, everything.” Kiara similarly shared, “When he was there, sometimes it was good memories, but sometimes it wasn’t because my dad was an alcoholic.” Darnique shared that her mother:

always said mean things, out of proportion, ’cause I was different. It's like she was jealous as a parent, which I feel she shouldn't have been. … My mom got mad and she kept saying, “You're not gonna graduate, you're gonna be like all of us. You're sixteen: Get pregnant, drop out. You're not gonna make it.”

Some participants also mentioned they were tasked with parental duties in high school. Imani shared,

I had a little sister, so I wasn't able to do sports like I wanted to. I always had to watch her. … It was like I was taking care of my sister and doing school at the same time.
Darnique, who had described her experiences of verbal abuse from her mother, also shared her experience of absorbing adult responsibilities:

I think I was in middle school, and my older brother and sister were in high school, and I don't know how but I helped them with their homework. …

[Regarding my mom], I feel like I'm the mother and she's the child. … I just felt … she could've tried to help better. I feel like I was a parent. I helped all my siblings with their homework and ... I had to give up [a lot of stuff]. I helped my two youngest brothers keep going, 'cause they wanted to give up. … Once I got a job, I started paying phone bills and … basically, I was paying all the bills for my parents. … Even though I'm not the mother, I still stepped up because I have relatives to take care, I still have a family, I'm not just gonna let you [Mom] leave them like that.

She further explained how these responsibilities affected her ability to focus at school: “Mostly, I couldn't sleep. … It was mostly drama I was trying to avoid, I kept getting dragged into.”

Tiana described that as she progressed in high school, her family’s poverty deepened and they had to move from place to place. This instability greatly affected her ability to concentrate. She elaborated:

Sometimes it was really hard to separate what I had going on at home and personally and other things outside of school when I got to school.

Sometimes I would lose focus. I would just daydream, thinking about the
stuff that I have going on. So I would lose focus sometimes. … When I was about graduate my senior year, things started getting a little crazy at home; like living situations. So sometimes it was really hard for me to just get up and get out of bed. Be motivated to go to school and finish. I don't know what it was, but I just finished.

**Emergent Theme #7: Engaging in Self-Encouragement**

Five participants (Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Kiara, Darnique) described engaged in deliberate positive self-talk and self-encouragement when asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school. Brayonna, who was raised by her elderly grandmother, took the initiative to motivate herself, explaining:

I really had to teach myself to go to school more, be more excited about school, encourage myself, just because I didn't have the push from parents or certain teachers. I had to get myself together and wanted to be able to be happy to go to school. … I wasn't this child that grew up with my own mother and father. I had help from a grandmother. She's much older. So she didn't know more about how the current generation is. So I really had to help myself to get myself there, because she didn't know how to help me and teachers didn't know how. I'm really by myself. I was my own support system.
Jeneice shared the kind of verbal encouragement she would give herself: “I felt proud of myself. I felt like, Jeneice this is amazing! You just accomplished one goal. You're going on to the next goal and focusing on your future.”

**Emergent Theme #8: Focus on Academic Goals and Resist Distractions**

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, all eight participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Jeneice, Kiara, Tiana) urged Black high school students focus on their academic goals and to resist distractions. Amara emphasized:

I say no matter what, don't let nobody get in your way of what you want to do. If you have a goal, strive for it, and don't give up on your goals. It don't matter. Don't get a boyfriend because they're distracting, and just strive for your goals.

Brayonna exhorted:

If you experience racism, stereotype, I'll just say, just focus on yourself because at the end of the day, you'll have yourself. ... You'll graduate high school and then when you're finished, you'll not have to worry about any of that stuff. ... I would say if you're going through hard challenges I would say, just push through it. You're going to graduate. You're going to get those rewards as you're hoping you'll get. If you're going through bullying or stressful situations, I would say just keep on pushing through it, because at the end of the day you're going to make it.
Tiana emphasized the importance of self-determination and resisting temptation:

The advice that I would put out is, you really just have to … dig within yourself, 'cause nobody can make you want to succeed or finish. Something within you has to be the reason that you want to do this. … I feel like the best thing to do is focus when you’re in the classroom. I know it’s tempting 'cause you’re with your friends or you just want to have fun, but I just feel like you should really focus on your work and always putting your best out there.

Jeneice underscored the importance of graduating from high school:

Whoever’s having a tough life with family, or whoever is slacking around and think school's not important, school is really important in my opinion because it helped me through so many challenges I've been through. And you're going to have a future career with your high school diploma. And that's what I have right now: I am a medical assistant. I just finished college for seven months. This is the things you’re going to get.

**Emergent Theme #9: Identifying and Focusing on a Clear and Compelling Goal**

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, seven participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice, Darnique) described identifying and focusing on a clear and compelling goal. Several participants explained they “just always” had an inner drive or need to succeed. Tiana reflected:
I was always just eager to succeed. Be successful. Be sure I get good grades. … I'm just like that type of person. Always just wanting to put out my best. … Well really just knowing that it's [going to college] something that I have to do. But I don't know. I wanted to finish high school so that I can go on to the next step of education; which is college.

Cenisa described her single-minded focus on graduation. She described:

Graduation is everything. I feel like if you don't make it to graduation, it's just sad, because that's the main goal. You go to school, you go through every grade to graduate, to get everything done, and finish, and move on to the next level. Yeah. … I was not worried about nothing else but school, but worried about what I'm doing at school. I wasn't worried about fitting in, or anything. It was just me at school, trying to get through it.

Similarly, Darnique noted that her interest was school and a life enabled by a high school diploma rather than in the things her family members pursued:

They [my family] all started dating at this age, and I was like "Nah, not into it." They wanted to party, I said, "Nah, I'm not into it." I was the person that would cry if I couldn't find school clothes. I'd cry, get mad. … I would watch people and say, "I wanna do that one day. I wanna be this one day, I wanna travel. The only way I can do that is if I succeed in life and I have to keep going."
Emergent Theme #10: Lack of Academic Support

When asked to identify the obstacles that made their time in high school difficult, four participants (Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Darnique) described they received little academic support at home. Cenisa recalled,

I didn't have nobody at home. … It was not a lot of help at all. It was kind of like with school, nobody knew how to help me with assignments. Nobody knew anything about school. It was no concern at all.

Darnique shared, “I never had help with anything. … I had to figure it out on my own, so it was ... kind of difficult, should I say? … You never really heard, “I'm proud of you,” from nobody in my family.”

Emergent Theme #11: Love, Listen to, and Support Students

When asked to offer advice to school administrators of Urban Black students, five participants (Amara, Cenisa, Kiara, Jeneice, Darnique) urged administrators to love, listen to, and support Black students. Cenisa explained,

[They need] encouragement and love. They need to know that they're going to get help, and that they're being heard, and that everything isn't hidden, and that they're being seen. Because a lot of Black kids feel like they're not being seen. … A lot of kids now are going through a lot of stuff I've never seen in my class.

Noting the power of peer pressure and the often adverse results, Cenisa added that administrators should encourage students' individuation. She explained:
They feel like they have to be ghetto and fit in at school, because everybody else is. And they have to feel like it’s okay to stand out, to do what they want to do. Everybody in high school wants to fit in. Everybody wants to fit it and be someone they’re not, and I feel like in hindsight everyone should learn how to be their self, learn how to learn yourself, so you can figure out what you want to be, and start working towards it.

Amara pointed out the importance of being aware that some students fear racism and thus will not ask for the help they need:

A Black student needs all your full help and attention because some of them like is scared to speak to other races because they feel like, oh, well, this teacher’s going to act this way because she’s this color. I think that more teachers should act like ... treat all students equally at the end of the day, and don't treat nobody different.

**Emergent Theme #12: Peers’ Negativity or Lack of Focus on School**

When asked to identify the obstacles that made their time in high school difficult, two participants (Imani, Brayonna) stated that their peers sometimes were negative or lacked a focus on school. Imani, observing her peers’ “wild” behavior at school, speculated that they did not take their education seriously because they were not paying for public high school:

I had friends who got in fights a lot. I was the one that was like, “It’s not worth it, because at the end of the day you're going to get suspended.” ... I
was the one that was trying to encourage all my friends. I want all of us to win. I was … trying to keep us together, keep us focused, because I know we all had that potential. … [In college] it's different: Since you're paying for it, you're going to try to, you know. In high school, everything's free, so I think that's why everyone just wilds out: “I'm going to fight if I want to fight. I'm going to cuss if I want to cuss. I'm going to do what I want to do because it's free.”

Brayonna, the second participant reporting this theme, expressed that her peers’ negativity discouraged her, undermined her confidence, and prompted her to avoid school:

I'll just say being around certain students would bring me down at school. … They will make you feel down about yourself because they're down about their self. So I wouldn't be excited to go to school sometimes. Just because I felt like I'm always around negativity.

**Emergent Theme #13: Peers' Prejudicial Attitudes**

When asked to identify the types of racism and stereotypes they experienced in high school, two participants (Imani, Tiana) described instances of witnessing peers’ prejudicial attitudes. Tiana described her peers’ refusal to accept her multiculturality: “Because I'm mixed, they [other students] were like, ‘What are you? Are you Puerto Rican? Or Mexican? Or Black? You can't be both.}
You have to be one or the other.”’ Imani recounted several instances of prejudice other students voiced. One of her experiences concerned her hair:

I feel like a lot of people stereotype Black people’s hair a certain way. Freshman year, I came to high school with braids … [and] 3 months in, I took them out. Then, a lot of people in my class were like, "Whoa, you have hair." I was like, "What's that supposed to mean—I have hair?" They were like, "You have a lot of hair." I'm like, "I know. What is that supposed to mean? Just because I have braids, I'm not supposed to have a lot of hair?" They're like, "Usually a lot a black people who have braids don't have a lot of hair." I'm like, "Well, I'm not one of those people." They're like, "Oh, that's cool." … To them, they made it seem like we have to have or we have to be mixed to have hair or something. That's how I took it, because I'm fully Black. I don't have any mixture, and I have a lot of hair, but that doesn't mean you have to be mixed to have a lot of hair. I've never understood that.

Imani additionally described that students made jokes of Black history course material:

I feel like I had moments where, people think everything's funny. You know, when we watch movies and stuff when Black history and stuff, and certain things would happen. It's like people should just be looking at it, watching it, learning. People nowadays like to joke and think everything is funny.
Emergent Theme #14: Seeking Healthy Distractions

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, two participants (Cenisa, Tiana) noted they sought healthy distractions, primarily sports and extracurricular activities, to relieve their school-related stress. Cenisa explained their benefits: “It helps you because it [extracurricular activities] takes your mind off everything negative and you’re not really thinking about nothing but what you’re doing at that moment.” Tiana shared:

I was really involved in school activities. … I was involved in almost every sport: I played basketball, volleyball, I did track for a year, and dance. They were kind of like an escape from school. … Making sure I was on top of everything … really got stressful at times. … [Sports] took me away from everything [and] played a big role in high school. … Basketball, specifically, it just really brought me at peace and took me away from school and everything else I had going on, so I was able to let it all out on the court.

Emergent Theme #15: Seeking Inspiration From Role Models

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, six participants (Brayonna, Kiara, Imani, Tiana, Jeneice, Darnique) described seeking inspiration from role models. Although some of these were traditional role models in that the represented an ideal the participants wanted to achieve, others were models who represented a future the participants wanted to
avoid at all costs. Positive role models included an uncle who had graduated from high school, parents who had completed college degrees, and parents who worked hard. Jeneice offered this example: “I feel like I had my cousins as a role model because she was in college and I was like, 'If she can do it then I can do it.'”

Participants reported they found role models in their friends and families who engaged in behaviors and had life outcomes they did not want. Imani elaborated:

I seen what all of my friends would do, doing the things they did. I didn't want to do those things. My friends that fought and everything, they got suspended, and then their grades dropped. They weren't able to do the things that they needed to do to graduate. That's when I was like, "I don't want to be that person that has to go to Sierra and come back to get my credits just to take a different path." For me, I was just like "I'm just like I'm going to do what I have to do so I can get high school over with and live my life."

Darnique commented,

I see how my family struggled, and I was like, “I'm gonna do anything and everything possible to never let this happen again.” It was horrible: Having to move house to house, living with other people, meals, gas bills that haven't been paid for over a year. Always had to warm water or go to other
people’s house to take showers throughout middle school and high school. It was an experience I didn’t want to experience.

Emergent Theme #16: Support From Family Members

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, five participants (Amara, Kiara, Imani, Tiana, Darnique) described help they received from family members, including grandparents (n = 3); parents (n = 4); and a cousin (n = 1). The nature of the help ranged from advice on how to handle difficult situations, practical help with difficult situations (e.g., getting switched to a different class), tutoring, inspiration and encouragement, and accountability to make sure they were completing their work and focusing on the goal of graduating. Kiara described the inspiration she found in her mother’s role modeling and encouragement:

My mom … has two degrees. She has a AS and a African American too, but she always pushed us to do better than her. That’s what she always said: “I always want my kids to be better than me” and stuff like that.

Kiara also received strong guidance and regular accountability from her grandfather. She explained:

My grandfather—He was always on me, and even though he lives in Atlanta, every week I would always still receive a phone call, a grade check and having to check in, from being a freshman all the way up to senior year, it was always about college. So, that’s what he instilled in me from even
when I was younger. But when I got to high school, it's more scholarships, college, making sure that my grades would look good for when it was that time to start applying and then when the applications came around, he was always on me, like, "Oh, how many applications you do this week?" Or for scholarships and stuff too.

Tiana described the encouragement and motivation she received from her father:

My dad. He's always … telling me that I have to always put out my best and try my hardest and it would pay off. … He was really my role model. I just seen how hard he works and he's just a hard worker. And I'm like ... I look up to that and I respect that, so it made me want to work just as hard.

Emergent Theme #17: Support From Friends

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, three participants (Cenisa, Kiara, Imani) cited receiving support from friends. Kiara explained that those with the same major would work together, while another explained that she made friends a community-based college-bound program. She elaborated:

We would build relationships. I still talk to most of the people who are in there with me still. We stay connected on social media and then that was being able to connect with other students around me that were the same because it was all about African American students.
Emergent Theme #18: Support From School Staff

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, all eight participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Jeneice, Kiara, Tiana) stated they received support from school staff, and that this support was critical to their success. Sources of support included teachers (n = 5), coaches (n = 3), and counselors and tutors (n = 3), and the principal (n = 1). The nature of help included advice and encouragement, tutoring, accountability to assure they were staying on track to graduate, guidance in developing good habits (e.g., doing their best, persevering), and moral support. Jeneice described learning the principle of perseverance from her coach and receiving emotional support her teachers. She reflected:

I remember my coach saying, "When you start, don't give up, because [if you do] you know you won't finish." And it's like the same thing to do it throughout high school. … They were all positive [my relationships with teachers] and that's what I loved. I needed motivation from them, too. I remember I would cry when I'm stressed and they're like, it's okay, you got this. Just breathe in. Don't worry about it. And they knew I've been through a lot on my plate and I just love how they're helpers. They make me feel better.

Kiara recalled the support received from her counselor:
The main reason I was able to receive those grades would be because of one counselor that I had. … He was really there for you. He really helped you make sure you’re in the right courses for your goal to go to a four year university.

Darnique, who experienced significant lack of support at home, sought surrogate parents in her teachers. Notably, she only sought the support of Black teachers, because she believed they were more likely to understand her. She stated:

I knew my mom wasn't the person to talk to, that's why I tried to talk to [my teachers]. … I only got close to African-American teachers ‘cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from … I was close to the African-American teachers, not being picky, but I just feel like they understood me more. I got close to one—in middle school, I got close to one, and I treated her as a mother. Every holiday, I'd buy her something, I'd visit her every day, talk to her about everything. Mother's Day, I'd spend lots of money on her. I never spent it on my mom because I felt like she was just there. I felt like she wasn't there as a mother … when I needed her most. ... That's why I got so close to most of the African-American female teachers—I got involved with them as a mother.
Emergent Theme #19: Taking Initiative and Persevering Through Challenges

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, four participants (Amara, Imani, Jeneice, Darnique) stressed the importance of taking initiative and persevering through challenges. Amara described how she handled the academic challenges she faced:

I asked when I need help with something and figured it out. … But I started asking more, then going to tutoring and stuff, so I would know. If my teacher didn't help me, then I tried to like at least figure it out on my own.

Imani explained that perseverance was a family value. She further pointed out that her perseverance, combined with her focus on progress rather than perfection, enabled her to successfully complete her math class:

Well, I came from a family where we don't give up. Giving up wasn't an option for me, even though I had obstacles and stuff. … For me, for example, assignment, I'd rather turn in what I have than not to turn anything at all. For me, I think that really helped me because I'd rather have a 50% and than a 0%. I think that's what really helped me. … Like math, I felt like I was not going to pass math, but I kept going and I did.

Darnique lacked the family support but nevertheless exhibited tremendous determination to succeed. She explained:

[My parents] weren't college graduates—not even high school graduates. So most of the stuff, I had to learn it on my own or try to Google it to see
how I would learn some stuff. … I never had help with anything, relationships, nothing. I had to figure it out on my own. … I always told myself there was gonna be something, something's gonna throw me off, but I gotta to find a way to learn it.

**Emergent Theme #20: Teachers’ and Administrators’ Discriminatory Treatment**

When probed to think of experiences of racism or stereotyping they experienced, three participants (Tiana, Imani, Kiara) described experiences of discriminatory treatment from teachers or administrative staff. Tiana stated, “I felt like the work that I would put in wouldn't be looked at as what it's supposed to be because … I was being judged or there's some type of racism or something.” Imani stated that two teachers racially segregated their classrooms and shared this story:

> It was two teachers … not to say they would pick on the people who were colored, but they would try to sit everyone in a certain spot: … The colored people would be on this side, and other people would be on this side. People didn't notice it until, I want to say, the second week because we had a project. Usually for projects, you can pick who you want to be with. He said, "Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side. Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side." We're like, "Why? My best friend is over there. Why do I have to pick someone who's over here?" … I think that was the only major event that happened.
Ultimately, this incident was addressed when students reported it to the principal. Kiara) asserted that school administration neglected to address incidents of racism and stereotype threat when they occurred. In her freshman year, she reported having a racist teacher (without describing the incident). At that time, she chose to simply switch classes because “It felt like our community wasn’t strong enough, or we didn't have enough people to actually be there for us when something like that would happen—like they didn't care.” Kiara stated that in her junior year, the teacher stated as part of her orientation to the class that she did not, “want any of that acting black or ghettoness in my class.” Kiara was one of two Black girls in the class. The participant noted she was offended by this remark, although the other girl apparently perceived it differently. The participant described taking this matter to the vice principal but was denied any resolution because she failed to follow the chain of command in reporting the issue. She stated:

So then after that, I would just mark down. I had a journal and I would write in there every time she would say something, and I would go turn it in to the vice principals to make notes of it. Once they stopped doing like they just weren't going to do anything else about it, my mom tried to come to the school and have a talk with the teacher and everything. … I still didn't get the help that I needed.
Kiara described based on her experiences that “that's how life is. Life has to still go on no matter what people think about you or what kind of stereotypes they'll give out about us that we just have to prove them wrong.” She switched to a class with a Black teacher; however, she reported the Black teacher was now subordinate to the White students in class. She elaborated:

They look down on her as she's not really going to do nothing or, if she does try, they'll make a lie. Because they'll believe the students when it comes to the African American teacher rather than the Caucasian teacher. It's different stereotypes and I've seen that in the school system also.

**Emergent Theme #21: Teachers' Refusal to Help**

When asked to identify what obstacles they faced in high school, two participants (Amara, Brayonna) described that teachers sometimes refused to help them with their work. Amara shared her experience:

I went to [my teacher's] desk one time and I told her like, "I need help with this." She just handed us the paper and was like, "Do this and you bring it back tomorrow. It's homework." So I went to her desk like, "Could you help me with this?" And she was like, "Oh, well, no. That's something that your family need to help you with."
Brayonna, the second participant reporting this theme elaborated that students have different needs and noted that at least some of her teachers failed to adapt to those needs:

I feel like teachers don't understand [that] certain students need certain type[s] of help. Every student is different. It's like help that student in a way that they'll understand. Not just the way that you know how to teach. … I felt like I needed more help with stuff like learning just because certain teachers didn't know how to handle me. Just because I asked a lot of questions and I like to be sure of things.

**Emergent Theme #22: Teachers' Stereotypes**

When probed to identify experiences of racism or stereotypes they observed in high school, two participants (Darnique, Kiara) described teachers' propagation of stereotypes. Darnique, who earlier had attributed her academic challenges to her race, explained that one of her teachers assumed that struggling students who are Black are not trying or paying attention. Darnique explained:

I see some people that would struggle and didn't ask for more help … and [the teacher] would kind of get mad but they was like, "Oh you're obviously not paying attention." Or I would see that the person is paying attention, but it's just the fact they need more help. And then she's just like, "Oh yeah you're obviously not gonna make it," or "Pretty sure you're gonna have to
come back again.” She would just … go straight for one of the Black students, an African-American male. I felt like they just needed a little help, they were probably struggling.

Darnique further outlined that teachers judged Black students based on their clothing, adhered to stereotypes about low academic achievement in Blacks, and thus failed to help Black students, all the while helping students of other races.

She elaborated:

Everybody instantly expects you to be in some type of game, or they'll just look at you in a certain way because the way you dress—some people don't even choose what they wear! They just down talk you and just, [there’s] not lots of motivation coming towards African-American students. I just feel like they don't give us credit when it's due. We would try so much to get to that point, but they would focus on the other races. It's like we're just there, just wanting to be successful like everyone else, but they don't really acknowledge us as much, but we're just there.

Kiara stated she experienced two teachers during her high school years express harmful, stereotypical generalizations about Black students. She shared:

It started my freshman year and, at first, I just brushed it off and I switched classes. … So, then it happened again my junior year … it was literally the first week of school … [when the] teachers do the little opening and break down some class rules and stuff, and the teacher goes, "I don't want any of
that acting black or ghettoness in my class." There's only me and one other black girl in the class, but she [the other girl] didn't take it, I guess, how I took it, and I really felt some type of way about it.

**Emergent Theme #23: Unprepared for Amount and Difficulty of Workload**

When asked to describe the obstacles they experienced in high school, four participants (Darnique, Amara, Imani, Jeneice) expressed they realized upon entering high school that they were unprepared for the amount and difficulty of workload they encountered. Darnique reflected,

Before I went to high school, they kept saying, “It's not gonna be this easy in high school.” They actually didn't prepare us for what you guys were gonna actually teach us. … So when I came to high school I was like, “Oh, I've never seen this before in my life. They didn't prepare me for this.”

Amara shared, “When I got to high school, it was kind of rocky at first because I'm not used to this, and I'm not used to going to all these classes, and stuff like that.”

**Emergent Theme #24: Wanting to be a Role Model and Create Positive Change**

When asked to identify what contributed to their ability to graduate from high school, four participants (Brayonna, Darnique, Jeneice, Tiana) found motivation in wanting to be a role model and create positive change. Several participants mentioned they would be the first or second high school graduate in their families. Tiana shared:
I've always been the type of person to want to succeed and be successful because of the things I've seen within my family and my family members going through school. And some of my parents, or my siblings, not finishing high school or getting to college, I always wanted to be the first one to do that.

Darnique elaborated:

I realized when I motivate myself, I can actually motivate other people, which I did. I helped people graduate along with me. People that were in higher/harder classes than me, I helped them, 'cause they didn't believe they could do it. I felt like maybe if I can motivate myself, then maybe I can motivate other people. Maybe we can keep the little trail going, and everything may change in the future, maybe.

**Emergent Theme #25: Withdrawal and Low Self-Esteem**

When asked to identify the obstacles they faced during high school, three participants (Amara, Darnique, Kiara) described disengagement and having low self-esteem. Three participants noted their struggle with disengagement from the learning process and low self-esteem at times. Kiara, whose father suffered from alcoholism and was not consistently present, explained,

When I was younger, I never really understood why I couldn't go see him every weekend or why they couldn't be together and stuff like that. … I would feel like I had to do something better. Like I felt like I wasn't good
enough before, so I felt like if I did better, then my dad would want to come back into my life or something like that.

Darnique who reported she experienced substantial emotional abuse from her mother, believed her race was to blame for her challenges would engage in negative self-talk:

If anything affected me [adversely], it would be myself. I kept getting discouraged or I kept telling myself I couldn't do it. ... I feel, for me, just because I was Black, I couldn't do what they would do. I'm not smart like them, I can never do what they're doing. I was like, “Dang, why can't I be like them?” I just always felt like it was a race thing to me. ... People don't feel like they belong in a certain area because of their skin color and they can't talk to people because of their skin color. They just feel like they're judged because of their skin color.

Amara shared, “Sometimes I used to be scared to ask teachers because some teachers used to be mean, so I didn't really want to ask.”

Supraordinate Themes

The 40 emergent themes were examined to determine how they relate to each other, if at all. Similar themes were grouped under supraordinate themes. Fifteen of the 40 emergent themes related to descriptions of the participants, are described in the Sample section of this chapter, and are not discussed here.
Eight themes were not determined to be similar enough to be grouped under supraordinate themes:

- Theme #2: Believe in and encourage yourself—cited by three participants (Kiara, Imani, Darnique)
- Theme #3: Create more programs for Black students—cited by two participants (Imani, Darnique)
- Theme #5: Did not personally experience racism or stereotypes—cited by five participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Darnique)
- Theme #8: Focus on academic goals and resist distractions—cited by all eight participants (Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Jeneice, Kiara, Tiana)
- Theme #11: Love, listen to, and support students—cited by five participants (Amara, Cenisa, Kiara, Jeneice, Darnique)
- Theme #13: Peers’ prejudicial attitudes—cited by two participants (Imani, Tiana)
- Theme #23: Unprepared for amount and difficulty of workload—cited by four participants (Darnique, Amara, Imani, Jeneice)
- Theme #25: Withdrawal and low self-esteem—cited by three participants (Amara, Darnique, Kiara)
The remaining 21 emergent themes were organized into the following seven supraordinate themes.

**Supraordinate Theme #1: Relentlessly Pursuing Success**

Three emergent themes reflected behavioral and motivational coping strategies the participants utilized to overcome the challenges they encountered in high school:

- Emergent Theme #9: Identifying and focusing on a clear and compelling goal (cited by seven participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice, Darnique).
- Emergent Theme #19: Taking initiative and persevering through challenges (cited by four participants—Amara, Imani, Jeneice, Darnique)
- Emergent Theme #24: Wanting to be a role model and create positive change (cited by four participants—Brayonna, Darnique, Jeneice, Tiana)

These activities reflect a focus on the goal of high school graduation and motivating others to do the same. Participants described their focus, motivation, and behavior toward this goal as being unflagging, or relentless. Participants explained that relentlessly pursuing academic success (defined by participants as completing homework, completing their classes, and graduating from high
school) was crucial to their achievement of graduating from high school. This supraordinate theme was reflected in the comments of all eight participants.

**Supraordinate Theme #2: Receiving Support From Others**

Three emergent themes reflected the sources and types of support (support systems) participants received in their pursuit of high school graduation. These themes included:

- **Emergent Theme #16: Support from family members** five participants (Amara, Kiara, Imani, Tiana, Darnique)
- **Emergent Theme #17: Support from friends** (cited by three participants—Cenisa, Kiara, Imani)
- **Emergent Theme #18: Support from school staff** (cited by all participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Jeneice, Kiara, Tiana)

Types of support included emotional uplift, role modeling, having fun and enjoying healthy distractions, helping making contact with others, accountability, advice on how to handle difficult situations, practical help with difficult situations (e.g., getting switched to a different class), tutoring, inspiration and encouragement, guidance in developing good habits, and accountability to make sure they were completing their work and focusing on the goal of graduating. This supraordinate theme of receiving support from others was cited by all eight participants.
Supraordinate Theme #3: Creating a Conducive Environment for Graduating

Three emergent themes reflected participants’ descriptions of deliberately taking actions to shape their lives and surroundings to support their goal of graduating from high school:

- Emergent Theme #1: Avoiding or ignoring racism and stereotypes (cited by six participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Kiara, Tiana, Darnique)
- Emergent Theme #4: Deepening Educational Connection (cited by two participants—Brayonna, Kiara)
- Emergent Theme #15: Seeking inspiration from role models (cited by six participants—Brayonna, Kiara, Imani, Tiana, Jeneice, Darnique)

These emergent themes suggested that participants coped with the challenges they encountered by creating an environment conducive or facilitative of their goal to graduate from high school—in turn, making their graduation more likely. Participants described how these activities served to enhance their effort and engagement as well as their belief in themselves and their ability to graduate. For example, by deliberately directing their attention their role models’ achievement of being in or completing college and using this fact to bolster her own self-confidence and motivation, they bolstered their self-confidence, thus
facilitating their own high school graduation. This supraordinate theme of creating a conducive environment for graduating was cited by all eight participants.

**Supraordinate Theme #4: Practicing self-care**

Three emergent themes reflected participants’ descriptions of engaging in specific activities to take care of their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing:

- Emergent Theme #7: Engaging in self-encouragement (cited by five participants—Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Kiara, Darnique)
- Emergent Theme #14: Seeking healthy distractions (cited by two participants—Cenisa, Tiana)

These activities served as coping mechanisms to deal with the stress they felt as they encountered and overcame the challenges of high school. Examination of the data suggested that six participants supported this supraordinate theme of practicing self-care.

**Supraordinate Theme #5: Stress in the Home**

Three emergent themes reflected participants’ descriptions of experiencing stress in their homes. These themes and associated responses were voiced when participants were asked to identify the key obstacles they faced during high school:

- Theme #6: Emotional abuse and neglect (cited by five participants—Cenisa, Kiara, Imani, Tiana, Darnique)
• Theme #10: Lack of academic support (cited by four participants—Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Darnique)

Participants explained that these experiences at home affected their ability to dedicate themselves to their schoolwork and undermined their efforts to succeed. Seven participants in total referenced the supraordinate theme of stress in the home as a key obstacle to their academic success.

Supraordinate Theme #6: Lack of Others’ Support

Two emergent themes reflected participants’ descriptions of lacking support from others as they endeavored to graduate from high school. These themes and associated responses were voiced when participants were asked to identify the key obstacles they faced during high school:

• Emergent Theme #12: Peers’ negativity or lack of focus on school (cited by two participants—Imani, Brayonna)

• Emergent Theme #21: Teachers’ refusal to help (cited by two participants—Amara, Brayonna)

Participants explained that the lack of support affected their ability to motivation to succeed and undermined their own efforts to complete their homework, pass tests, and reach graduation. Three participants in total referenced the supraordinate theme of lack of others’ support as a key obstacle to their academic success.
Supraordinate Theme #7: Teacher- and Administrator-Based Racism

Two emergent themes reflected participants’ descriptions of racism and stereotypes experienced with teachers or administrators:

- Theme #20: Teachers’ and administrators’ discriminatory treatment (cited by three participants—Tiana, Imani, Kiara)

- Theme #22: Teachers’ stereotypes (cited by two participants—Darnique, Kiara)

Participants’ descriptions concerned perceptions that teachers were (a) evaluating their work differently than they were evaluating other students’, (b) racially segregating classrooms, (c) assuming that academically struggling students who are Black are not trying or paying attention, or making comments that "I don't want any of that acting black or ghettoness in my class." Participants offered these descriptions when probed to think of times they experienced racism or stereotypes at school. Four participants in total referenced the supraordinate theme of teacher-based racism.

Categories

The next step of analysis was identifying categories to organize the seven supraordinate themes and eight emergent themes that had not been associated with a supraordinate theme. This final step was helpful for conceptually understanding the findings. To create the categories, the seven Supraordinate
Themes and eight remaining emergent themes were compared to determine which were similar. The following five categories were determined.

**Category #1: Reasons for Success**

Four supraordinate themes reflected participants’ descriptions of the coping mechanisms and support systems that contributed to their success in graduating from high school:

- Supraordinate Theme #1: Relentlessly pursuing success (cited by all eight participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice)
- Supraordinate Theme #2: Receiving support from others (cited by all eight participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice)
- Supraordinate Theme #3: Creating a conducive environment for graduating (cited by all eight participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice)
- Supraordinate Theme #4: Practicing self-care (cited by six participants—Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice)

This category of supraordinate themes, underlying emergent themes, and associated data reveal insights about how the participants effectively navigated their way through high school to achieve the success of graduation. This category partially addresses Research Questions 2 and 3. Related to Research
Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, participants described relying on school staff, family members, friends, and community leaders for emotional uplift, role modeling, having fun and enjoying healthy distractions, helping making contact with others, accountability, advice on how to handle difficult situations, practical help with difficult situations (e.g., getting switched to a different class), tutoring, inspiration and encouragement, guidance in developing good habits, and accountability to make sure they were completing their work and focusing on the goal of graduating.

Related to Research Question 3, what coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges, participants described identifying and focusing on the clear and compelling goal of graduating, taking initiative and persevering through challenges, wanting to be a role model and create positive change, avoiding or ignoring racism and stereotypes, deepening their connection and engagement with school, participating in college-bound programs, seeking inspiration from role models, engaging in self-encouragement, experiencing emotional growth and healing, and seeking healthy distractions.

Category #2: Obstacles to Success

Two supraordinate themes and two emergent themes reflected the obstacles participants stated they experienced as they proceeded through high school in their quest to graduate:
• Supraordinate Theme #5: Stress in the home (cited by seven participants—Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice)

• Emergent Theme #23: Unprepared for amount and difficulty of workload (cited by four participants—Darnique, Amara, Imani, Jeneice)

• Emergent Theme #25: Withdrawal and low self-esteem (cited by three participants—Amara, Darnique, Kiara)

• Supraordinate Theme #6: Lack of others’ support (cited by three participants—Amara, Brayonna, Imani)

This category of supraordinate themes, underlying emergent themes, and associated data reveal insights about the number, nature, and impact of the challenges participants faced as they endeavored to achieve the success of high school graduation. These responses partially address Research Question 1, what are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors? Specifically, participants described facing challenges such as the death of family members, emotional abuse and neglect at home, lack of academic support at home, peers’ negativity and lack of focus on school, teachers’ refusal to help, being overwhelmed and unprepared for amount and difficulty of the workload, and struggling with urges to disengage at school and battles with low self-
esteem. These various obstacles undermined their motivation and abilities to attend school, complete homework, pass tests, and reach their eventual goal of graduation.

Category #3: Experiences of Racism

Three emergent themes and one supraordinate theme provided insights about the experiences of racism and stereotyping participants encountered during high school:

- Emergent Theme #5: Did not personally experience racism or stereotypes (cited by five participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Jeneice, Darnique)
- Supraordinate Theme #7: Teacher- and administrator-based racism (cited by four participants—Darnique, Imani, Kiara, Tiana)
- Emergent Theme #13: Peers’ prejudicial attitudes (cited by two participants—Imani, Tiana)

This category of supraordinate and emergent themes, along with the associated data, reveal insights about the nature and extent of racism and stereotypes participants encountered as the progressed through high school. These responses partially address Research Question 1. Although five of the eight participants reported not personally experience racism or stereotypes, three participants (plus Darnique, who offered examples of racism when probed to do so) asserted that teachers (a) evaluated their work differently than they evaluated...
other students’, (b) racially segregated classrooms, (c) assumed that academically struggling students who are Black are not trying or paying attention, or (d) made comments that "I don't want any of that acting black or ghettleness in my class." One of these participant added that school administration does not believe Black students allegations of non-Black teachers’ racist comments, and two of these participants noted instances where (a) a peer refused to accept that a person could be multiethnic, (b) a peer demonstrated limited understanding of African American hair, and (c) students made jokes about Black history course material.

Category #4: Advice to Students

Three emergent themes reflected participants’ advice offered to other Urban Black students:

- Emergent Theme #2: Believe in and encourage yourself (cited by three participants—Kiara, Imani, Darnique)
- Emergent Theme #8: Focus on academic goals and resist distractions (cited by all eight participants—Amara, Brayonna, Cenisa, Darnique, Imani, Kiara, Tiana, Jeneice)

These emergent themes and associated data were voiced in response to questions about what advice participants would give to other Urban Black high school students. These responses partially address each of the research questions. Relevant to Research Question 1, what are Urban Black high school
graduates' perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors, participants mentioned the various possible distractions, negativity, or stereotypes surrounding them in their families, from their friends, and in the school environment, and emphasized that students must focus on the goal and let nothing undermine their confidence. Relevant to Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, Emergent Theme #12 in this category speaks to the need for friends and taking advantage of the enjoyment that can be gained in high school. Relevant to Research Question 3, what coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges, participants emphasized the need to let nothing undermine their self-confidence or focus on reaching graduation. Specifically, they advised young Black students to “focus on your goals, don’t let other people distract you.” They further stressed that success is found in deeply committing the goal of finishing school and not allowing despair; abuse or criticism; racism or stereotypes; or even the distraction of fun, friends, and dating to get in the way of achieving the goal.

Category #5: Advice to Administration

The fifth and final category consists of two emergent themes that reflected participants’ advice offered to administrators of Urban Black high school students:
• Emergent Theme #3: Create more programs for Black students (cited by two participants—Imani, Darnique)

• Emergent Theme #11: Love, listen to, and support students (cited by five participants—Amara, Cenisa, Kiara, Jeneice, Darnique)

These emergent themes and associated data were voiced in response to questions about what advice participants would give to administrators of Urban Black high school students. These responses partially address Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success? Specifically, pointed out the need for programs that would allow Black students to congregate and support each other, in addition to these programs offering a forum for students to receive vital support and guidance from school and community leaders. Moreover, Emergent Theme #11 is quite straightforward in that these participants simply are needing teachers’ and administrators’ love, support, and listening ears.

Summary of Findings

The study findings provided a wealth of data related to this study’s research questions. Category 1: Reasons for Success partially addresses Research Questions 2 and 3. Related to Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, participants described relying on school staff, family members, friends, and
community leaders for emotional uplift, role modeling, having fun and enjoying healthy distractions, helping making contact with others, accountability, advice on how to handle difficult situations, practical help with difficult situations (e.g., getting switched to a different class), tutoring, inspiration and encouragement, guidance in developing good habits, and accountability to make sure they were completing their work and focusing on the goal of graduating.

Category 2: Obstacles to Success partially address Research Question 1, what are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors? Specifically, participants described facing challenges such as the death of family members, emotional abuse and neglect at home, lack of academic support at home, peers’ negativity and lack of focus on school, teachers’ refusal to help, being overwhelmed and unprepared for amount and difficulty of the workload, and struggling with urges to disengage at school and battles with low self-esteem. These various obstacles undermined their motivation and abilities to attend school, complete homework, pass tests, and reach their eventual goal of graduation.

Category 3: Experiences of Racism partially address Research Question 1. Although five of the eight participants reported not personally experience racism or stereotypes, three participants (plus Darnique, who offered examples of
racism when probed to do so) described instances of teacher, peer, or administrator racism or prejudices.

Category 4: Advice to Students partially address each of the research questions. Relevant to Research Question 1, what are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors, participants mentioned the various possible distractions, negativity, or stereotypes surrounding them in their families, from their friends, and in the school environment, and emphasized that students must focus on the goal and let nothing undermine their confidence. Relevant to Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, Emergent Theme #12 in this category speaks to the need for friends and taking advantage of the enjoyment that can be gained in high school. Relevant to Research Question 3, what coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges, participants emphasized the need to let nothing undermine their self-confidence or focus on reaching graduation. Specifically, they advised young Black students to “focus on your goals, don’t let other people distract you.” They further stressed that success is found in deeply committing the goal of finishing school and not allowing despair; abuse or criticism; racism or stereotypes; or even the distraction of fun, friends, and dating to get in the way of achieving the goal.
Category 5: Advice to Administrators partially address Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success? Specifically, pointed out the need for programs that would allow Black students to congregate and support each other, in addition to these programs offering a forum for students to receive vital support and guidance from school and community leaders. Moreover, Emergent Theme #11 is quite straightforward in that these participants simply are needing teachers’ and administrators’ love, support, and listening ears.

In summary, relevant to Research Question 1, what are Urban Black high school graduates’ perspectives about achieving academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors, participants described facing challenges such as the death of family members, emotional abuse and neglect at home, lack of academic support at home, peers’ negativity and lack of focus on school, teachers’ refusal to help, being overwhelmed and unprepared for amount and difficulty of the workload, and struggling with urges to disengage at school and battles with low self-esteem. Notably, five of the eight participants reported not personally experience racism or stereotypes. Examples offered by other participants included teacher-based racism as well as prejudices propagated by peers. These various obstacles reportedly undermined participants’ motivation and abilities to attend school, complete homework, pass tests, and reach their eventual goal of graduation. Despite noting the various possible distractions,
negativity, or stereotypes surrounding them in their families, from their friends, and in the school environment, participants emphasized that students must focus on the goal and let nothing undermine their confidence.

Regarding Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, participants described relying on school staff, family members, friends, and community leaders for emotional uplift, role modeling, having fun and enjoying healthy distractions, helping making contact with others, accountability, advice on how to handle difficult situations, practical help with difficult situations (e.g., getting switched to a different class), tutoring, inspiration and encouragement, guidance in developing good habits, and accountability to make sure they were completing their work and focusing on the goal of graduating. Participants also pointed out the need for programs that would allow Black students to congregate and support each other, in addition to these programs offering a forum for students to receive vital support and guidance from school and community leaders. Perhaps the most fundamental support need of these students is simply teachers’ and administrators’ love, support, and listening ears.

Related to Research Question 3, what coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges, participants described identifying and focusing on the clear and compelling goal of graduating, taking initiative and persevering through challenges, wanting to be a role model and
create positive change, avoiding or ignoring racism and stereotypes, deepening their connection and engagement with school, participating in college-bound programs, seeking inspiration from role models, engaging in self-encouragement, experiencing emotional growth and healing, and seeking healthy distractions. Participants emphasized the need to let nothing undermine their self-confidence or focus on reaching graduation.
Achieving Academic Success Despite Stereotype Threats

Although most participants reported being achieving or high achieving academically and currently were working on a college degree or had already finished one. Several also reported feeling unprepared for high school when they first started and further found it very challenging (identified within Category 2: Obstacles to Success). The present findings supported findings from past research, which documented severe racial inequality in education and a widening gap between the academic achievement of Black and White students, as evidenced by standardized testing (Barton & Coley, 2010; Camera, 2016; Carver, 1975; Jencks & Phillips, 2011; NAEP, 2013; Noguera, 2012; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995), grade point averages, and college entrance rates (Jencks & Phillips, 2011).

A key focus of this study and this particular research question was to understand how students coped with the stereotypes and challenges they encountered. Three of the eight participants reported having experienced little or no racism or stereotypes in high school (identified within Category 3: Experiences of Racism). Two additional participants voiced that the racism they
experienced was relatively minor, such as “around the corner, around the bush,” or “it’s like you’ll be in a classroom full of Hispanics, or Whites and everybody’ll look at you.” The remaining three voiced experiences of feeling that a teacher was evaluating their work differently than other students’ work, observing a teacher racially segregating the classroom, or witnessing a teacher make racially charged remarks. The three students escalated the issue to school administration, with two receiving their desired outcome of being switched from the class or the teacher being corrected, and one reporting that the administration did nothing. These data support findings from past research, which argue that experiences of discrimination, segregation, and racism have produced low academic self-confidence, low self-worth, poor self-image, and diminished self-respect (Dubois & Edwards, 2008; King, Davis, & Brown, 2012).

Participants described coping with instances of racism or stereotyping by avoiding racist teachers, people, or situations, and ignoring what they could not physically avoid (identified within Category 1: Reasons for Success). This sentiment was reiterated in their advice to young Black students to “focus on your goals, don’t let other people distract you” (identified within Category 4: Advice to Students), which was voiced by seven of the eight participants. These individuals stressed that success is found in deeply committing to the goal of finishing school and not allowing despair; abuse or criticism; racism or stereotypes; or even the distraction of fun, friends, and dating to get in the way of achieving the goal.
Thus, in answer to Research Question 1, study findings suggest that the way Urban Black high school students achieved academic success despite stereotype threats and impeding social factors is to identify and focus on their goals, circumventing what obstacles they could and cognitively and emotionally coping with what they could not (identified within Category 1: Reasons for Success and Category 4: Advice to Students).

Support Systems

The participants described support figures at home and school (Category 1: Reasons for Success as well as stories of struggle and differentness from friends and, for some, family members (Category 2: Obstacles to Success). These descriptions are consistent with past research, which emphasize that Black students need extra support navigating unfamiliar and challenging school contexts and that many students lack this support (Category 5: Advice to Administrators; Barton & Coley, 2010; Basch, 2011; Burke & Lander, 2010; Johnson, 2011; Dubois & Edwards, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Noguera, 2012; Rowley & Wright, 2001; Thompson, 2004).

Participants noted several sources of support that helped make their success possible (Category 1: Reasons for Success). Friends were cited as study buddies as well as sources of emotional support and stress relief. School staff, including teachers, administrative staff, sports coaches, guidance counselors, and tutors were mentioned as sources of advice, moral support, and
practical guidance. For example, three participants noted the inspiration sports coaches provided to complete their homework first, always do their best, or to persevere through difficulties. Administrative staff offered moral support and guidance to keep trying and asking for help when academic challenges were encountered. Teachers were sources of practical help and skill development. One participant, who faced a severe lack of support at home, found mother and father figures in her teachers. Three participants noted their participation in college-bound programs in their school or community and also benefited from the help and support from the program’s leaders. Family members and role models (often members of the student’s immediate or extended family) acted as a final critical source of support for students. These individuals provided a model for what the students could become (or models or what they definitely did not want to become), verbal encouragement, and accountability to ensure the students were doing their schoolwork and staying the course. Therefore, in answer to Research Question 2, what support systems do Urban Black students develop and utilize to attain academic success, students primarily rely upon family members, community members, school staff, and college-bound programs (Category 1: Reasons for Success).

Coping Mechanisms for Challenges

Participants described many strategies they employed for coping with the challenges they encountered, including cognitive (e.g., goal setting), emotional
(e.g., growth and healing), and behavioral (e.g., taking initiative) approaches (see Category 1: Reasons for Success). Thus, in answer to Research Question 3, what coping mechanisms do Urban Black students utilize when they encounter challenges, the students utilize cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies that enhance their focus on the goal, reduce their stress, avoid distraction, and promote their achievement of the goal.

These findings reflect that these students efforts and attitudes reflected a growth mindset, meaning a belief that success comes from effort (Dweck, 2000). Dweck explained that individuals with growth mindsets push forward when faced with obstacles and challenges. In this study, the participants’ accounts also reflect grit, meaning a persistence and desire to achieve long-term goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Duckworth and Quinn explained that grit is a better indicator of future earnings and happiness than intelligence or talent. Similar to this study, Dixson et al. (2017) found that grit helped explain the success or failure of Black and African American students.

Relationship to the Theoretical Framework

This study was based on theoretical foundations of CRT and stereotype threat theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although CRT asserts that discrimination is normal in American society, five of the eight participants in this study reported
they experienced no or few instances of racism or discrimination. In this respect, the study findings did not support past literature.

CRT further asserts that Urban Black students reflect histories of illiteracy academic achievement gaps (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although some participants mentioned their family members had not completed high school, other participants shared that their parents or cousins had college degrees or were completing college. Moreover, five of the eight participants in this study were in college, one was deciding which college to attend, and one had finished college. Participants’ high school GPAs ranged 2.4–4.2 (M = 3.05, SD = .59), indicating that these participants did not demonstrate an academic achievement gap or low college matriculation rates. In this respect, the present study’s findings did not support past literature.

Another tenet of CRT is that Black students face unique psychosocial impediments and extreme levels of poverty (Evans, 2004; Evans & Kim, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This study was conducted in San Bernadino, the second poorest city in America (Gazzar, 2015), which suggests that this study’s participants faced poverty. One participant, in particular, mentioned that her family’s frequent moves and financial difficulties in the latter years of her high school career became an obstacle to her education and undermined her focus and motivation. Moreover, seven of the eight participants described home-related stress, including emotional abuse and neglect as well as lack of academic
support, which became obstacles to their education. In this respect, the present study’s findings support CRT tenets.

Stereotype threat refers to the perception that one’s group or race is the subject of stigma and that such perceptions increase anxiety and decrease performance (Kellow & Jones, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Various researchers have concluded that these perceptions expand achievement gaps and impede the development of a growth mindset (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). In this study, five participants reported they did not personally experience racism or stereotypes. When pressed to provide examples, four participants cited instances of teacher- and administrator-based racism and two of these participants also cited peers’ prejudicial attitudes. At the same time, three of these four participants who noted instances of racism or stereotype when pressed explained that they avoid or ignore such instances and do not let it bother them. The fourth of these participants expressed the same sentiment indirectly, by explaining that she deliberately chose to focus on school and resist temptations to fight, “go wild,” or get distracted from her academic goal. In this respect, the present study’s findings did not support literature on stereotype threat, as the majority of participants reported not experiencing racism or stereotypes, and those who did responded with a renewed commitment to their goal and a growth mindset.
Implications for Education Leaders

1. It is recommended that Black students be taught about the culture and history of their people. Participants in this study described the range of stressors they experienced in the home (Category 2: Obstacles to Success). They also described some experiences of racism (Category 3: Experiences of Racism). To aid in their sensemaking of their varied experiences and converting this sensemaking into helpful, productive action, it would be helpful Urban Black students to learn about the culture and history of their people. It is possible that by placing their experiences within the larger context of their history around the globe that they will have more understanding of the the unique challenges they have faced and the distinctive strengths they have and can leverage as a people for advancing their success, both individually and collectively.

2. Urban Black students need mentors. Per Category 1: Reasons for Success, it was clear that participants strongly relied upon the others’ support to progress through high school and achieve the success of graduation. Thus, a strong mentor program is recommended for students to be propelled forward and grow. While many participants found support from family members, several participants also named stress in the home as a key obstacle to their success (Category 2; Obstacles to Success) and called on administrators to love, listen to,
and support students (Category 5: Advice to Administrators). These data suggest it is imperative for educators to establish mentoring programs in the schools for these students.

3. It is recommended that social-emotional learning, restorative justice practices, and trauma informed education is a used when teaching Urban Black youth. The participants’ accounts of home-based stressors—specifically emotional abuse and neglect (Category 2: Obstacles to Success) and experiences of racism (Category 3: Experiences of Racism) suggest the importance of these students’ learning strategies to enhance their abilities to grow socially and emotionally, recover from trauma, and achieve restorative justice. With these practices in place, it is anticipated that the students may be better equipped to achieve their desired academic and life outcomes.

Limitations

Three limitations of the study should be noted. First is that the study is a snapshot of one point in time based on participant recall, which is subject to a variety of biases. A longitudinal design would have enabled the researcher to identify factors that preceded and may have a causal effect upon the results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The second limitation is that generalization from the findings cannot be offered since the findings are based on self-reported data.
from only eight female participants from one high school located in a lower economic area of San Bernardino, California. The degree of similarity between the participants limits the generality to the results to other populations. The third limitation is the principal researcher’s role as a teacher at the participating school. This means that the researcher may have preconceived ideas about the situations Urban Black students face at the school.

Two delimitations were noted during the study, concerning participant exclusion criteria and the methodology used. Current high school students were excluded because they were still developing cognitively, emotionally, and physically (Willens, 2013). Thus, they were not perceived to not have the benefit of time and distance to determine what promoted their success. Although the qualitative design was the best approach for this particular study because it allowed greater details of the student’s voice perspective to be understood, it was limited by the constraints of self-reported data. Such data is subject to a variety of biases, including hypothesis guessing, socially desirable answering, and more (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, qualitative research can be affected by researcher bias to a greater extent than is quantitative research. Moreover, a quantitative study would have provided statistical assessment of students’ attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. Other benefits of conducting a quantitative analysis would have allowed the primary investigator to test specific hypotheses for generalization (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).
Suggestions for Future Research

Relatively few instances of racism and stereotyping were identified in this study (Category 3: Experiences of Racism). Moreover, it was unclear whether some of the instances reported (e.g., feeling unfairly evaluated by teachers, fielding insensitive comments from other students about their appearance, being "looked at") were racially motivated or unique to Black students. It would be beneficial to conduct a larger study in the future, including students of all races to determine whether participants’ perceptions and experiences of racism are consistent with other students’ perceptions and experiences. Additional research also may reveal more widespread instances of racism and stereotyping than what was shared in this study, which would be more aligned with the findings of past research (DuBois, 1994; King, Davis, & Brown, 2012; Noguera, 2012; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Longitudinal research, including students enrolled in each year of the high school experience, would be helpful for revealing the in vivo challenges, racism, and stereotypes students are experiencing as they happen, along with the sensemaking, coping strategies, and support mechanisms they employ to persist through to completion. This kind of study also would reveal the offramps previously successful students take from high school, including the reasons and breakdowns of support that lead to their departure.
Summary

Five categories were identified to answer the research questions. Category 1: Reasons for Success partially addresses Research Questions 2 and 3. Category 2: Obstacles to Success partially address Research Question 1. Category 3: Experiences of Racism partially address Research Question 1. Category 4: Advice to Students partially address each of the research questions. Category 5: Advice to Administrators partially address Research Question 2. This study’s findings only partially support CRT literature and assertions by stereotype threat theory.

My firsthand experiences of once being an at-risk Urban Black student and my observations and reflections as a researcher and teacher of this population emphasized to me: (a) the importance of asking these students to share their stories; (b) their substantial lack of support at school and at home; (c) the significant academic challenges they face; and (d) the stifling, marginalizing, and disempowering effects of racism in the school system. Above all, this research emphasized the need for continuing to seek out Urban Black students’ stories. The participants’ excitement to share their stories and appreciation for listening and allowing them to talk was evident. They had much to say and we have much to learn from them. Let them speak!
APPENDIX A

SCHOOL LETTER OF SUPPORT
February 1st, 2019

Letter of Support

The purpose of this letter is to verify that I have given permission for Luguanda Hawkins to use her classroom as a location to perform interviews for her Dissertation.

I also give permission for our data department to provide a contact list, including email and phone number, of our Black graduates who graduated between June 2017 to 2018.

Thank you,

[Signature]

HIGH SCHOOL

* San Bernardino, California
APPENDIX B

STUDY INVITATION EMAIL FROM PUNCHBOWL
From: Luquanda Hawkins <mail@mail.punchbowl.com>
Sent: [Date and Time]
To: [recipient address]
Subject: Punchbowl Invitation: "Black Graduates Wanted"!!!

You're invited! Please click on the invitation to see more details and to RSVP.

Black Graduates Wanted!!!
Friday, March 22, 2019 to Friday, March 29, 2019

Don't want invitations from this host? Remove yourself.
If you can't see the above invitation, click here.
Add mail@mail.punchbowl.com to your address book to ensure you receive all invitations and cards in your inbox.
To learn about our privacy policy, click here.
Black Graduates Wanted!!

I was provided your information by the Administration of High school, as a graduate of High School, you are invited to participate in a research project on academic success in Urban Black students. I am a doctoral candidate at California State University, San Bernardino and the study has been approved by the CSUSB Institutional Review Board. The purpose of my research is to examine urban Black high school graduates’ pathways to academic success. To participate, you need to be:

1. A graduate from High school, in the San Bernardino City Unified School District
2. 18 years or older
3. Of Black or African American ancestry

As part of this study, you would participate in a one-on-one interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview would be conducted in a classroom at High School after school hours. If you are interested in participating, please press the Continue button above and then RSVP “Yes” by March 15, 2019. If you volunteer, you may or may not be selected for an interview. Only those participants randomly selected for an interview will be contacted. Those who participate in an interview will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card as a token of my appreciation.

If you have additional questions prior to deciding whether to participate, please contact me at @coyote.csusb.edu or

Hosted by Luquanda Hawkins
APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW
Hello _______,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in an interview for my study. As a reminder, I am a doctoral student at California State University, San Bernardino and I am examining Urban Black high school students' pathways to academic success as part of my dissertation. To participate, you need to be:

1. A graduate from [name] High school, in the San Bernardino City Unified School District
2. 18 years or older
3. Of Black or African American ancestry

The one-on-one interview for this study will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted in classroom H-8 at [name] High School between 2:30 and 8:30 pm March 22-29, 2019. Please respond to this email with three days and times that work for you to be interviewed.

As a way to show my appreciation for your participation in the interview process, you will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card.

If you have any questions about your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at [contact information].

Sincerely,

Luquanda Hawkins
APPENDIX D

TELEPHONE SCRIPT FOR SCHEDULING AN INTERVIEW
Hello _______,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in an interview for my study. As a reminder, I am a doctoral student at California State University, San Bernardino and I am examining Urban Black high school students’ pathways to academic success as part of my dissertation. To participate, you need to be:

1. A graduate from [name] High school, in the San Bernardino City Unified School District
2. 18 years or older
3. Of Black or African American ancestry

The one-on-one interview for this study will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted in classroom H-8 at [name] High School between 2:30 and 8:30 pm March 22-29, 2019. What day and time works best for you? [Schedule the participant for the interview day and time].

As a way to show my appreciation for your participation in the interview process, you will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card.

If you have any questions before this day, prior to deciding whether to participate, please do not hesitate to contact me at [contact information].

See you soon and thank you,

Luquanda Hawkins
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Participant: __________________________________

Principal Investigator: Luquanda N. Hawkins

The study in which you are volunteering to participate in is designed to examine Urban Black high school graduates’ pathways to academic success. This study is being conducted by Luquanda N. Hawkins, doctoral student from the College of Education; Educational Leadership, under the supervision of Dr. Marita Mahoney, College of Education, California State University, San Bernardino for the purposes of completing the doctoral dissertation. Participants in this research study must be Black (African American) High school graduates of the San Bernardino Unified School District. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to examine Urban Black high school students’ pathways to academic success as part of my dissertation.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES: Participation in this study presupposes the following:
That you are willing to participate in one face-to-face interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. To ensure accuracy of information, you will agree to have the interview audio-recorded. The recording will be transcribed and the investigator will maintain confidentiality by keeping your name and school district out of any publication that may come from this study. All state and federal laws will be upheld to maintain confidentiality and the recordings will be deleted after the transcriptions have been made.

INCENTIVE: Everyone that participates in the interview process will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card as a way to show appreciation for your time.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL: Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time. You will still receive the $10 Starbucks gift card, no matter what level of participation you provide. Your participation in the study will
consist of a 45-60 minute interview and the data collection/analysis timeframe will be from March 2019 to March of 2020. Should you be interested, I will email you a copy of the summary of the study as a way to say thank you for your contribution in this study. If you would like a copy of the study summary, please provide your name and email address.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Information gathered as part of this study shall either be stored in password protected computer or in a locked cabinet that only the researcher will have access to. The investigator will take all reasonable measures to maintain the confidentiality of the participant’s identity and responses. Participant identities and responses will be coded for privacy purposes and only coded information will be used in accordance to federal and state research procedures on reporting the data gathered by this process. If the findings of this study are published, presented or reported on for professional review, no personal information about the identity of the participant or affiliation to the school district will be released. At the end of three years, all files collected as part of this study will be deleted.

RISKS: The researcher believes there to only be minimal risks associated with this study. As part of the research process, discomfort may arise from answering questions about past experiences. The researcher will work with you to ensure any concerns or questions are addressed throughout the process and discomfort is minimized to ensure no harm is caused to human subjects.

BENEFITS: There are no benefits to the participant by way of compensation. The information gathered as part of this study will go far to add and extend the body of research examining teacher-student relationships with at-risk youth as well as make policy recommendation to assist practitioners.

CONTACT: If any questions, comments or concerns about the research occur, please contact the lead investigator, Luquanda N. Hawkins at [contact information], or the dissertation chair, Dr. Marita Mahonery, California State University, San Bernardino Department of Educational Leadership, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino CA, 92407 or email at [contact information].

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT
I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study conducted by doctoral student Luquanda N. Hawkins from the Educational
Program at California State University, San Bernardino. I am aware that I may contact Dr. Marita Mahoney, Mrs Luquanda N. Hawkins’ dissertation chair, at [contact information] for questions.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I hereby certify that I am over the age of 18 years old and agree to participate in the research described above. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and all procedures are fully understood.
Participant’s Signature: _____________________________ Date: ______________

It is the assertion of the researcher that the research procedures have been explained and defined to the participant and being of sound mind and body, the participant voluntarily and knowingly have giving informed consent to be a participant in this research and I am cosigning this form as proof of acceptance of this person’s consent.

Sign
The Interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy of transcription; please sign below if you agree to the taping of the interview.

Participant’s Signature: _____________________________ Date: __________
Principal Investigator: _____________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL
IRB #: IRB-FY2019-201
Title: "LET THEM SPEAK"
Creation Date: 3-9-2019
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Luquanda Hawkins
Review Board: CSUSB Main IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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<tr>
<td>Luquanda Hawkins</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:willia88@coyote.csusb.edu">willia88@coyote.csusb.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marita Mahoney</td>
<td>Co-Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mmahorey@csusb.edu">mmahorey@csusb.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luquanda Hawkins</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:willia88@coyote.csusb.edu">willia88@coyote.csusb.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Luquanda Hawkins</td>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:willia88@coyote.csusb.edu">willia88@coyote.csusb.edu</a></td>
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APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW SCRIPT
Thank you for meeting with me. Today, I would like to learn about your experiences in high school and how you have navigated your way to graduation. Let’s begin by reviewing the Informed Consent form. [Gives the consent form to the participant and allows him or her time to review it.] Do you have any questions before signing the form?

So I can focus on our conversation, I’m going to record our conversation. Do I have your permission to do so? Do you have any questions before we begin?

WARM-UP QUESTIONS
1. If you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?
   *Framing of Questions:*
   • Please, tell me more.
   • Describe what that means to you.

2. Describe what thoughts come to mind when you think about completing your high school graduation.

CONTEXT SETTING
Today, I particularly want to understand your journey academically through high school.

3. Thinking back to when you started high school, how would you describe yourself academically?
   *Framing of Questions:*
   • Please use three adjectives to describe yourself at that time. Why these?
   • Please tell me how you would rate your academic success at that time

4. What do you think explains your level of success at that time?
   *Framing of Questions: (use only those that contribute to the conversation)*
   • Please explain any traits, attitudes, or abilities that contributed to your success.
   • Please describe the support, if any, that you received from family, friends, or teachers.
   • Please describe any role models you had that contributed to your success.
   • Please tell me about any classes, extracurricular activities, or community involvement that helped you be successful.

5. How would you describe yourself academically at this time?
   *Framing of Questions:*
   • Please use three adjectives to describe yourself at that time. Why these?
   • Please tell me how you would rate your academic success at that time
6. What do you think explains your level of success at this time?  
*Framing of Questions*: (use only those that contribute to the conversation)  
- Please explain any traits, attitudes, or abilities that contributed to your success.  
- Please describe the support, if any, that you received from family, friends, or teachers.  
- Please describe any role models you had that contributed to your success.  
- Please tell me about any classes, extracurricular activities, or community involvement that helped you be successful.

**CORE QUESTIONS**

Now that we have some signposts for where you saw yourself at the beginning of your high school journey and where you are now, I would like to understand how you got from there to here.

7. Please walk me through your experience, telling your story in as much detail as possible.  
[Researcher will encourage the participant to tell his or her story with as little interruption as possible, probing only to gather a rich and detailed story]

*Possible Framing of Questions*: (use only those that contribute to the conversation)

- Please identify the support systems, if any, you relied on at that time?  
- Please describe any obstacles you faced, if any.  
- Please describe any experiences of stereotypes or racism you had.  
- Please describe how you felt about yourself and your future at this time.  
- Describe the role your ethnicity played, if any, in your experience.  
- Please explain the reasons for your success/failure you experienced at this time.  
- Please compare your results to other students'.  
- Please describe the relationship(s) you had with your teacher(s).  
- Please describe what your life was like at this time.  
- Please explain the influence your home environment had on your academic achievement.

**CLOSING QUESTIONS**

Thanks so much for sharing your story. This is very helpful for me, and I really appreciated getting to know your experiences better.

7. As you reflect on all that you just shared about your journey through high school, please identify the three biggest challenges that affected your academics.
8. Please describe the coping strategies that were most helpful for overcoming those.
9. Please name the sources of support that were most helpful for overcoming those.
10. Is there anything else I haven’t asked or we haven’t discussed that you would like to share about your academic success and how you did it?

Thank you again for your time and your insights!
APPENDIX H

RAW TRANSCRIPTS
Speaker 1: So thank you for meeting with me today. I would like to learn about your experiences in high school. How to navigate, how you were able to graduate, okay? We're going to begin by saying you were okay signing this.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And we're going to be recording the conversation, is that okay?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: All right. You have any questions before we start? All right. If you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?

Speaker 2: Challenging.

Speaker 1: Challenging. Tell me more.

Speaker 2: Because high school is like a rocky ... It's like a rocky road that you go down. When I first went to high school, it was like, oh, this is way much harder than middle school. Then, when I started getting the hang of it, then I start like understanding more about it.

Speaker 1: I see. Describe what comes to mind when you think of high school and graduation.

Speaker 2: I was excited. I was excited because like I'm my mom's first child to graduate and there's six of us.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: My big brother and my dad, my older brother he didn't graduate on my dad's side, and then my mom kids, so I was her first to graduate. So I was happy to make them happy, and I was happy to actually graduate.

Speaker 1: Wow. I bet. I bet. Thinking back to when you started high school, what kind of student were you?

Speaker 2: I was a pretty good student because I never wanted to like mess up what I have with teachers. I never was a kid that would disrespect anybody elder than me, so that was it.

Speaker 1: Okay, did you find it easy in school or not so easy?

Speaker 2: It was kind of easy but then again, it was like I don't remember this, it was so long ago. But it was pretty easy.
Speaker 1: Pretty easy? If you were to rate yourself like were you an A student, B student, C student?

Speaker 2: I was like a B student.

Speaker 1: B student. Okay.

Speaker 2: Because I asked when I need help with something and figured it.

Speaker 1: Okay. I'm going to ask you to give your three adjectives. And when I say that, you can say, I'm smart. I'm cool. I'm funny. That's it, so you can describe yourself in three adjectives, what would it be?

Speaker 2: I'm helpful, I'm determined, and I'm pretty smart.

Speaker 1: Okay. You being a B student, why do you think you were? What made you that student?

Speaker 2: Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school. But when I got to high school it was kind of rocky at first because I'm not used to this, and I'm not used to going to all these classes, and stuff like that. That measured me like how to be. But then when I got sophomore, junior, then I start getting my grades back up to As and stuff.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Being a B student is a good student.

Speaker 2: Yeah. I used to be sad when I'd get lower than a B, like a C.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: I used to be sad, and my mom just used to go, "You have to just work and ask." Sometimes I used to be scared to ask teachers because some teachers used to be mean, so I didn't really want to ask. But I started asking more, then going to tutoring and stuff, so I would know.

Speaker 1: It's still a really good score to get a B. What gave you the motivation to strive for those kind of grades? Or how did you ... because a lot of students don't get Bs, they get Ds and Fs, so how do you think you were able to?

Speaker 2: Out of all my mom kids, I'm the one that always like ... If you want to get somewhere than I have to ... I really have to work on getting there, and I'm not going to stop until I get there. When I first went to high school, I'm like, my goal is to not get nothing under a C. When I got my first C in one of my classes, I was really sad, and I was crying to my principal. He was like, "Don't be sad. All you have to do is just go to tutoring. You could get your grade up." I was really happy when I finally got my grade up, so yeah.
Speaker 1: Wow. Oh, good. When we think about things like attitudes, traits, and abilities, what kind of attitude were you in to be able to succeed? What kind of abilities do you believe you had that helped you to succeed?

Speaker 2: I really ignored people. I really tried to help a lot of people like if they're mad. I'll try to really help them instead of being mean towards them because I know sometimes people go through things and I know if you trigger them more and more, it's just going to get worse. I try to help before I just like leave the whole situation alone.

Speaker 1: That's nice. Did you receive support from family, or teachers, or counselors? Did you have a mentor or role model?

Speaker 2: Well, my mom helped me, and my dad helped me, my grandma helped me. But mainly, if I needed help I would go to my counselor, tutor, or my teacher. But if my teacher didn't help me, then I tried to like at least figure it out on my own.

Speaker 1: Were you in any extracurricular activities, community involvements? Were you into any type of religious affiliations that you felt supported you?

Speaker 2: I was in sports, basketball, volleyball, and softball.

Speaker 1: And did they help you out? I mean, how did that prepare you or help you, or if it did at all?

Speaker 2: That really helped me keep my grades up because I really loved sports and if my grades dropped from the sport, I wouldn't want to play like a game if I see my grades going down. I rather pick up my grades than play a basketball, or a volleyball game. That used to help me like keep my grades up. I would do my practicing after I do my homework. But that's how our coaches was, they'll tell us, you have to do your homework first, then we'll go outside and practice. That really helped a lot.

Speaker 1: I see. I see. Now we're going to get into some questions that are a little bit more deeper. And with these particular questions, I want you to identify any obstacles you had in high school, anything you felt like were challenges, and any experiences that you experienced stereotypes or racism. Do you know what a stereotype is?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay. Can you describe if you've had any of them, and if you haven't, you can say that?
Speaker 2: One time, when I first became a freshman, I had like a racist teacher. She would act different towards all colored people. Soon as she started, I went to her desk one time and I told her like, "I need help with this." She just handed us the paper and was like, "Do this and you bring it back tomorrow. It's homework." So I went to her desk like, "Could you help me with this?" And she was like, "Oh, well, no. That's something that your family need to help you with." Then, I heard from other classmates, oh, she's really racist. I had her before. But I wasn't really paying attention because I had to see it for myself. Then, she really started acting weird towards us.

Speaker 2: We would raise our hands, she wouldn't pick on us or anything, so I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that class.

Speaker 1: How did you feel in that class? What did that make you feel like? Did it affect your studying, your ability to perform in there?

Speaker 2: No, I just kind of stayed to myself. When I seen her act like that, I'm like, I'm not going to just say nothing else. I'm just going to wait until my mom talked to the principal, and I switched my class. But ever since she was acting like that, I just stayed to myself. I did my work-

Speaker 1: So you didn't participate in class, you didn't raise your hand?

Speaker 2: Yeah. It made me not want to raise my hand anymore, answer questions even though I knew the answer, but I didn't want to raise my hand anymore or anything.

Speaker 1: Wow. That's unfortunate. Being a black girl, going to school, how did you feel?

Speaker 2: I felt all right. I didn't really have problems with racism, only that teacher because I really like ... In high school, I really didn't talk to nobody because I didn't want to get distracted. I really didn't want to make lot of friends because it's a lot of drama when you make a lot of friends, but then, yeah. So I really stayed to myself and just hang by myself, like even at lunch. Like I had like a few of my cousins at school with me, so I would be with them. But passing period and stuff, I don't talk to anybody, I just go straight to my next class, do what I got to do, but then that's it.

Speaker 1: Do you feel like it was harder for you than other people of other races to go to school, and to work, and to do well?
Speaker 2: Not really. Well, I had went to Carter at first, and there, it's like some of the teachers would act different towards coloreds. I mean, some of the teachers wouldn't, but when I went to [Miner 00:10:28], like they treat everybody the same. It was no racism, nothing.

Speaker 1: So your life right now, how is it?

Speaker 2: It's pretty good. I'm still trying to figure out what's going on, what I'm going to do because at first I was going to go to Valley, it's too many people that I know there, and I just don't want to get distracted. I'm thinking about my dad and my mom want to go to a private college, West Coast University in Ontario, so I can get my RN.

Speaker 1: That's exciting. That's really good.

Speaker 2: So I'm really happy about that.

Speaker 1: I bet. We’ve said a whole lot of things, and asked a lot of questions. There's students that are going to be coming behind you. There's students that are black kids, that may not have had your strength and things like that, what could you say to them about how to succeed and how to graduate?

Speaker 2: I say no matter what, don't let nobody get in your way of what you want to do. If you have a goal, strive for it, and don't give up on your goals. It don't matter. Don't get a boyfriend because they're distracting, and just strive for your goals.

Speaker 1: Would you like to tell superintendents that are over all the schools, like this is what a black student needs to be successful?

Speaker 2: A black student needs like all your full help and attention because some of them like is scared to speak to other races because they feel like, oh, well, this teacher's going to act this way because she's this color. I think that more teachers should act like ... treat all students equally at the end of the day, and don't treat nobody different.

Speaker 1: Wow. I've said a lot of things, is there anything that you feel like this ... I want to make sure I capture your experience in high school in your own words. Is there anything you want to say?

Speaker 2: My experience of high school was, it was okay. I'm not going to say it was great because I did go through some things, like I went through depression in high school. I went through ... like a lot of stuff I was frustrated, but I never let anything get in my way to graduate.

Speaker 1: Wow, that's exciting. That's good to hear. You have a lot of strength, young lady. So I'm going to stop our-
Cenisa Transcript

Speaker 1: So, you signed the consent form, and you’re okay with this being recorded?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1: All right. So here we go. We’re going to talk about your experiences in high school.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: Like, if you can think back that far, right? So if you had one word to sum it up, what would that be?

Speaker 2: Exciting.

Speaker 1: Exciting. Why would you say exciting?

Speaker 2: Because high school was the best time, ever. It wasn’t as hard as now. We had, I had friends that helped me through everything, and I was in everything. I was in step, I was in speech and debate, talent shows, double Dutch. It was just easy and fun.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2: Yeah, exciting.

Speaker 1: So when you think about graduation, what did that feel like?

Speaker 2: It felt like you was graduating from college or something. Everybody was rooting for you, everybody was happy, excited to see what college you was going to, it was perfect.

Speaker 1: Perfect. So what about, what kind of student were you?

Speaker 2: I don’t, I was a student. I was something else.

Speaker 1: Were you an A, B, C student?

Speaker 2: A C.

Speaker 1: C, okay. How were you in comparison to other students, would you say?

Speaker 2: I would say I was in the middle. Because you have good kids, and you have kids that’s just crazy. And I was a little bit in the middle. I wanted to do everything, but then I was scared to do everything. So I was in the middle.
Speaker 1: In the middle, huh? When you think about your attitude or abilities in high school, what helped you to cope when things were rough?

Speaker 2: Graduation. Because graduation is everything. I feel like if you don't make it to graduation, it's just sad. Because that's the main goal. You go to school, you go through every grade to graduate, to get everything done, and finish, and move on to the next level. Yeah.

Speaker 1: Did you have role models, did you have supporters, did you have mentors? Who helped you?

Speaker 2: If I didn't have nobody at home I had teachers, I had friends, my friends' parents, and everyone around me, coaches. It was a lot of people that helped.

Speaker 1: And you say if you didn't have anyone at home? Did your home help you?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: Or do you feel like home life hurt you in certain ways?

Speaker 2: Yes. At home it was not a lot of help at all. It was kind of like with school nobody knew how to help me with assignments, nobody knew anything about school. It was no concern at all.

Speaker 1: How did you overcome that? There's some students that are facing that right now, and they didn't have your strength. How did you overcome that?

Speaker 2: They just gotta stay in their own lane and not worry about everybody else. Everybody's worried about boys and girls and stuff that does not matter. They just need to focus on they self, so in the end it could pay off.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative). When you talk about your extracurricular activities, the things that you did, whether it was step, or church, or whatever it was, how did it help you? Or did it hurt you?

Speaker 2: It helps you. Because it takes your mind off everything negative. And you're not really thinking about nothing but what you're doing at that moment.

Speaker 1: Okay. I want you to give me three adjectives that describes you in high school, three.

Speaker 2: Outgoing, spiritual, and curious.
Speaker 1: Curious. All right. So now we're going to get a little deeper. We're going to talk about obstacles you faced. How did you overcome the big stuff?

Speaker 2: The big stuff. My biggest thing that I had was with my dad. My dad is very negative, he puts you down, everything. And I got through it by, school was my escape from everything. When I was at school I was not worried about, you know, "Ooh, [inaudible 00:04:58], ooh." I was not worried about nothing else but school, but worried about what I'm doing at school. I wasn't worried about fitting in, or anything. It was just me at school, trying to get through it.

Speaker 1: Oh, okay. Do you feel, do you know what a stereotype is?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1: Do you know what racism is?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1: Did you experience any of that with a teacher, or an experience here at school?

Speaker 2: Racism. I would say I did, but it never comes out straight forward. It's always around the corner, around the bush. So I don't pay it no mind.

Speaker 1: So it didn't affect you?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What did it make you feel like, though?

Speaker 2: It, it hurts your feelings. It hurts my feelings, and I don't like when they try to add you in different groups, and different type of people. Because you know who you are. So, it'll hurt your feelings.

Speaker 1: And the students that are coming behind you that may experience that, what message do you have for them?

Speaker 2: Be strong. Don't let people get in your head, and try to take you out your character. Because once you get out your character you look like the fool. You're embarrassing yourself.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative). So, if you had just one thing you can say, "This is why I succeeded", what is that one thing?

Speaker 2: Self-encouragement.

Speaker 1: Self-encouragement. Okay. All right. So, we're ending this part, and this was what I wanted to ask you is, if you had something to tell Dr. [Marsden
00:06:59], who is our superintendent, that, "Dr. Marsden, this is what black needs to succeed." What would that be?

Speaker 2: Encouragement and love, they need to know that they're going to get help, and that they're being heard, and that everything isn't hidden, and that they're being seen. Because a lot of black kids feel like they're not being seen. They feel like they have to be ghetto and fit in at school, because everybody else is. And they have to feel like it's okay to stand out, to do what they want to do. Everybody in high school wants to fit in. Everybody wants to fit it and be someone they're not, and I feel like in highlight everyone should learn how to be their self, learn how to learn yourself, so you can figure out what you want to be, and start working towards it.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative), wow, wow. So you've talked about your challenges, and your any obstacles, and your support system. Is there anything I've left out? Because I wanna make sure I capture what you felt in high school, what you went through, what helped you, what didn't help you, and students that are coming behind you, how to help them. Did I miss anything?

Speaker 2: No. I just, I want everyone behind me to reach their goal. I feel like everybody should. A lot of kids now, are going through a lot of stuff I've never seen in my class. So I don't know what's going on, but I feel like everybody just needs to stop, and get it together. Because it's getting bad.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Wow. And what are you doing now, so that we can catch up with you?

Speaker 2: Right now I'm working, I'm going to school for medical billing and coding.

Speaker 1: Ooh.

Speaker 2: I'll be done in April 2020.

Speaker 1: Wow. Congratulations.

Speaker 2: So, and, I'm in church. I have a daughter, she's five months.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I pay my own bills, I take care of myself, and my daughter.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I don't know, everything's good at the moment.

Speaker 1: Okay.
Speaker 2: At the moment-
Speaker 1: At the moment.
Speaker 2: ... everything's good.
Speaker 1: Well I'm going to stop recording at this point because-
Brayonna Transcript

Speaker 1: So thank you for meeting with today. I would like to learn about your experiences in high school, and how you have navigated your way to graduation, how you had.

Speaker 1: Let's begin by reviewing the informed consent that I just gave you. Are you okay signing that?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay, so I can now focus our conversation. I'm going to record our conversation. Is that okay with you?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: All right. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: All right. Let me put it to you so we can hear you. If you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?

Speaker 2: Tough.

Speaker 1: Tough, okay. Tell me more.

Speaker 2: Well, just because teachers wouldn't help or teachers don't understand. So it's kind of like if you can't help the student then it will be tough, because they can't learn on their own. That's what the teachers are there for.

Speaker 1: So your relationship with the teachers. You want to describe a little bit more about that?

Speaker 2: I guess when I change schools, because I used to go to [name]. I can say that my relationships with teachers are better just because I feel like teachers don't understand certain students need certain type of help. Every student is different. It's like help that student in a way that they'll understand. Not just the way that you know how to teach.

Speaker 1: I see. Describe what thoughts come to mind when you think about high school and graduation?

Speaker 2: I would say it was fun. It was exciting and some points.

Speaker 1: Today I particularly want to understand your journey academically through high school. Thinking back to when you started high school, how would you describe yourself academically? What kind of student were you?
Speaker 2: I was the type of student that wouldn't like to learn but as I got older, becoming a junior and a senior, then I really wanted to engage in more stuff. Just because I feel like I needed to and if I wanted to go to college I'd have to learn certain stuff. I had to understand certain things.

Speaker 1: You can use three adjectives to describe yourself, what I'm about to say, like I'm happy, I'm sad, whichever. How were you as a person back then?

Speaker 2: I could say I was happy. Excited to be in school.

Speaker 1: I'm listening.

Speaker 2: Some points sad.

Speaker 1: Sad.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: I'm gonna make this [inaudible 00:03:03]. Okay. How would you rate yourself academically?

Speaker 2: I would say a seven.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Okay. What would you say that depended upon? Why were you a seven?

Speaker 2: Just because I felt like I needed more help with stuff like learning just because certain teachers didn't know how to handle me. Just because I asked a lot of questions and I like to be sure of things.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative) So what would you think explains your level of success? You graduated, so that's a great accomplishment. Why do you think you were able to do that? What helped you?

Speaker 2: I really had to teach myself to go to school more, be more excited about school, encourage myself just because I didn't have the push from parents or certain teachers. I had to get myself together and wanted to be able to be happy to go to school.

Speaker 1: You just mentioned a real important point there. You didn't have the support at home?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Speaker 1: You want to elaborate on that? Talk a little bit more?

Speaker 2: Yeah, just because I wasn't this child that grew up with my own mother and father. I had help from a grandmother. She's much older. So she
didn't know more about how the current generation is. So I really had to help myself to get myself there, because she didn't know how to help me and teachers didn't know how. I'm really by myself. I was my own support system.

Speaker 1: Okay. Your attitudes, your abilities, your traits. The things that you learned along the way, you said you had yourself. Can you name anybody else? Community, at the school, at church, at a sports activity, within your family, anybody else that was there for you?

Speaker 2: Yeah I had this one counselor. His name was Mr. Brown. He was my main support once I transferred schools. He helped me get everything. He made sure my credits was there. He made sure my grades was up. He would reward me, so I could keep up my work, and he was there before he retired.

Speaker 1: Wow, that's awesome. Your family, your friends, your teachers. You did say a little bit more about that, but any other relationship, that either highs or lows, that you had in high school that stands out to you.

Speaker 2: I wouldn't say no.

Speaker 1: Is there anything specifically about a relationship that either added to your success with school or pulled you down?

Speaker 2: I'll just say being around certain students would bring me down at school just because some kids, they're just not the type that's always happy. So it's like they will make you feel down about yourself because they're down about their self. So I wouldn't be excited to go to school sometimes. Just because I felt like I'm always around negativity.

Speaker 1: I see. Did you have any extracurricular activities or community involvement? Whether it religious or whether it's a sporting or were you a cheerleader? Is there anything else that you were involved in, in high school?

Speaker 2: Yeah I was in softball. I did track. It's not really a sport, but I did computer design. I was a teacher assistant and office assistant when I was in school.

Speaker 1: Any of those helped you in any way?

Speaker 2: I could say being a teacher's assistant helped me because I was around other students. I helped the teachers. I got more engagement. Softball I could say helped me with leadership.

Speaker 1: Oh. Now we're going to talk about some obstacles. Things you felt that were really difficult with high school. Anything come to mind?
Speaker 2: I could say probably my math classes. Those are really tough. I could say that as I became a senior, and they became more easier just because I feel like I got more help. I was in certain classes and tutoring, so it got a little more easier.

Speaker 1: Did you have any role models? Any mentors?

Speaker 2: I could say my uncle. He is a role model. He graduate. He's the only one that graduated out of my family, so that pushed me to want to graduate to be the second one then be a role model to my siblings, my younger siblings, because I'm the oldest.

Speaker 1: Okay. All right. So now that we have some sign poles from where we saw yourself at the beginning of high school and your journey, I'd like to understand now some more in depth questioning about milestones and things that you felt in high school. I would say please identify any obstacles as far as ... that you feel. Maybe you didn't have any. I don't want to put any words in your mouth, but being a black girl. Do you feel that, do you know what a stereotype is?

Speaker 2: Yeah I do.

Speaker 1: And do you know what racism is?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Do you feel that you experienced any of these things?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Okay. So where I live is called Railings. Others might know, there's not really a lot of black people there. I was at Citrus Valley High school and there's barely African Americans. So it's like you'll be in a classroom full of Hispanics, or whites and everybody'll look at you. When they talk about slavery or other stuff. Just because I'm smart, and I'm an African American. So they'll just give you that look of does she belong in here or stuff like that. It felt weird.

Speaker 2: It's like I didn't have to do so. I wasn't really worried about it.

Speaker 1: Okay. You're a strong girl. You weren't really worried about it. Do you feel like when you were taking exams or studying at all, did it have any factor on you? When you took tests or when you did work, and you did involvement at school did that affect you at all? The fact that you thought they were looking at you like why is she here? Does she belong?

Speaker 2: No really. I just did what I had to do to graduate high school. I felt like they're not gonna be there my whole life. I'm just here to graduate school and learn.
Speaker 1: You know there are kids that are going to be coming up behind you. They might not have your strength and may be going through things. Is there anything you would like to say to them about if they experience those things?

Speaker 2: Yeah. If you experience racism, stereotype I'll just say just focus on yourself because at the end of the day, you'll have yourself ... you'll graduate high school and then when you're finished you'll have to worry about any of that stuff.

Speaker 1: Excuse me? Excuse me. Excuse me. Hold on one second.

Speaker 1: Excuse me. Hold on a minute. Sorry.

Speaker 1: Excuse me!

Speaker 3: Oh sorry.

Speaker 1: Sorry. Could you open H9 for me?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 1: I'm sorry.

Speaker 3: That's okay.

Speaker 1: I'm trying to tape.

Speaker 1: Oh my goodness. We'll be able to go in there. Oh my goodness. I'm running. Okay. So your relationship with your teachers ... anything else you want to add?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: No. Okay. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Speaker 3: Have a good one.


Speaker 1: So, is there anything else that I have not added that you feel like needs to be said, and I would say in reference to your challenges or your successes. Would you like to tell our superintendent something? Would you like to tell the kids something, leave behind how to help them?

Speaker 2: I would say if you're going through hard challenges I would say, "Just push through it. You're going to graduate. You're going to get those rewards as you're hoping you'll get. If you're going through bullying or stressful
situations I would say just keep on pushing through it, because at the end of the day you're going to make it."

Speaker 1: That's awesome. Thank you so much. I'm gonna stop.
Kiara Transcript

Speaker 1: Let's start. So, I would like to learn about your high school experience, all right?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1: Are you okay that you signed the consent form to give me this information?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: Are you okay with it being recorded?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: All right. So, if you had something that you can say that's a word or an image that describes your high school experience, what would it be?

Speaker 2: A word would be learning I guess or lesson.

Speaker 1: Lesson. Okay. When it comes to your actual experience, what would you say that word would be?

Speaker 2: My actual experience was ... Let me see. I would say different.

Speaker 1: Different. Okay. All right. When you think about high school and then you think about graduation, you have another word to offer for that experience?

Speaker 2: Let me think. You said high school and graduation.

Speaker 1: Completing it. Like you've finished high school. What is the feeling that comes about?

Speaker 2: Happiness.

Speaker 1: Happiness. What kind of student were you?

Speaker 2: A very book smart I guess.

Speaker 1: What kind of grades did you get?

Speaker 2: Well, my overall GPA is a 4.2.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Yeah. With honors.
Speaker 1: With honors, huh?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: So, you were a straight A student with honors. What do you say was the main reason you were able to get those kind of grades?

Speaker 2: The main reason I was able to receive those grades would be because of one counselor that I had. His name was Mr. Berkeley, but yeah.

Speaker 1: What did he do?

Speaker 2: He was really there for you. He really helped you make sure you're in the right courses for your [inaudible 00:02:05] to go to a four year university and another thing I could say to was being [Avid 00:02:11]. So, in Avid, you were required to stay on top of your grades and stay organized and stuff like that.

Speaker 1: All right. All right. Did you have a mentor, a teacher, a counselor that really, a family member, a mom or dad that helped you the most to be successful?

Speaker 2: My grandfather.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What did he do?

Speaker 2: He was always on me and even though he lives in Atlanta, every week I would always still receive a phone call, a grade check and having to check in and from being a freshman all the way up to senior year, it was always about college. So, that's what he instilled in me from even when I was younger but when I got to high school, it's more scholarships, college, making sure that my grades would look good for when it was that time to start applying and then when the applications came around, he was always on me. Like, "Oh, how many applications you do this week?” Or for scholarships and stuff too. So, yeah.

Speaker 1: That's great. That's great. You answered that. Were you in any type of sports, activities? Were you in the community programs? Were you a church member or anything like that that helped you?

Speaker 2: Well, I did a program called Black Future Leaders for my sophomore year. Yeah I found out about it my sophomore year and I did it all the way up to my senior year and if you're not familiar, it's like you go to stay at Cal State for the weekend and it was run by Danny Tillman and we would do STEM projects for the week, the weekend or we would do ... I know one year it was STEM. One year it was black history so we learned about the different african cultures and stuff like that. Every time we would go we'd always have to write an essay about what we're going to do for the weekend before we go. Then we
would build relationships. Like I still talk to most of the people who are in there with me still.

Speaker 2: We stay connected on social media and then that was being able to connect with other students around me that were the same because it was all about African American students. We also did different things outside of our weekend that we'd have once a year. We would go to the black college expo or we would just have times where we just get together, go to Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles and stuff like that.

Speaker 1: Would you recommend that to other students?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: What did it actually do for you?

Speaker 2: It was a good experience. It made me want to live on campus and then it helped with my communication skills because I was already shy and didn't really care about making friends and stuff, but it helped. They taught us about networking and their own life experiences so they gave us advice on how to be able to get good jobs and stuff like that. So, I would recommend it to a lot of young high school students because once you go through the program, it's like you get a look on the real world. That's what they don't give to you in a regular high school, but these people they're here to help you get through the world. Even after I can call any one of them and they'll still be there for you even after high school.

Speaker 1: What about how did it help you as a black student?

Speaker 2: As a black student, it helped me because I mean we don't have a lot of programs that are really destined just for us because it's either you're in the light or not in the light. So, if you're not the top black student, then there's nothing for you really. They don't recognize us as much and so with the program, it's like you're around a lot of students who have the same abilities and strengths that you do. Because there's different requirements. You have to have a 3.0 or above so you're with students who have the same mindset as you I guess you can say. It helped me because at my own high school, we didn't really have a lot of programs like that. So, it was like I was able to connect in a different way of joining a club or something.

Speaker 1: Wow. That sounds like a really good program. If you had to say, other than your grandfather which sounds amazing, what else contributed to your success? How were you able to be so successful? 4.2 you go to college now right?

Speaker 2: Yeah.
Speaker 1: What school is that?

Speaker 2: I go to Cal State San Bernardino.

Speaker 1: Wow. What else? What helped you to get here?

Speaker 2: I would say the things that I went through when I was younger I guess it just was my own ... I was my own motivation. So, yeah my mom went to school. She has two degrees. She has a AS and a AA too, but she always pushed us to do better than her. That's what she always said. I always want my kids to be better than me and stuff like that. So, I would say the different things that I went through in life with my dad and stuff like that too.

Speaker 1: What were those things if you want to just talk about you don't have to go into detail, but you said challenges. What kind of obstacles or challenges were they?

Speaker 2: Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot, but when he was there, sometimes it was good memories, but sometimes it wasn't because my dad was an alcoholic. So, when I was younger I never really understood why I couldn't go see him every weekend or why they couldn't be together and stuff like that. But as I got older, this is the topic that I wrote for my ... You know the senior personal insight?

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2: Yeah. So that essay and I used to hold a grudge once I got to middle school and high school. I held a grudge towards my dad until we got back in contact my junior year and it was like I felt like once I forgave him that I started doing better. So, I don't know. It's very difficult before. I would feel like I had to do something better. Like I felt like I wasn't good enough before so I felt like if I did better then my dad would want to come back into my life or something like that.

Speaker 1: Wow. Such a bright young lady. So, you have students that are going to be coming behind you and there are black students that have not been able to really succeed in high school and they're struggling and they've experienced things like, I don't know if you have, so my question to you is have you ever experienced stereotypes and racism? Stereotyping and racism in high school?

Speaker 2: Yes I did.

Speaker 1: Then how did it make you feel? What did you do about that?

Speaker 2: Well, it was junior year again. Well, actually it started my freshman year and at first I just brushed it off and I switched classes. I don't know. It felt like our community wasn't strong enough or we didn't have enough people to actually
be there for us when something like that would happen. Like they didn't care. So, then it happened again my junior year and instead of switching the classes, I actually tried to take it somewhere like with another person for help. But then again, I still didn't get the help that I needed but I just looked at it as that's how life is. Life has to still go on no matter what people think about you or what kind of stereotypes they'll give out about us that we just have to prove them wrong. So, that's what I did.

Speaker 1: Thank you for that. Can you describe what actually happened? Did you feel a certain way? did you hear something?

Speaker 2: Well, junior year it was literally the first week of school so teachers do the little opening and break down some class rules and stuff and the teacher goes, "I don't want any of that acting black or ghettoness in my class." There's only me and one other black girl in the class, but she didn't take it I guess how I took it and I really felt some type of way about it. I didn't address the teacher, but I just kept it to myself and I went to the vice principal. They didn't do nothing. Whenever I tried to go to the principal, they wouldn't let me talk to her. You know you always have to go in order I guess from the authority or whatever, so then after that, I would just mark down. I had a journal and I would write in there every time she would say something and I would go turn it in to the vice principals to make notes of it.

Speaker 2: Once they stopped doing like they just weren't going to do anything else about it, my mom tried to come to the school and have a talk with the teacher and everything. But then it ended up just ... Oh, excuse me. After that, we ended up just having to switch my class. So, then I got a teacher who was African American for English. I felt like in her class, she had no more over the class. The class was not disciplined better than my other class where she was talking about the African American students, but there was more order in the class. Then in my other class, we learned but it was hard learning because they look down on her as she's not really going to do nothing or if she does try, they'll make a lie.

Speaker 2: Because they'll believe the students when it comes to the African American teacher rather than the Caucasian teacher. It's different stereotypes and I've seen that in the school system also.

Speaker 1: Wow. Well you're such a bright young lady and I appreciate you talking to me. I wanted to ask you if you wanted to give a message to other black students coming behind you what would that be?

Speaker 2: The message would be to don't give up on what you have your goals set for. If you think you can do it, then you know that you can accomplish it no matter what anybody else has to say because you are a minority to society at
this time and you just have to be different. Don't fall into what everybody else has to say. Just do what you want to do in life.

Speaker 1: Wow. Well, that was it from me and I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording at this time.
Speaker 1: We're going to today talk about your experiences in high school. Let's begin by making sure that you're okay that you signed the consent form, that you are going to talk about this, and that it's being recorded.

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1: Okay. In an image or word, sum up your experience in high school.

Speaker 2: Hard.

Speaker 1: Hard.

Speaker 2: I say hard because high school, it makes you have a lot of ups and downs because you have a lot of work to do, and then you have a life at home. For me, I had a little sister so I wasn't able to do sports like I wanted to. I always had to watch her, and then I also had to do homework. It was like I was taking care of my sister and doing school at the same time.

Speaker 1: Wow. Hard. When you came to school, was there anything hard about being at school?

Speaker 2: Being at school wasn't so hard, but I just think the work that, like the overload that they would do. Because at least for me I was an avid. Avid is what made it hard, because you had to do all the notes and the binding checks and then on top of that have your other six classes.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's a lot. It is a lot. Now, think about high school and now think about graduation. What's the thought that comes to mind?

Speaker 2: Graduation was like a relief. Soon as you graduate, you just have this left weighted off your shoulders. No more work, no more stress, and then college is like dang. [crosstalk 00:01:37]. Stress came back.

Speaker 1: Where do you go?

Speaker 2: I go to Valley right now.

Speaker 1: Wow. Okay. Academically, what kind of student were you in high school?

Speaker 2: Academically I was a good student. I only had two times where I was struggling with grades, trying to keep them up. Other than that, I was good academically.
Speaker 1: You saw kids that weren't doing good that looked like you, meaning another black kid. Why do you think you did good, graduated, and then you saw others that didn't?

Speaker 2: Well, for me, my parents were on me. They made sure if I needed help, I could go to tutoring or something, I was able to. I feel like other kids, their parents weren't as strict on them, so maybe that's why they didn't have motivation to go to school and be on time and do the work on time and all the things I need to do. Because you have to have some type of support system to help you because your mind can go crazy sometimes. I don't want to do it. You know? If you have someone there to help you, you could do this. You got this. It's easier for you, and I had a little support system, so it was easier for me.

Speaker 1: Wow, wow. Were you an A student, B student?

Speaker 2: I was more like a B. I had only two Cs, so yeah, more B, A.

Speaker 1: More the B.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay. Your attitudes and traits and abilities. What do you think that you had that caused you to just keep on going no matter what you faced?

Speaker 2: Well, I came from a family where we don't give up. Giving up wasn't an option for me, even though I had obstacles and stuff. For me, for example, assignment, I'd rather turn in what I have than not to turn anything at all. For me, I think that really helped me because I'd rather have a 50% and than a 0%. I think that's what really helped me.

Speaker 1: Families and friends. Did you have mentors or role models?

Speaker 2: I didn't have much of that. I just more had a support system.

Speaker 1: What were that? What was that?

Speaker 2: I had a few friends that we had the same majors and stuff, so we kind of all would work together, and like I said, I had my parents as well, and I had a cousin who was good at math. When I needed math help, I had him to help me.

Speaker 1: All right, all right. Extracurricular activities or community involvement like church or sports or anything. Did you do any of that?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I was in choir and church and at school I did ... it was two clubs that you do community service, other places. That helped me get
community service for avid, but then I also stayed in it so I had more hours than I needed.

Speaker 1: Would you say it helped you, and how if it did?

Speaker 2: Yes, because community service I feel like it humbles you, because you see a lot of people who don't have a lot things you have, so you look at things differently in the outside world outside of school. You see someone who needs help. You're like, I'm going to help them.

Speaker 1: Wow. Yeah, yeah. If had to ask you three adjectives that describe you in high school as a student, what would they be?

Speaker 2: Loud, fun, and outgoing.

Speaker 1: Okay. Now what we're going to talk about are the things that you experienced. I want you to ... As a black student, do you feel that you experienced any racism or any types of stereotypes?

Speaker 2: I feel like I had moments where, people think everything's funny. You know, when we watch movies and stuff when black history and stuff, and certain things would happen. It's like people should just be looking at it, watching it, learning. People nowadays like to joke and think everything is funny. That's the only hard part of high school that you have to really dig. Sometimes you can't speak up on everything because people have different mindsets, and the teachers. For example, the national anthem. A lot of things that happen in the world, my mom, she gave me a choice, like "You have to say the national anthem if you don't want to." I would stand, but I wouldn't say it.

A lot of teachers would get mad, and it's like ... We didn't really get why they were mad. We stood still, while some students will sit down. Of course, they would say stuff to them too. It's like you can't force people to do things they don't want to do. Then when the would ask us why, I'm mean, that's why. We're just trying to help you understand from our point of view. I think that's the only thing.

Speaker 1: Yeah. When you say your point of view, what is that point of view?

Speaker 2: I feel like when it comes to the flag, I stand because a lot of people died for us to be where we are today. I don't say what we're supposed to say because I feel like it's not equal for everyone. Because there's so many things that happens where it's like it's not equal. There's no way it could be equal. That's why don't say it, but I'm still going to respect the whole thing we have to do.

Speaker 1: When you see other black kids not succeeding, you see it. It's there. How does that make you feel?
Speaker 2: It makes feel hurt because I know they have the potential. It's starts in your mind first. Because if your mind isn't telling you have it and for you to keep going, you're not going to keep going, because your mind is telling you something else. That's where motivation and things come in, and a lot of people don't have that.

Speaker 1: Right. Wow. Did you have any obstacles other than at high school? Did you have things that happened or your family, neighborhood, whatever, that you overcame, and if so, how did you do it?

Speaker 2: I think one that really took a toll on me was when my aunt and my uncle died, because they were a big part of my family that kept us together. We would see all our family members more, and it's like now I only see a lot of my family members when we have to go to a funeral or something. I think that really affected me because it just me get really down. Other than that, my high school wasn't as hard, and I also had friends who got in fights a lot. I was the one that was like, it's not worth it because at the end of the day you're going to get suspended. You being black is already a red flag. You just got to ... I was the one that was trying to encourage all my friends. I want all of us to win. I was the one that was trying to keep us together, keep us focused, because I know we all had that potential.

Speaker 1: You just said something, a red flag. How is it to be a black girl in high school? How is it to be a black girl right now?

Speaker 2: I mean, it's not tough, but sometimes when you go certain places, you know. You have that sense what it's like. Okay. You see where everyone's ... You're the one that's standing out. In college, it's like everyone's comfortable in college. Not to say everyone's broke, but it's like everyone is broke because we're all ... You know, college is expensive, so everyone's having the same mindset in college because you're paying for the classes. It's different. Since you're paying for it, you're going to try to, you know. In high school, everything's free, so I think that's why everyone just wilds out. I'm going to fight if I want to fight. I'm going to cuss if I want to cuss. I'm going to do what I want to do because it's fee.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Again, with racism and stereotypes. Did you feel any of that? I just want to make sure I'm covering that part for you. In school, did you feel like teachers were racist? Did you feel like you experienced those things?

Speaker 2: I had a few teachers. It was two teachers I had that they ... Not to say they would pick on the people who were colored, but they would try to sit everyone in a certain spot if that makes sense. The colored people would be on this side, and other people would be on this side. People didn't notice it until I want to say the second week. Because we had a project, and usually projects,
you can pick who you want to be with. He said, "Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side. Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side." We're like, "Why?" My best friend is over there. Why do I have to pick someone who's over here? Then we brought it to the principal's attention, and that's when it kind of got solved. I think that was the only major event that happened. I was like, okay.

Speaker 1: Did you ever feel a certain way around them? That you're being looked at differently with the stereotypes. Did you ever feel any experiences about that?

Speaker 2: I had one experience because I feel like a lot of people stereotype black people's hair a certain way. Freshman year, I came to high school with braids like these. Then I want to say three months in, I took them out. Then, a lot of people in my class were like, "Whoa, you have hair." I was like, "What's that supposed to mean? I have hair?" They were like, "You have a lot of hair." I'm like, "I know. What is that supposed to mean? Just because I have braids, I'm not supposed to have a lot of hair?" They're like, "Usually a lot a black people who have braids don't have a lot of hair." I'm like, "Well, I'm not one of those people." They're like, "Oh, that's cool." I'm like, "Why is it that you all think that? Not everyone who wears weaves, ponytails, all the extra hair, that doesn't mean we don't have hair. Sometimes I just get braids. I don't want to do my hair."

To them, they made it seem like we have to have or we have to be mixed to have hair or something. That's how I took it, because I'm fully black. I don't have any mixture, and I have a lot of hair, but that doesn't mean you have to be mixed to have a lot of hair. I've never understood that.

Speaker 1: Going to school with all that you've experienced and feel, how are you able to not let those things bother you and say, you know what? I'm graduating. What an accomplishment, still a great accomplishment. How are you able to push all that aside?

Speaker 2: I seen what all of my friends would do doing the things they did. I didn't want to do those things. Like I said, my friends that fought and everything, they got suspended, and then their grades dropped. They weren't able to do the things that they needed to do to graduate. That's when I was like, I don't want to be that person that has to go to Sierra and come back to get my credits. Just to take a different path. For me, I was just like I'm just like I'm going to do what I have to do so I can get high school over with and live my life.

Speaker 1: All right, all right. You have students coming behind you. They look like you. They're black girls, black boys coming behind you. What do you tell them? What's the message you want to leave for them?
Speaker 2: Stay focused, and don't let no one distract you. I think that's very important because you can have friends who could tell you to do something and you do it, say you guys get caught, you're all going to get caught. It's not just one person going to go down for whatever you guys did. It's all you guys. On top of that, the workload, it's going to get tough, but if you want to graduate, you can graduate. You have too have that mindset. Don't let no one tell you that you cannot do it, because you can.

Speaker 1: Do you want to tell our superintendents something, or any superintendent that's over all these schools, like this is what black kids need? What is that?

Speaker 2: I say they need more clubs, because I know a lot of black students that like to do clubs to keep everyone together. Sometimes they want extra paperwork and curricular activities to be involved, but sometimes you don't need that. You can just have a classroom, everyone sit in a classroom and just talk. Talk about what's on your mind, what's bothering you. If you need advice, you guys give each other advice, just uplift each other. That can really change someone life sometimes.

Speaker 1: Wow. Relationships with teachers. I want to make sure I covered that. When you compare yourself to another student that is not a black student academically, do you see any difference?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: Your relationships with teachers. Do you feel that that ... Did you find any of them to be a role model for you?

Speaker 2: Yes. I had one teacher named Miss Johnson, and she was one of those people. If you needed help or she had something that you feel like she can help you with, she will. No matter if it's money, advice, anything. She was that person. She's going to give you. Whatever you need, she had it.

Speaker 1: Was race was she?

Speaker 2: She was black.

Speaker 1: Do you feel like that had something to do with the fact that you were connected with her so?

Speaker 2: I feel like it does but it doesn't because we ... The reason why we connected was because we were in BSU, and that kind of brought us together, but she also would help people outside of the black race. That's why I say it kind of does but it doesn't.

Speaker 1: Your being a black girl, how do you feel about that now?
Speaker 2: Now I feel like I embrace it everyday, from my hair to my feet. It's like I know my black is beautiful, but sometimes like you said at high school, you can have that feeling where it's like sheesh. Am I beautiful? Am I worth it? It's like now, I know I'm worth it.

Speaker 1: Do you feel that you were as smart as other kids?

Speaker 2: In certain subjects. Like math, I feel like I was not to pass math, but I kept going and I did.

Speaker 1: All right. That was it for me as far as that goes, but I wanted to make sure that I covered ... I wanted to make sure that the kids coming behind you understand if they face something, this is what they can do. Any last thoughts or comments?

Speaker 2: Just don't stop. That's so important because things can happen in your life, and you want to give up, but if you don't give up, I promise you it will be worth it.

Speaker 1: Awesome. Thank you. I appreciate your time. I'm going to stop the recording at this time.
Jeneice Transcript

Speaker 1: All right. Thank you for meeting with me today. I would like to learn about your experiences in high school and how you have navigated your way to graduation that you did rather. Let's begin by reviewing the actual informed consent. I want to make sure you were comfortable in signing it.

Jeneice: Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1: Okay, good. So now I can focus on our conversation. I'm going to record our conversation. Do I have your permission to do so?

Jeneice: Yes.

Speaker 1: All right. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Jeneice: No.

Speaker 1: All right. Okay. So if you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would that be?

Jeneice: Oh, that's a good word. I'll say interesting.

Speaker 1: Interesting. Tell me a little bit more and describe what interesting means to you.

Jeneice: It's like we're going through phases when we get to high school and we learned so many things that we never thought we would know and they're teaching us how to get out in the world and things that we need to know when we get a job or when we're on our own.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Today I particularly want to understand your journey academically through high school. Thinking back to when you started high school, how would you describe yourself academically? You can use three adjectives to describe yourself and if you do, why those three?

Jeneice: I'll say I was nervous, scared and worried because getting out of middle school, it's like, oh, here we go, freshman year and my school there was only freshmen, so no sophomore, junior, senior. So it was a good year. At least we didn't get picked on, you know, being freshmen. But yeah, I was scared because I'm like, oh, we're getting higher up in the level and just hoping we can focus and that'll help us.

Speaker 1: And then you said that was ninth grade. Okay. So then as you progressed and you were at [this school], what happened?
Jeneice: When I was at [this school], it was a challenge. It was different because I moved from Texas to here in California. So it was just different skills and stuff. Like English.

Speaker 1: I see. And so please tell me how you would rate your academic success at that time. Were you successful?

Jeneice: I'll say on a scale one to 10, I'll say a six.

Speaker 1: A Six. Okay. And what do you think explains your level of success? What gave you that six? What helped you to have any success at all?

Jeneice: What helped me to have success. Well, I was stressed out for my academics and stuff. I didn't know what to do. I was struggling, but then I asked for help and I was like, you know what, I should just not give up. Just keep on going. And you're almost done with high school.

Speaker 1: Okay. What do you think explains, how do I put this? So you just said you told yourself to keep going. So those particular traits or abilities that you had to tell yourself, where do you think that came from?

Jeneice: I feel it came from myself, my heart, my mind.

Speaker 1: Okay. Do you feel that you were taught that? Was there any support you received to get that mindset? Family, friends, people?

Jeneice: Well, I feel like I was taught that on my own because I in my family, I wanted to be the first person to graduate high school. And then go on to college.

Speaker 1: Okay. So did you have people in the community, anyone that just kind of supported you in that or did you see anything, did you read any books, was there anything you can say other than just you? How did you get there in that mindset?

Jeneice: I feel like I had my cousins as a role model because she was in college and I was like, if she can do it then I can do it.

Speaker 1: Okay. The classes and activities and community involvement may have been sports, whatever. What were those things that you did in high school that helped you?

Jeneice: What helped me was actually track and field. It was my senior year and I loved it. It helped me and motivated me on my senior year through high school.
Speaker 1: Okay. How would you describe how that actually helped you? Can you give a little bit more explanation for why that particularly supported you?

Jeneice: Why it supported me was because I remember my coach saying, when you start, don't give up because you know you won't finish. And it's like the same thing to do it throughout high school.

Speaker 1: Okay. Let's see. So to be able to graduate from high school is a pretty big accomplishment for a lot of people and it's one to be celebrated. There are some students that struggle and weren't able to. What do you think separates you from others that didn't make it, that were kind of like you, maybe grew up like you, but you were able to graduate, you were able to push forward, but some kids aren't that successful.

Jeneice: Well, I know there's two stories. I know the story. I remember I wanted to give up high school at first. I was like, oh, this is too hard. I don't know what to do. But then I motivated myself. I was like, okay, keep on going. And I know what kids are going through. They're just like, oh well you know what? High school is really not important. And they're just like, I just want to fail. I just want to give up. And that's their mindset. And then my mindset is like, [inaudible 00:06:32], but then I'm just like, man, if I don't graduate high school, I'm just going to be here another year and I just want to go out in the world, go to college, experience things I want to be in life.

Speaker 1: Wow. All right. If we have some signposts for where you saw yourself in the beginning, the high school and where you are now. I would like to understand how you got from there to here. Please take a moment to reflect on your experiences, thinking about highs and lows and milestones, and I know we've talked about some of these things already, but some students choose to journal at this time. Maybe you need some paper and I can give you some. But just take a moment and identify just for this last part of our questioning, anything that was a support system, whether it was at school, the community, religious affiliations, as you said, sports, your family, that we haven't mentioned. Because once again we're trying to put information together to make sure I understand fully your experiences and things that weren't good and things that were. So things that also not were supportive, but the things that were obstacles, this stuff was like not good for me. So describe those.

Jeneice: Oh, growing up, life, it was hard with family situations and affects your schooling sometimes. And I know I haven't had my family around and stuff. I've been here and there and it just motivated me to go through during high school and without my family, living with my uncle and auntie, it was a horrible experience. I wanted my family to be there. I wish life was perfect. A lot of people don't have perfect life, but I just pushed through it, kept on going, and finally finished high school and onto college.
Speaker 1: All right. In that you are to be congratulated for all of that, definitely. Describe how you felt about yourself personally and your future while you were in high school. What did you feel about you?

Jeneice: I felt proud of myself. I felt like, Jeneice, this is amazing. You just accomplished one goal. You're going on to the next goal and focusing on your future.

Speaker 1: Yeah. In your experiences, do you know what the term stereotypes are? Do you know that term?

Jeneice: I think so.

Speaker 1: Okay. So it's almost like, since I'm a black woman, you look at me and immediately you say she's loud or ignorant or whatever because I see that being portrayed on television sometimes about black women. So that's what she is. That's what a stereotype is. You know what racism is?

Jeneice: Yes.

Speaker 1: Okay. So do you feel that you've had any of those experiences while you were in high school?

Jeneice: I don't think, no. Not really.

Speaker 1: So you didn't feel racism, you didn't feel stereotypes. Okay. All right. And describe the role that being a black girl played in high school. Do you feel that there was anything that was different possibly from you and another student? Maybe the treatment that she received or how people perceived you? Was there anything different?

Jeneice: I don't think, there was nothing different. I feel like they were treating me the same, equal rights and stuff, and that's what I liked about school and stuff. They're not treating you, oh, because you're black, we're going to treat you a different way.

Speaker 1: Okay. All right. Please explain the reasons, your relationships with your teachers. Were they all positive and not, describe one that wasn't.

Jeneice: They were all positive and that's what I loved. I needed motivation from them, too. I remember I would cry when I'm stressed and they're like, it's okay, you got this. Just breathe in. Don't worry about it. And they knew I've been through a lot on my plate and I just love how they're helpers. They make me feel better.

Speaker 1: That's wonderful. So we talked about how your life was and the last part of this is your environment. Can you please describe how your environment
was at home and neighborhood? How it affected you in school and just a little bit more information about that.

Jeneice: Environment at home, it was really good. It was peaceful. The neighborhood was really nice. It was not scary or anything. It was protected and safe.

Speaker 1: Okay. Do you feel that anything played a role on how you did in school personally? Did you feel like you came to school with extra loads emotionally or anything?

Jeneice: Yeah, I felt that at thought times and stuff I had heavy loads on me and I wouldn't let it affect school or anything.

Speaker 1: And the last part here is I just wanted to make sure that I'm asking the questions that are really getting to your experience. So if you feel that you want to add more, please let me know. So these are the last parts. As you reflect more about challenges in high school, describe how you coped with them. If something came up at school, how were you able to get over it and get through it?

Jeneice: Having challenges. Oh, that's a good question. Well, having lots of personal issues, challenges, I wouldn't let it affect me. I would just push it to the side just like this is not my time. It's not worth it. I'm just going to focus what I need to focus, get my grades up and everything else.

Speaker 1: All right. And so pushing it to the side, overcoming these things and something in you is very strong. I can tell just by your responses. And being able to see where that comes from. Do you know exactly, your strength, I can just push that to the side. I don't really have to deal with the things trying to destroy me. Where does that come from?

Jeneice: I really don't know. I know a lot of people are like, oh, you have a strong strength and I really don't know.

Speaker 1: Okay. That's an honest answer. Is there anything else I haven't asked and haven't discussed that you would like people to know about your academic success or maybe to tell a message to tell people that are coming up, students behind you, this is what you can do to be successful?

Jeneice: Well, I have a message. Whoever's having a tough life with family or whoever is slacking around and think school's not important, school is really important in my opinion because it helped me through so many challenges I've been through. And you're going to have a future career with your high school diploma. And that's what I have right now. I am a medical assistant. I just finished college for seven months.
Speaker 1:  Oh my God. Wow.

Jeneice:  This is the things you're going to get.

Speaker 1:  That is fantastic. Oh my God. One last message to get to our superintendent. Is there something that he needs to know about a student that is a young black student going through our school system? Do you have a message for him?

Jeneice:  Yes, I do. A message for the superintendent. It is an honor and grateful that I am a black student that is motivating myself and other people. And it just helps a lot being a wonderful black student.

Speaker 1:  Wow. That's awesome. Thank you so much.

Jeneice:  You're welcome.

Speaker 1:  I'm gonna stop the recording at this time, and let's just, my phone wants to turn-
Tiana Transcript

Interviewer: I'm gonna hit record right there.

Intervewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay, so thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate all that we had to go through to get here.

Intervewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: It's about your experiences in high school. So you're okay signing the consent form?

Intervewee: Yes.

Interviewer: And are you okay with this being recorded?

Intervewee: Yeah, it's fine.

Interviewer: You have any questions for me?

Intervewee: Mm-mm (negative).

Interviewer: All right. Here we go.

Interviewer: So if you could use one word to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?

Intervewee: One word?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Intervewee: I don't know. Fun, I guess.

Interviewer: Fun? Okay.

Intervewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: All right. Fun.

Interviewer: Why was it fun?

Intervewee: Probably because I was really involved in the school, like school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport, so.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Intervewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Which sports?
Interviewee: I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year-
Interviewer: Wow. Oh my God!
Interviewee: ... and dance.
Interviewer: Oh wow.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: You were involved in every sport.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Thinking back on high school, what kind of student were you?
Interviewee: I was always just eager to succeed.
Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Interviewee: Be successful. Be sure I get good grades.
Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Okay, all right.
Interviewer: Did you ... Were you an A student, B student, C student? A mixture?
Interviewee: A mixture of A and B.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: I was a really good student.
Interviewer: Okay. All right.
Interviewer: What would you say helped you the most to be that good student? Was it a teacher? A parent? Was it motivation inside? Was it a counselor?
Interviewee: Well it was a mixture of my coach and from within myself, 'cause I'm just like that type of person. Always just wanting to put out my best. And also with my basketball coach, [Danesha 00:01:56] [Culverson 00:01:56], she made me want to always put my best foot forward, so.
Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Interviewer: So as far as having certain attitudes and abilities and traits in high school, what would you say is the biggest thing that helped you to ... within yourself, to be successful? What kept you going in hard times?

Intervewee: Well really just knowing that it's something that I have to do. But I don't know.

Interviewer: Like why do you feel that it's what you had to do? Some people don't feel like it's what they have to do.

Intervewee: Well, because I wanted to finish high school so that I can go on to the next step of education; which is college.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay.

Interviewer: So you had to do that to get there?

Intervewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Did you have family members or mentors that supported you? I know you mentioned Ms. Culverson. Anybody else?

Intervewee: My dad. He's always pushed me to ... Well telling me that I have to always put out my best and try my hardest and it would pay off.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Intervewee: So pretty much my dad.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, okay.

Interviewer: So was he a role model or do you have others?

Intervewee: Well no, he was really my role model. I just seen how hard he works and he's just a hard worker. And I'm like ... I look up to that and I respect that, so it made me want to work just as hard.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay, okay.

Interviewer: So you were in sports, different activities. How did those things help you in school?

Intervewee: They were kind of like ... What's the word? Like a getaway from school.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Interviewee: I was able to be free. And I don't know what the word is for it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewee: Escape?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: I think. There we go. An escape.

Interviewee: Ahhh okay, you could be free.

Interviewee: What would you say you were escaping? Why did you need to get away?

Interviewer: Just because I was always ... How do I say it? Making sure I was on top of everything.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: So it really got stressful at times.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: So it was just a stress ... A really [crosstalk 00:04:28]-

Interviewee: A stress? Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And that stress that you had, either at home, family, whatever it was, how did it effect you in school?

Interviewer: Sometimes it was really hard to separate what I had going on at home and personally and other things outside of school when I got to school.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewee: And then, so when you got there you were weighted down?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: What did it cause you as far as grades, attention, focus?

Interviewer: Sometimes I would lose focus. I would just daydream, thinking about the stuff that I have going on. So I would lose focus sometimes.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.
Intervewee: So we're getting into some deeper things now.

Interviewer: Okay.

Intervewee: And so, support systems, you've talked about. Obstacles, you've talked about. But were there any other big things you went through in high school? And if so, how did you overcome them?

Interviewer: Big things are just?

Intervewee: Anything. If you didn't go through anything big-

Interviewer: Like personally?

Intervewee: ... mm-hmm (affirmative). Personal. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's a deep question. I would say it was pretty good, up until it got towards the end when I was about graduate my senior year. Things started getting a little crazy at home; like living situations.

Interviewer: (affirmative).

Interviewer: So sometimes it was really hard for me to just get up and get out of bed. Be motivated to go to school and finish. I don't know what it was, but I just finished.

Interviewee: Wow.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's awesome. You say you don't know what it was and I have 9th graders now, I have students and they are struggling. So is there a message you want to tell them?

Interviewer: 9th graders?

Intervewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Got a long way to go!

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yep.

Interviewer: The advice that I would put out is, you really just have to ... That's something I feel like you have to dig within yourself, 'cause nobody can make you want to succeed or finish. Something within you has to be the reason that you want to do this.

Interviewee: Right along those lines, when you were in high school did you feel anything racially that prohibited you? Did you feel like you experienced any stereotypes? Or stereotyping or racism?

Interviewer: Probably I would say kids always are trying to bully each other, I don't understand for what, but probably when I was fresh in high school, my Freshman year, I did have some. Because I'm mixed, so they were like, "What are you? Are you Puerto Rican? Or Mexican? Or black? You can't be both. You have to be one or the other." And you're trying to be this and that.

Interviewer: That, in that sense.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Anything coming from teachers like that? Did you feel any certain way? Like they treated you different?

Interviewer: Yeah, I did.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: I' not gonna say specifically, but-

Interviewee: Yeah. But you did.

Interviewer: Yeah. But you did.

Interviewer: ... I did.

Interviewee: And how did it effect you? Did it effect you when you were in a classroom?

Interviewer: At times I just felt really uncomfortable. And I felt like the work that I would put in wouldn't be looked at as what it's supposed to be because of ... I was being judged or there's some type of racism or something? So.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I get it. I get it.

Interviewee: So our superintendent, Dr. [Marsden 00:08:26], if you had to tell him something about mixed kids or black kids, how to help them ... A lot of our kids are struggling. A lot of our black kids are struggling. What would you tell our superintendent that they need to succeed?

Interviewer: Just to not listen to it. That's what I had to learn to do when I was getting those signals. Or feelings when I was in a classroom, I just had to ignore it and just focus on my work.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.
Intervewee: And as we're finishing up, 'cause I said it wasn't going to be that long-

Interviewer: Okay.

Intervewee: ... I want to make sure I have really captured your experience in your own voice-

Interviewer: Okay.

Intervewee: ... about high school. I want to make sure that you are able to ... 'Cause what we're trying to do is put all this together to help students coming after you. So, have I missed anything? Have I left anything out? Was there anything you want to share with a young person, this is how you cope?

Interviewer: I just feel like going through high school, as you're going through it, you're going through these changes and growing up and finding yourself. I feel like the best thing to do is focus when you're in the classroom.

Interviewer: I know it's tempting 'cause you're with your friends or you just want to have fun, but I just feel like you should really focus on your work and always putting your best out there. And just enjoy the experience of being in high school.

Interviewer: Try to get into some clubs or some sports or activities. Really just be involved and just enjoy your time being here.

Intervewee: Wow. Well any other things? I felt like we've covered it all.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Intervewee: You're ... And I just want to make sure that I put this out here one more time that if there's anything else you feel that really was the number one thing that helped you, in bad times, helped you to graduate, helped you to keep going no matter what, what would that be?

Interviewer: Yeah. Well like I said, I've always been the type of person to want to succeed and be successful because of the things I've seen within my family and my family members going through school. And some of my parents, or my siblings, not finishing high school or getting to college, I always wanted to be the first one to do that.

Intervewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And then I also feel like what took me away from everything, what played a big role in high school, was sports. Basketball, specifically. It just really brought me at peace and took me away from school and everything else I had going on so I was able to let it all out on the court.
Interviewee: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Wow. That is so good. I just know that what you have to say, and just shared, is really going to help these kids coming.

Interviewer: I hope so.

Interviewee: So thank you.

Interviewer: You're welcome.

Interviewee: I appreciate your time.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Let me go ahead and stop our recording now.
Darnique Transcript

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Thank you for meeting me today. I would like to learn about your experiences in high school and how you have navigated your way to graduation. Let's begin by reviewing the informed consent, it gives the consent form to participate and allows you to review it. That's what that is. Okay, do you have any questions before signing the form?

Speaker 1: No.

Speaker 2: Okay. So I can focus on our conversation. I'm going to record our conversation, do I have your permission to do so?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Speaker 2: Do you have any questions before we begin?

Speaker 1: No.

Speaker 2: Here we go. If you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?

Speaker 1: Oh god. Wow, it's a lot of words I think. I don't even know.

Speaker 2: Anything. You can choose anything.

Speaker 2: Here we go. If you could use one word or image to sum up your high school experience, what would it be?

Speaker 1: This is where I have my head, I just can't ... It's like a trial.

Speaker 2: Okay, a trial. Tell me a little bit more about why it's a trial.

Speaker 1: It's just so much that you feel you need to accomplish. First it's like, "All right, I can do this, and just leave," and then it's like, there's so many difficult pathways you have to go through, and so many steps you have to take forward to achieve that goal. It's not all simple and just easy. You have to really focus, really hard. It's many, many steps to accomplishing.

Speaker 2: So, in describing the steps, could you just describe your thoughts that come to mind when it comes to ... You knew you were gonna complete your high school graduation when it came. What thoughts came to mind?

Speaker 1: I was just excited, actually. First I was scared, 'cause, you know how I find those [inaudible 00:02:09] stuff, I was like, "Oh yeah, this is gonna be some stuff." 'Cause, besides home, things you're doing at home, some people
deal with so many different things at home. I know what I dealt with at home. So coming to school and having to try to focus on that, and things you deal with, it's kind of a difficult path, shall I say? It was kind of hard, you have to get through some stuff, 'cause it's kind of hard to focus ...

Speaker 2: I'll let you answer another question. Do you wanna describe one of the things you dealt with at home, just briefly?

Speaker 1: That's fine. It was mostly mom problems, I never really had a bond with her. Never. And after it was kind of sad that the family treat me different, because of who I was. You know how they all started dating at this age, and I was like "Nah, not into it." They wanted to party, I said, "Nah, I'm not into it." I was the person that would cry if I couldn't find school clothes. I'd cry, get mad, or if I didn't have certain things ...

Speaker 2: I knew they weren't college graduates, not even high school graduates. [inaudible 00:03:34]. So most of the stuff, I had to learn it on my own or try to Google it to see how I would learn some stuff because ... I remember, I think I was in middle school, and my older brother and sister were in high school, and I don't know how but I helped them with their homework. I never had help with anything, relationships, nothing. I had to figure it out on my own, so it was ... Kind of difficult, should I say?

Speaker 1: My mom, she always said mean things, out of proportion, 'cause I was different. It's like she was jealous as a parent, which I feel she shouldn't have been. I felt like I once had a bond with her but she was ... it's like we're switched, I feel like I'm the mother and she's the child. I feel like she wasn't prepared for this, as she feels she was. I understand she helps and stuff like that but I just felt, she could've waited, or she could've tried to help better. I feel like I was a parent, I helped all my siblings with their homework and ... a lot of stuff I had to give up. I helped my two youngest brothers keep going, 'cause they wanted to give up. It was like, a difficult thing.

Speaker 2: Thank you for that. Today I particularly want to understand your journey academically through high school, so thinking back when you started high school, how would you describe yourself academically? Use three adjectives to describe yourself at the time, three words that would describe you academically. How prepared you were, your schooling, were you considered a person that was at the great level, above or below? That kind of description.

Speaker 1: I feel like I was average. I feel like I could've learned more. Before I went to high school they kept saying, "It's not gonna be this easy in high school," they actually didn't prepare us for what you guys were gonna actually teach us. [inaudible 00:05:35] It wasn't there. So when I came to high school I was like, "Oh, I've never seen this before in my life. They didn't prepare me for this."
Speaker 1: I always told myself there was gonna be something, something's gonna throw me off, but I gotta to find a way to learn it, 'cause I'm a visual learner. I have to do one-on-one sometimes, I want you to constantly keep telling me something. So I'd get mad about that but ...

Speaker 2: So can you give me a word that would describe who you were in high school academically? You said 'average', is there another word?

Speaker 1: Determined?

Speaker 2: 'Determined'. Okay. What do you think explains your level of success at that time? Any traits, attitudes or abilities that contributed to your success? Any support, if any, did you receive from family or friends or teachers? Describe any role models, or things that contributed to your success. Anything about your classes, extra curricular activity, sports, church, anything that helped you succeed.

Speaker 1: Well at home I can't say that. At home, no. I feel like they're the reason I chose to do what I ... I knew I was 'cause they kept saying ... My mom got mad and she kept saying, "You're not gonna graduate, you're gonna be like all of us. You're sixteen, get pregnant, drop out, you're not gonna make it."

Speaker 2: So what was the reason for your success for you. Was it at school, was it someone you met at church, was it-

Speaker 1: That was you.

Speaker 2: It was me?

Speaker 1: (laughs)

Speaker 2: Okay. So you can describe a teacher, so tell me how did a teacher, for example, how did I encourage you, support you?

Speaker 1: Okay, no matter how bad I talk, I'd say, "My mom's this, this and this," you just kept turning everything into a positive. Even though I didn't wanna hear a positive, you just kept changing my perspective of things. You were just so happy and motivated and you encouraged me to that, 'cause I had a lot of low self esteem. And me just talking to you in my day and stuff, actually made me feel better, attitudes and stuff. I was like, "Oh, she might be my teacher but I'm go talk to [Miss Hawkins 00:07:53]," or I just thought about you in my head and I was on my breaking point. I knew my mom wasn't the person to talk to, that's why I tried to talk to you. I'd mention family a lot to you or [Miss Coverson 00:08:06], is she still here?

Speaker 2: Another teacher? Yeah. Wow, that's interesting. How would you describe yourself academically at this time. We already said that a minute ago
but, please, anything else you wanna add as far as what helps you. I'm sorry, I just repeated that ... Let me go to the next question.

Speaker 2:  What do you think explains how ... Oh, okay. So you said about support systems, you talked about obstacles. So let's talk now that have some signpost for where you saw yourself at the beginning of your high school journey, and where you are now. I would like to understand how you got there from here. Please take a moment to reflect on your experiences, thinking about the highs and the lows, the milestones, the turning points or decisions, others' involvement as you moved through high school. Feel free to use a paper and pencil if you feel like you want me to give you something to write.

Speaker 2:  So here it goes. Identify any obstacles in school. Describe any experiences, did you feel stereotypes that you had any experience with? Do you understand what I mean by stereotypes?

Speaker 1:  Can you give me an example?

Speaker 2:  A stereotype, I would say, or racism, would be like a lot of black people involved in crime. You see it in the news. You'll see things like when they consider black people, what do they think of them in the media? Racism, do you understand what racism is?

Speaker 2:  Okay so, kind of together in that perspective, did you feel any of that in school? Did you feel that people stereotyped you a certain way? They said, "This is her, and this is what she's going to be." Did you feel ... That's kind of what a stereotype does, because of others and because of what I see about black people, that's what she's going to be. Do you feel like you were labeled?

Speaker 1:  No, not me. I feel like some other people were labeled but no, not me.

Speaker 2:  So describe what you felt like, how other people were labeled, in what way?

Speaker 1:  I see some people that would struggle and didn't ask for more help than some teachers would expect. And they would kind of get mad but they was like ... “Oh you're obviously not paying attention,” or I would see that the person is paying attention, but it's just the fact they need more help. And then she's just like, "Oh yeah you're obviously not gonna make it," or, "Pretty sure you're gonna have to come back again." She would just ... I just didn't like ... She would go straight for her, I don't remember her name, she'd go straight for one of the black students. An African-American male.

Speaker 2:  And you felt like this happened, you saw it, you experienced it?
Speaker 1: I felt like they just needed a little help, they were probably struggling.

Speaker 2: So, being black here, what role did it play for you or other students that you saw? You just described one. How was it to be black at this school, or in high school period, in your life, or living here?

Speaker 1: Everybody instantly expects you to be in some type of game, or they'll just look at you in a certain way because the way you dress. Some people don't even choose what they wear. They just down talk you and just, not lots of motivation coming towards African-American students. I just feel like they don't give us credit when it's due. We would try so much to get to that point but they would focus on the other races. It's like we're just there, just wanting to be successful like everyone else, but they don't really acknowledge us as much, but we're just there.

Speaker 2: Your relationship with your teachers that weren't black, how was that?

Speaker 1: I didn't really have relationships with teachers that weren't black. I used to come visit certain teachers just because they were nice teachers overall but I never got close to ... I only got close to African-American teachers 'cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from 'cause ...

Speaker 1: They don't understand where we come from, they don't understand our backgrounds, they understand where we struggle. They take advantage of that, they make fun of us 'cause they're low income people, stuff like that. So when we try to address them they're like, "Well it's not our fault you're this and this." I say it's not our fault either, we just have to deal with it. And us dealing with that made it hard for us also. It made it hard for us.

Speaker 1: When I was close to the African-American teachers, not being picky, but I just feel like they understood me more. I got close to one, in middle school I got close to one, and I treated her as a mother. Every holiday, I'd buy her something, I'd visit her every day, talk to her about everything. Mother's Day, I'd spend lots of money on her. I never spent it on my mom because I felt like she was just there. I felt like she wasn't there as a mother. She does stuff as a mother but I feel like when I needed her most ... That's why I got so close to most of the African-American female teachers, I got involved with them as a mother.

Speaker 2: Wow, okay. So thanks so much for sharing your story, this was very helpful to me. I really appreciated getting to know more about your experiences, even more so. As you reflect on all that you just shared about your journey through high school, please identify three biggest challenges that affected your
academics. What were the three biggest things that affected you when you came to school, and you knew that it was affecting you while you were here? It could be home or here.

Speaker 1: Home is mostly, I couldn't sleep. I don't even know. It was mostly drama I was trying to avoid, I kept getting dragged into. I can't really say nothing much affected me. If anything affected me it would be myself. I kept getting discouraged or I kept telling myself I couldn't do it, but then I just started to motivate myself because I realized when I motivate myself I can actually motivate other people, which I did. I helped people graduate along with me. People that were in [higher/harder 00:15:25] classes than me, I helped them, 'cause they didn't believe they could do it.

Speaker 1: I felt like maybe if I can motivate myself then maybe I can motivate other people. Maybe we can keep the little trail going, and everything may change in the future, maybe.

Speaker 2: So you just hit a point, I want you to describe these coping strategies that you used. How were you able to motivate? You just described your home life and how it was, and the relationship or lack thereof with your mom, you couldn't even really sleep.

Speaker 2: What kind of coping strategies, how did you do this? How were you able to push through all of this and what motivated you? What did you used to do to keep yourself going?

Speaker 1: I would just pray. I would watch people and say, I wanna do that one day. I wanna be this one day, I wanna travel. The only way I can do that is if I succeed in life and I have to keep going. There was nobody else willing to go down the pathway that I was going, so it was hard for me to bond with lots of people 'cause I was trying to motivate them. They wouldn't wanna hear it but I kept going, 'cause lots of people were trying to give up. I didn't let them give up 'cause I wanted them to be as successful as me. I like to put people down, I want them ... You have some friends that don't want you to do better than them, and honestly I will congratulate you if you are doing better than me, I just wanna also see ...

Speaker 1: What really motivated me was my grandmother, 'cause she always told me, “You shouldn't put people down, you should always uplift them, and you should always motivate them,” and she was just one of the most helpful people. She was 94 when she started telling me her little stories. She would constantly receive mail from Caucasian people, I guess that she took care of back then, 'cause she was born in 1918. She constantly got mail telling how she helped them, and basically she was my motivational person. She was my inspiration, I wanted to make a change like she did. She changed lots of people, she took care
of people when she didn't have to, she let them in when she didn't have to. Everyone thought of her as a mother figure.

Speaker 1: I'm young, but I feel like I should just follow in her footsteps. Both my grandmothers were my motivation. They kept me going, they kept telling me I can, besides everybody else. You never really heard, "I'm proud of you," from nobody in my family. It was just her, I would just talk to her. Half the stuff I didn't know what she was talking about but she was the reason I stuck to it. Because I see how my family struggled and I was like, "I'm gonna do anything and everything possible to never let this happen again." It was horrible.

Speaker 1: Having to move house to house, living with other people, meals, gas bills that haven't been paid for over a year. Always had to warm water or go to other people's house to take showers throughout middle school and high school. It was an experience I didn't want to experience. That's why now from this day forward, I constantly try to do my best to take care of them. They're living in hotels and stuff, I just feel like I have to get a job and once I got a job I started paying phone bills and helping her pay basically all the bills.

Speaker 1: Basically, I was paying all the bills for my parents. My mom had a [rough pass 00:19:29] so she couldn't get a job in I don't know how long. I'd see her cry a couple of times because she couldn't get it. I think she had a felony, every time she was close to getting a job she couldn't get it. We never had a bond. And then a lot of stuff happened to me but I feel like I got a step up, even though I'm not the mother I still stepped up because I have relatives to take care, I still have a family, I'm not just gonna let you leave them like that.

Speaker 2: Wow. That's amazing. Is there anything else I haven't asked or we haven't discussed that you would like to share about your academic success and how you did it? There are kids that are probably behind you that are gonna wanna know, "How can I do it?" They may have had your story and they wanna know just, "How do I do this?" What helped you? You said prayer, you said a grandmother, you said teachers. Is there anything else you wanna share?

Speaker 1: Not many of those people that are probably behind me don't even have anybody to talk to or to vent to, I just want to tell them that anything is possible. You've gotta believe in yourself, don't take criticism. Don't let nobody put you down. You gotta just believe in yourself, you gotta believe that you can do anything if you believe you can do it. I just feel like ... There isn't anything in this world you can't do. I feel like you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. People say, "I'm not smart enough, or I will never be able to do it," but I feel like you can. I feel like some stuff may be hard but I feel like you can do it. Anything's really possible, you just gotta believe in yourself. You gotta trust in yourself before you trust anybody else.
Speaker 1: It's really you. You gotta focus on you before you can focus on anybody else around you.

Speaker 2: That's awesome. One last thing, is there anything you'd like to tell the district, our super intendant, this is what a student like me needs to succeed?

Speaker 1: Maybe I think we should have more programs, to help those who actually need somebody to talk to. There should just be more motivational speakers here, coming to the schools. Everybody needs just a little love or somebody just there, just to talk to. I feel like, some people feel like they aren't smart enough either, so there should be more one-on-one things like tutoring. In some tutoring I see that it's kind of hard for kids, 'cause they don't like getting in groups, they don't even know how to open up to people or ask. They feel like they're dumb, and I feel like maybe we could talk to them one-on-one and get to know their story. We need more people out there to help us in our future generation to succeed.

Speaker 1: We need more motivation, mostly teachers just put their students down and I just feel that's not right. They need to get to know them before they judge them.

Speaker 2: That's good, I think that's really good. If you wanna add anything else for black kids, is there anything you want your super intendant to know, then that's it.

Speaker 1: I don't even know ... So you want me to say, like ...

Speaker 2: I want you to say whatever you want, this is just the last part. Anything else you wanna add, it doesn't have to be what I just talked about. Anything else you wanna add.

Speaker 1: Well I feel, for me, just because I was black I couldn't do what they would do. I'm not smart like them, I can never do what they're doing. I was like, “Dang, why can't I be like them?” I just always felt like it was a race thing to me, it's always felt like it. But then at the end I feel like, we're all just one. There's no white, purple, yellow or whatever color. (laughs) We're all just one. I feel like we all are a family, whether you believe it or not, we're just there ... There's nobody who can ... No I can't really say that.

Speaker 1: People don't feel like they belong in a certain area because of their skin color and they can't talk to people because of their skin color. They just feel like they're judged because of their skin color. I want them to know that it's not just all race to people, many people are racist out there. I feel like it's not just race though. I don't really know what to say.

Speaker 2: That's good. Say whatever you like.
Speaker 1: I kind of think, I don't even know. I'm really thinking about, like ...

Speaker 2: Well I appreciate it, this was amazing and again I wanna just say thank you again for your time and your insight, and this is gonna be great for research and students that are gonna follow. Thanks again.
1. Amara: Challenging. Because high school is like a rocky ... It's like a rocky road that you go down. When I first went to high school, it was like, oh, this is way much harder than middle school. Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school.

2. Brayonna: Tough.

3. Darnique: It's like a trial. It's just so much that you feel you need to accomplish. First it's like, "All right, I can do this, and just leave," and then it's like, there's so many difficult pathways you have to go through, and so many steps you have to take forward to achieve that goal. It's not all simple and just easy. You have to really focus, really hard. It's many, many steps to accomplishing.

4. Imani: Hard ... because high school, it makes you have a lot of ups and downs because you have a lot of work to do, and then you have a life at home. For me, I had a little sister so I wasn't able to do sports like I wanted to. I always had to watch her, and then I also had to do homework. It was like I was taking care of my sister and doing school at the same time.

5. Cenisa: Exciting. Because high school was the best time, ever. It wasn't as hard as now. ... It was just easy and fun.

6. Tiana: I don't know. Fun, I guess, because I was really involved in the school, like school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance.

7. Kiara: A word would be learning I guess or lesson. My actual experience was ... Let me see. I would say different.

8. Jeneice: Oh, that's a good word. I'll say interesting. It's like we're going through phases when we get to high school and we learned so many things that we never thought we would know and they're teaching us how to get out in the world and things that we need to know when we get a job or when we're on our own.

9. Amara: I'm helpful, I'm determined, and I'm pretty smart. Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school. ... I really ignored people. I really tried to help a lot of people like if they're mad. I'll try to really help them instead of being mean towards them because I know sometimes people go through things and I know if you trigger them more and more, it's just going to get worse. I try to help before I just like leave the whole situation alone. ... I was a pretty good student because I never wanted to like mess up what I have with teachers.

10. Imani: Loud, fun, and outgoing.

11. Brayonna: I could say I was happy. Excited to be in school. Some points sad.
12. Cenisa: Outgoing, spiritual, and curious. I was in everything. I was in step, I was in speech and debate, talent shoes, double Dutch.
13. Tiana: I was really involved in school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance.
14. Amara: I’m helpful, I’m determined, and I’m pretty smart. Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school. ... I never was a kid that would disrespect anybody elder than me, so that was it.... I really ignored people. I really tried to help a lot of people like if they’re mad. I’ll try to really help them instead of being mean towards them because I know sometimes people go through things and I know if you trigger them more and more, it's just going to get worse. I try to help before I just like leave the whole situation alone.
15. Imani: Yeah. I was in choir and church and at school I did ... it was two clubs that you do community service, other places. That helped me get community service for avid, but then I also stayed in it so I had more hours than I needed. Community service, I feel like it humbles you, because you see a lot of people who don't have a lot things you have, so you look at things differently in the outside world outside of school. You see someone who needs help. You're like, “I'm going to help them.”
16. Jeneice: I'll say I was nervous, scared and worried because getting out of middle school, it's like, oh, here we go, freshman year and my school there was only freshmen, so no sophomore, junior, senior. So it was a good year. At least we didn't get picked on, you know, being freshmen. But yeah, I was scared because I'm like, oh, we're getting higher up in the level and just hoping we can focus and that'll help us.
17. Brayonna: I could say I was happy. Excited to be in school. Some points sad. I was the type of student that wouldn't like to learn but
19. Tiana: I got a mixture of A and B. I was a really good student.
20. Amara: It was kind of easy but then again, it was like I don't remember this, it was so long ago. But it was pretty easy. I was like a B student.
21. Imani: Academically I was a good student. I only had two times where I was struggling with grades, trying to keep them up. Other than that, I was good academically. ... I was more like a B. I had only two Cs, so yeah, more B, A.
22. Jeneice: I'll say on a scale one to 10, I'll say a six.
23. Cenisa: I don't, I was a student. I was something else. A C student. [Compared to other students,] I would say I was in the middle. Because you have good kids, and you have kids that's just crazy. And I was a little bit in the middle. I wanted to do everything, but then I was scared to do everything. So I was in the middle.
Brayonna: I would say a seven … because I felt like I needed more help with stuff like learning just because certain teachers didn't know how to handle me. Just because I asked a lot of questions and I like to be sure of things.

Darnique: I feel like I was average. I feel like I could've learned more.

Jeneice: I felt proud of myself. I felt like, Kayla, this is amazing. You just accomplished one goal. You're going on to the next goal and focusing on your future.

Amara: I was excited. I was excited because like I'm my mom's first child to graduate and there's six of us. My big brother and my dad, my older brother he didn't graduate on my dad's side, and then my mom kids, so I was her first to graduate. So I was happy to make them happy, and I was happy to actually graduate.

Cenisa: It felt like you was graduating from college or something. Everybody was rooting for you, everybody was happy, excited to see what college you was going to, it was perfect.

Brayonna: I would say it was fun. It was exciting at some points.

Darnique: I was just excited, actually.

Kiara: Happiness.

Imani: Graduation was like a relief. Soon as you graduate, you just have this left weighted off your shoulders. No more work, no more stress, and then college is like dang. Stress came back.

Cenisa: Right now I'm working, I'm going to school for medical billing and coding. I'll be done in April 2020. And I'm in church. I have a daughter, she's five months. I pay my own bills, I take care of myself, and my daughter. I don't know, everything's good at the moment.

Kiara: I go to Cal State San Bernardino.

Imani: I go to Valley right now. Now I feel like I embrace it [my identity as a Black girl] everyday, from my hair to my feet. It's like I know my black is beautiful, but sometimes like you said at high school, you can have that feeling where it's like sheesh. Am I beautiful? Am I worth it? It's like now, I know I'm worth it.

Darnique: That's why now from this day forward, I constantly try to do my best to take care of them. They're living in hotels and stuff, I just feel like I have to get a job and once I got a job I started paying phone bills and helping her pay basically all the bills. Basically, I was paying all the bills for my parents. My mom had a rough past so she couldn't get a job in I don't know how long. I'd see her cry a couple of times because she couldn't get it. I think she had a felony, every time she was close to getting a job she couldn't get it. We never had a bond. And then a lot of stuff happened to me but I feel like I got a step up, even though I'm not the mother I still stepped up because I have relatives to take care, I still have a family, I'm not just gonna let you leave them like that. Home is [the biggest obstacle I faced]
mostly, I couldn't sleep. I don't even know. It was mostly drama I was trying to avoid, I kept getting dragged into.

37. Jeneice: I am a medical assistant. I just finished college for seven months.

38. Amara: It's pretty good. I'm still trying to figure out what's going on, what I'm going to do because at first I was going to go to Valley, it's too many people that I know there, and I just don't want to get distracted. I'm thinking about my dad and my mom want to go to a private college, West Coast University in Ontario, so I can get my RN. So I'm really happy about that.

39. Amara: In high school, I really didn't talk to nobody because I didn't want to get distracted. I really didn't want to make lot of friends because it's a lot of drama when you make a lot of friends, but then, yeah. So I really stayed to myself and just hang by myself, like even at lunch. Like I had like a few of my cousins at school with me, so I would be with them. But passing period and stuff, I don't talk to anybody, I just go straight to my next class, do what I got to do, but then that's it. ... My experience of high school was, it was okay. I'm not going to say it was great because I did go through some things, like I went through depression in high school. I went through ... like a lot of stuff I was frustrated, but I never let anything get in my way to graduate. I used to be sad when I'd get lower than a B, like a C. Out of all my mom's kids, I'm the one that always like ... If you want to get somewhere then I have to ... I really have to work on getting there, and I'm not going to stop until I get there. When I first went to high school, I'm like, my goal is to not get nothing under a C. ... That really helped me keep my grades up because I really loved sports and if my grades dropped from the sport, I wouldn't want to play like a game if I see my grades going down. I rather pick up my grades than play a basketball, or a volleyball game. That used to help me like keep my grades up.

40. Brayonna: As I got older, becoming a junior and a senior, then I really wanted to engage in more stuff. Just because I feel like I needed to and if I wanted to go to college I'd have to learn certain stuff. I had to understand certain things. ... [Being the only Black girl didn't really affect me.] Not really. I just did what I had to do to graduate high school. I felt like they're not gonna be there my whole life. I'm just here to graduate school and learn.

41. Cenisa: Graduation. Because graduation is everything. I feel like if you don't make it to graduation, it's just sad. Because that's the main goal. You go to school, you go through every grade to graduate, to get everything done, and finish, and move on to the next level. Yeah. ... And I got through it [dealing with emotional abuse and neglect at home] by, school was my escape from everything. When I was at school I was not worried about, you know, "Ooh, [inaudible 00:04:58], ooh." I was not worried about nothing else but school, but worried about what I'm doing at school. I wasn't worried about fitting in, or anything. It was just me at school, trying to get through it.
42. Kiara: It made me want to live on campus and then it helped with my communication skills because I was already shy and didn't really care about making friends and stuff, but it helped. They taught us about networking and their own life experiences so they gave us advice on how to be able to get good jobs and stuff like that. I would say the things that I went through when I was younger I guess it just was my own ... I was my own motivation. So, yeah

43. Tiana: I was always just eager to succeed. Be successful. Be sure I get good grades. ... I'm just like that type of person. Always just wanting to put out my best. ... Well really just knowing that it's something that I have to do. But I don't know. I wanted to finish high school so that I can go on to the next step of education; which is college.

44. Jeneice: I feel it [my success] came from myself, my heart, my mind. ... Well, I know there's two stories. I know the story. I remember I wanted to give up high school at first. I was like, oh, this is too hard. I don't know what to do. But then I motivated myself. I was like, okay, keep on going. And I know what kids are going through. They're just like, oh well you know what? High school is really not important. And they're just like, I just want to fail. I just want to give up. And that's their mindset. And then my mindset is like, [inaudible 00:06:32], but then I'm just like, man, if I don't graduate high school, I'm just going to be here another year and I just want to go out in the world, go to college, experience things I want to be in life. ... I felt that at thought times and stuff I had heavy [emotional] loads on me and I wouldn't let it affect school or anything. ... Well, having lots of personal issues, challenges, I wouldn't let it affect me. I would just push it to the side just like this is not my time. It's not worth it. I'm just going to focus what I need to focus, get my grades up and everything else.

45. Darnique: They [my family] all started dating at this age, and I was like "Nah, not into it." They wanted to party, I said, "Nah, I'm not into it." I was the person that would cry if I couldn't find school clothes. I'd cry, get mad. ... Darnique: I would just pray. I would watch people and say, I wanna do that one day. I wanna be this one day, I wanna travel. The only way I can do that is if I succeed in life and I have to keep going.

46. Amara: If my teacher didn't help me, then I tried to like at least figure it out on my own. Because I asked when I need help with something and figured it. ... But I started asking more, then going to tutoring and stuff, so I would know. Then, when I started getting the hang of it, then I start like understanding more about it. When I got sophomore, junior, then I start getting my grades back up to As and stuff.

47. Imani: Well, I came from a family where we don't give up. Giving up wasn't an option for me, even though I had obstacles and stuff. For me, for example, assignment, I'd rather turn in what I have than not to turn anything at all. For me, I think that really helped me because I'd rather have a 50%
and than a 0%. I think that's what really helped me. … Like math, I felt like I was not going to pass math, but I kept going and I did.

48. Jeneice: [When I was struggling academically] I asked for help and I was like, you know what, I should just not give up. Just keep on going. And you're almost done with high school.

49. Darnique: [My parents] weren't college graduates, not even high school graduates. So most of the stuff, I had to learn it on my own or try to Google it to see how I would learn some stuff. … I never had help with anything, relationships, nothing. I had to figure it out on my own. … I always told myself there was gonna be something, something's gonna throw me off, but I gotta to find a way to learn it, 'cause I'm a visual learner. I have to do one-on-one sometimes, I want you to constantly keep telling me something. So I'd get mad about that but ... [I think I was] determined?

50. Brayonna: I could say my uncle. He is a role model. He graduate. He's the only one that graduated out of my family, so that pushed me to want to graduate to be the second one then be a role model to my siblings, my younger siblings, because I'm the oldest.

51. Darnique: I realized when I motivate myself I can actually motivate other people, which I did. I helped people graduate along with me. People that were in higher/harder classes than me, I helped them, 'cause they didn't believe they could do it. I felt like maybe if I can motivate myself then maybe I can motivate other people. Maybe we can keep the little trail going, and everything may change in the future, maybe. … There was nobody else willing to go down the pathway that I was going, so it was hard for me to bond with lots of people 'cause I was trying to motivate them. They wouldn't wanna hear it but I kept going, 'cause lots of people were trying to give up. I didn't let them give up 'cause I wanted them to be as successful as me. I like to put people down, I want them ... You have some friends that don't want you to do better than them, and honestly I will congratulate you if you are doing better than me, I just wanna also see ...

52. Jeneice: Well, I feel like I was taught that on my own because I in my family, I wanted to be the first person to graduate high school. And then go on to college.

53. Tiana: Well like I said, I've always been the type of person to want to succeed and be successful because of the things I've seen within my family and my family members going through school. And some of my parents, or my siblings, not finishing high school or getting to college, I always wanted to be the first one to do that.

54. Amara: When I got my first C in one of my classes, I was really sad, and I was crying to my principal. He was like, "Don't be sad. All you have to do is just go to tutoring. You could get your grade up." I was really happy when I finally got my grade up, so yeah. … But mainly, if I needed help I would go to my counselor, tutor, or my teacher. … I was in sports, basketball,
volleyball, and softball. ... I would do my practicing after I do my homework. But that's how our coaches was, they'll tell us, you have to do your homework first, then we'll go outside and practice. That really helped a lot.

55. Brayonna: Yeah I had this one counselor. His name was Mr. Brown. He was my main support once I transferred schools. He helped me get everything. He made sure my credits was there. He made sure my grades was up. He would reward me, so I could keep up my work, and he was there before he retired. ... My math classes [were] really tough. I could say that as I became a senior, and they became more easier just because I feel like I got more help. I was in certain classes and tutoring, so it got a little more easier.

56. Cenisa: I had teachers, ... coaches. It was a lot of people that helped.

57. Kiara: The main reason I was able to receive those grades would be because of one counselor that I had. His name was Mr. Berkeley, but yeah. He was really there for you. He really helped you make sure you're in the right courses for your [inaudible 00:02:05] to go to a four year university.

58. Imani: Yes. I had one teacher named Miss Johnson, and she was one of those people. If you needed help or she had something that you feel like she can help you with, she will. No matter if it's money, advice, anything. She was that person. She's going to give you. Whatever you need, she had it. She was black [and] the reason why we connected was because we were in BSU, and that kind of brought us together, but she also would help people outside of the Black race. That's why I say it kind of does but it doesn't.

59. Tiana: My basketball coach, Danesha Culverson, she made me want to always put my best foot forward

60. Jeneice: What helped me was actually track and field. It was my senior year and I loved it. It helped me and motivated me on my senior year through high school. Why it supported me was because I remember my coach saying, when you start, don't give up because you know you won't finish. And it's like the same thing to do it throughout high school. They were all positive [my relationships with teachers] and that's what I loved. I needed motivation from them, too. I remember I would cry when I'm stressed and they're like, it's okay, you got this. Just breathe in. Don't worry about it. And they knew I've been through a lot on my plate and I just love how they're helpers. They make me feel better.

61. Darnique: Okay, no matter how bad I talk, I'd say, "My mom's this, this and this," you just kept turning everything into a positive. Even though I didn't wanna hear a positive, you just kept changing my perspective of things. You were just so happy and motivated and you encouraged me to that, 'cause I had a lot of low self esteem. And me just talking to you in my day and stuff, actually made me feel better, attitudes and stuff. I was like, "Oh, she might be my teacher but I'm go talk to Miss Hawkins," or I just thought
about you in my head and I was on my breaking point. I knew my mom wasn't the person to talk to, that's why I tried to talk to you. I'd mention family a lot to you or Miss Coverson, is she still here? I only got close to African-American teachers 'cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from ... I was close to the African-American teachers, not being picky, but I just feel like they understood me more. I got close to one, in middle school I got close to one, and I treated her as a mother. Every holiday, I'd buy her something, I'd visit her every day, talk to her about everything. Mother's Day, I'd spend lots of money on her. I never spent it on my mom because I felt like she was just there. I felt like she wasn't there as a mother. She does stuff as a mother but I feel like when I needed her most ... That's why I got so close to most of the African-American female teachers, I got involved with them as a mother.

62. Amara: I used to be sad, and my mom just used to go, "You have to just work and ask." ... [To support my success,] my mom helped me, and my dad helped me, my grandma helped me. ... [In my freshman year when I had a teacher I thought was racist,] I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that class.

63. Kiara: I would say the things that I went through when I was younger I guess it just was my own ... I was my own motivation. So, yeah my mom went to school. She has two degrees. She has a AS and a AA too, but she always pushed us to do better than her. That's what she always said. I always want my kids to be better than me and stuff like that. So, I would say the different things that I went through in life with my dad and stuff like that too. My grandfather. He was always on me and even though he lives in Atlanta, every week I would always still receive a phone call, a grade check and having to check in and from being a freshman all the way up to senior year, it was always about college. So, that's what he instilled in me from even when I was younger but when I got to high school, it's more scholarships, college, making sure that my grades would look good for when it was that time to start applying and then when the applications came around, he was always on me. Like, "Oh, how many applications you do this week?" Or for scholarships and stuff too. So, yeah.

64. Imani: Well, for me, my parents were on me. They made sure if I needed help, I could go to tutoring or something, I was able to. I feel like other kids, their parents weren't as strict on them, so maybe that's why they didn't have motivation to go to school and be on time and do the work on time and all the things I need to do. Because you have to have some type of support
system to help you because your mind can go crazy sometimes. I don't want to do it. You know? If you have someone there to help you, you could do this. You got this. It's easier for you, and I had a little support system, so it was easier for me. ... [In terms of support.] I had my parents as well. And I had a cousin who was good at math. When I needed math help, I had him to help me.

65. Tiana: My dad. He's always pushed me to ... Well telling me that I have to always put out my best and try my hardest and it would pay off. So pretty much my dad. He was really my role model. I just seen how hard he works and he's just a hard worker. And I'm like ... I look up to that and I respect that, so it made me want to work just as hard.

66. Darnique: Both my grandmothers ... kept me going, they kept telling me I can, besides everybody else. ... It was just her, I would just talk to her. Half the stuff I didn't know what she was talking about but she was the reason I stuck to it.

67. Cenisa: I had friends that helped me through everything ... I had friends, my friends' parents, and everyone around me. ... It was a lot of people that helped.

68. Kiara: Then we would build relationships. Like I still talk to most of the people who are in there with me still. We stay connected on social media and then that was being able to connect with other students around me that were the same because it was all about African American students.

69. Imani: I had a few friends that we had the same majors and stuff, so we kind of all would work together.

70. Kiara: So, I would recommend it to a lot of young high school students because once you go through the program, it's like you get a look on the real world. That's what they don't give to you in a regular high school, but these people they're here to help you get through the world. [Now,] Even after [the Black Future Leaders program is over] I can call any one of them and they'll still be there for you even after high school.

71. Brayonna: I could say my uncle. He is a role model. He graduate. He's the only one that graduated out of my family, so that pushed me to want to graduate to be the second one then be a role model to my siblings, my younger siblings, because I'm the oldest.

72. Kiara: my mom went to school. She has two degrees. She has a AS and a AA too, but she always pushed us to do better than her. That's what she always said. I always want my kids to be better than me and stuff like that.

73. Imani: I seen what all of my friends would do doing the things they did. I didn't want to do those things. Like I said, my friends that fought and everything, they got suspended, and then their grades dropped. They weren't able to do the things that they needed to do to graduate. That's when I was like, I don't want to be that person that has to go to Sierra and come back to get my credits. Just to take a different path. For me, I was just
like I'm just like I'm going to do what I have to do so I can get high school over with and live my life.

74. Tiana: My dad. He's always pushed me to ... Well telling me that I have to always put out my best and try my hardest and it would pay off. So pretty much my dad. He was really my role model. I just seen how hard he works and he's just a hard worker. And I'm like ... I look up to that and I respect that, so it made me want to work just as hard. Well like I said, I've always been the type of person to want to succeed and be successful because of the things I've seen within my family and my family members going through school. And some of my parents, or my siblings, not finishing high school or getting to college, I always wanted to be the first one to do that.

75. Jeneice: I feel like I had my cousins as a role model because she was in college and I was like, if she can do it then I can do it.

76. Darnique: I would watch people and say, I wanna do that one day. I wanna be this one day, I wanna travel. The only way I can do that is if I succeed in life and I have to keep going. ... What really motivated me was my grandmother, 'cause she always told me, “You shouldn't put people down, you should always uplift them, and you should always motivate them,” and she was just one of the most helpful people. She was 94 when she started telling me her little stories. She would constantly receive mail from Caucasian people, I guess that she took care of back then, 'cause she was born in 1918. She constantly got mail telling how she helped them, and basically she was my motivational person. She was my inspiration, I wanted to make a change like she did. She changed lots of people, she took care of people when she didn't have to, she let them in when she didn't have to. Everybody thought of her as a mother figure. ... I'm young, but I feel like I should just follow in her footsteps. Both my grandmothers were my motivation. I see how my family struggled and I was like, “I'm gonna do anything and everything possible to never let this happen again.” It was horrible: Having to move house to house, living with other people, meals, gas bills that haven't been paid for over a year. Always had to warm water or go to other people's house to take showers throughout middle school and high school. It was an experience I didn't want to experience.

77. Amara: [In my freshman year when I had a teacher I thought was racist,] I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that class. ... [In my freshman year when I had a teacher I thought was racist,] I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous
that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several
times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that
class.

78. Brayonna: Yeah. Okay. So where I live is called Railings. Others might
know, there's not really a lot of black people there. I was at Citrus Valley
High school and there's barely African Americans. So it's like you'll be in a
classroom full of Hispanics, or whites and everybody'll look at you. When
they talk about slavery or other stuff. Just because I'm smart, and I'm an
African American. So they'll just give you that look of does she belong in
here or stuff like that. It felt weird. It's like I didn't have to do so. I wasn't
really worried about it.

79. Cenisa: Racism. I would say I did, but it never comes out straight forward.
It's always around the corner, around the bush. So I don't pay it no mind.

80. Kiara: But then again, I still didn't get the help that I needed but I just looked
at it as that's how life is. Life has to still go on no matter what people think
about you or what kind of stereotypes they'll give out about us that we just
have to prove them wrong. So, that's what I did.

81. Tiana: At times I just felt really uncomfortable … so [I learned] just to not
listen to it. That's what I had to learn to do when I was getting those signals.
Or feelings when I was in a classroom, I just had to ignore it and just focus
on my work.

82. Darnique: I didn't really have relationships with teachers that weren't black. I
used to come visit certain teachers just because they were nice teachers
overall but I never got close to ... I only got close to African-American
teachers 'cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom
and dad to me, they understood where we come from 'cause ... They don't
understand where we come from, they don't understand our backgrounds,
they understand where we struggle. They take advantage of that, they
make fun of us 'cause they're low income people, stuff like that. So when
we try to address them they're like, "Well it's not our fault you're this and
this." I say it's not our fault either, we just have to deal with it. And us
dealing with that made it hard for us also. It made it hard for us.

83. Brayonna: Yeah I was in softball. I did track. It's not really a sport, but I did
computer design. I was a teacher assistant and office assistant when I was
in school. I could say being a teacher's assistant helped me because I was
around other students. I helped the teachers. I got more engagement.
Softball I could say helped me with leadership.

84. Kiara: Another thing I could say to was being in the Avid [program]. So, in
Avid, you were required to stay on top of your grades and stay organized
and stuff like that. As a black student, it helped me because I mean we
don't have a lot of programs that are really destined just for us because it's
either you're in the light or not in the light. So, if you’re not the top black
student, then there’s nothing for you really. They don't recognize us as
much and so with the program, it's like you're around a lot of students who have the same abilities and strengths that you do. Because there's different requirements. You have to have a 3.0 or above so you're with students who have the same mindset as you I guess you can say. It helped me because at my own high school, we didn't really have a lot of programs like that. So, it was like I was able to connect in a different way of joining a club or something. I did a program called Black Future Leaders for my sophomore year. Yeah I found out about it my sophomore year and I did it all the way up to my senior year … on-campus You go to stay at Cal State for the weekend and it was run by Danny Tillman and we would do STEM projects for the week, the weekend or we would do ... I know one year it was STEM. One year it was black history so we learned about the different African cultures and stuff like that. Every time we would go we'd always have to write an essay about what we're going to do for the weekend before we go. … We also did different things outside of our weekend that we'd have once a year. We would go to the black college expo or we would just have times where we just get together, go to Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles and stuff like that. It was a good experience.

85. Brayonna: I really had to teach myself to go to school more, be more excited about school, encourage myself just because I didn't have the push from parents or certain teachers. I had to get myself together and wanted to be able to be happy to go to school. … I wasn't this child that grew up with my own mother and father. I had help from a grandmother. She's much older. So she didn't know more about how the current generation is. So I really had to help myself to get myself there, because she didn't know how to help me and teachers didn't know how. I'm really by myself. I was my own support system.

86. Cenisa: Self-encouragement

87. Jeneice: I felt proud of myself. I felt like, Kayla, this is amazing. You just accomplished one goal. You're going on to the next goal and focusing on your future.

88. Darnique: But then I just started to motivate myself because I realized when I motivate myself I can actually motivate other people, which I did. I helped people graduate along with me. People that were in higher/harder classes than me, I helped them, 'cause they didn't believe they could do it. I felt like maybe if I can motivate myself then maybe I can motivate other people. Maybe we can keep the little trail going, and everything may change in the future, maybe. … I would just pray.

89. Cenisa: It helps you. Because it [extracurricular activities] takes your mind off everything negative. And you're not really thinking about nothing but what you're doing at that moment. … school was my escape from everything. When I was at school I was not worried about, you know, "Ooh, [inaudible 00:04:58], ooh." I was not worried about nothing else but school,
but worried about what I'm doing at school. I wasn't worried about fitting in, or anything. It was just me at school, trying to get through it.

90. Tiana: I was really involved in school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance. They were kind of like an escape from school. I was able to be free. Just because I was always ... How do I say it? Making sure I was on top of everything. So it really got stressful at times. ... [Sports] took me away from everything [and] played a big role in high school. ... Basketball, specifically. It just really brought me at peace and took me away from school and everything else I had going on, so I was able to let it all out on the court.

91. Kiara: Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot ... because my dad was a alcoholic. ... I held a grudge towards my dad until we got back in contact my junior year and ... once I forgave him, I started doing better.

92. Cenisa: My biggest [obstacle] thing that I had was with my dad. My dad is very negative, he puts you down, everything.

93. Kiara: Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot, but when he was there, sometimes it was good memories, but sometimes it wasn't because my dad was a alcoholic. So, when I was younger I never really understood why I couldn't go see him every weekend or why they couldn't be together and stuff like that. But as I got older, this is the topic that I wrote for my ... You know the senior personal insight? So that essay and I used to hold a grudge once I got to middle school and high school. I held a grudge towards my dad until we got back in contact my junior year and it was like I felt like once I forgave him that I started doing better. So, I don't know. It's very difficult before. I would feel like I had to do something better. Like I felt like I wasn't good enough before so I felt like if I did better then my dad would want to come back into my life or something like that.

94. Imani: Hard ... because high school, it makes you have a lot of ups and downs because you have a lot of work to do, and then you have a life at home. For me, I had a little sister so I wasn't able to do sports like I wanted to. I always had to watch her, and then I also had to do homework. It was like I was taking care of my sister and doing school at the same time.

95. Tiana: Sometimes it was really hard to separate what I had going on at home and personally and other things outside of school when I got to school. Sometimes I would lose focus. I would just daydream, thinking about the stuff that I have going on. So I would lose focus sometimes. ... When I was about graduate my senior year, things started getting a little crazy at home; like living situations. So sometimes it was really hard for me to just get up and get out of bed. Be motivated to go to school and finish. I don't know what it was, but I just finished.

96. Darnique: 'Cause, besides home, things you're doing at home, some people deal with so many different things at home. I know what I dealt with at
home. So coming to school and having to try to focus on that, and things you deal with, it's kind of a difficult path, shall I say? It was kind of hard, you have to get through some stuff, 'cause it's kind of hard to focus ... It was mostly mom problems, I never really had a bond with her. Never. And after it was kind of sad that the family treat me different, because of who I was. You know how they all started dating at this age, and I was like "Nah, not into it." They wanted to party, I said, "Nah, I'm not into it." ... My mom, she always said mean things, out of proportion, 'cause I was different. It's like she was jealous as a parent, which I feel she shouldn't have been. ... Darnique: Well at home I can't say that. At home, no. I feel like they're the reason I chose to do what I ... I knew I was 'cause they kept saying ... My mom got mad and she kept saying, "You're not gonna graduate, you're gonna be like all of us. You're sixteen, get pregnant, drop out, you're not gonna make it." I remember, I think I was in middle school, and my older brother and sister were in high school, and I don't know how but I helped them with their homework. ... I felt like I once had a bond with her but she was ... it's like we're switched, I feel like I'm the mother and she's the child. I feel like she wasn't prepared for this, as she feels she was. I understand she helps and stuff like that but I just felt, she could've waited, or she could've tried to help better. I feel like I was a parent, I helped all my siblings with their homework and ... a lot of stuff I had to give up. I helped my two youngest brothers keep going, 'cause they wanted to give up. It was like, a difficult thing. ... That's why now from this day forward, I constantly try to do my best to take care of them. They're living in hotels and stuff, I just feel like I have to get a job and once I got a job I started paying phone bills and helping her pay basically all the bills. Basically, I was paying all the bills for my parents. My mom had a rough past so she couldn't get a job in I don't know how long. I'd see her cry a couple of times because she couldn't get it. I think she had a felony, every time she was close to getting a job she couldn't get it. We never had a bond. And then a lot of stuff happened to me but I feel like I got a step up, even though I'm not the mother I still stepped up because I have relatives to take care, I still have a family, I'm not just gonna let you leave them like that. Home is [the biggest obstacle I faced] mostly, I couldn't sleep. I don't even know. It was mostly drama I was trying to avoid, I kept getting dragged into. First I was scared, 'cause, you know how I find those [inaudible 00:02:09] stuff, I was like, "Oh yeah, this is gonna be some stuff."

97. Brayonna: I wasn't this child that grew up with my own mother and father. I had help from a grandmother. She's much older. So she didn't know more about how the current generation is. So I really had to help myself to get myself there, because she didn't know how to help me and teachers didn't know how. I'm really by myself. I was my own support system.
98. Cenisa: I didn't have nobody at home. At home it was not a lot of help at all. It was kind of like with school nobody knew how to help me with assignments, nobody knew anything about school. It was no concern at all.

99. Jeneice: Oh, growing up, life, it was hard with family situations and affects your schooling sometimes. And I know I haven't had my family around and stuff. I've been here and there and it just motivated me to go through during high school and without my family, living with my uncle and auntie, it was a horrible experience. I wanted my family to be there. I wish life was perfect. A lot of people don't have perfect life, but I just pushed through it, kept on going, and finally finished high school and onto college. ... Environment at home, it was really good. It was peaceful. The neighborhood was really nice. It was not scary or anything. It was protected and safe.

100. Darnique: I never had help with anything, relationships, nothing. I had to figure it out on my own, so it was ... Kind of difficult, should I say? ... You never really heard, "I'm proud of you," from nobody in my family.

101. Imani: I think one that really took a toll on me was when my aunt and my uncle died, because they were a big part of my family that kept us together. We would see all our family members more, and it's like now I only see a lot of my family members when we have to go to a funeral or something. I think that really affected me because it just me get really down.

102. Darnique: Before I went to high school they kept saying, "It's not gonna be this easy in high school," they actually didn't prepare us for what you guys were gonna actually teach us. [inaudible 00:05:35] It wasn't there. So when I came to high school I was like, "Oh, I've never seen this before in my life. They didn't prepare me for this."

103. Amara: But when I got to high school it was kind of rocky at first because I'm not used to this, and I'm not used to going to all these classes, and stuff like that. That measured me like how to be.

104. Imani: Being at school wasn't so hard, but I just think the work that, like the overload that they would do. Because at least for me I was an avid. Avid is what made it hard, because you had to do all the notes and the binding checks and then on top of that have your other six classes.

105. Jeneice: When I was at [this school], it was a challenge. It was different because I moved from Texas to here in California. So it was just different skills and stuff. Like English. ... Well, I was stressed out for my academics and stuff. I didn't know what to do. I was struggling.

106. Amara: No, I just kind of stayed to myself. When I seen her act like that, I'm like, I'm not going to just say nothing else. I'm just going to wait until my mom talked to the principal, and I switched my class. But ever since she was acting like that, I just stayed to myself. I did my work. ... [but] it made me not want to raise my hand anymore, answer questions even though I knew the answer, but I didn't want to raise my hand anymore or anything.
Sometimes I used to be scared to ask teachers because some teachers used to be mean, so I didn’t really want to ask.

107. Darnique: I can’t really say nothing much affected me. If anything affected me it would be myself. I kept getting discouraged or I kept telling myself I couldn’t do it. Well I feel, for me, just because I was black I couldn’t do what they would do. I’m not smart like them, I can never do what they’re doing. I was like, “Dang, why can’t I be like them?” I just always felt like it was a race thing to me, it’s always felt like it. But then at the end I feel like, we’re all just one. There’s no white, purple, yellow or whatever color. (laughs)

We’re all just one. I feel like we all are a family, whether you believe it or not, we’re just there … There’s nobody who can … No I can’t really say that. People don’t feel like they belong in a certain area because of their skin color and they can’t talk to people because of their skin color. They just feel like they’re judged because of their skin color. I want them to know that it’s not just all race to people, many people are racist out there. I feel like it’s not just race though. I don’t really know what to say.

108. Kiara: Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot …. my dad was a alcoholic. So, when I was younger I never really understood why I couldn’t go see him every weekend or why they couldn’t be together and stuff like that. … I would feel like I had to do something better. Like I felt like I wasn’t good enough before so I felt like if I did better then my dad would want to come back into my life or something like that.

109. Amara: One time, when I first became a freshman, I had like a racist teacher. She would act different towards all colored people. Soon as she started, I went to her desk one time and I told her like, "I need help with this." She just handed us the paper and was like, "Do this and you bring it back tomorrow. It’s homework." So I went to her desk like, "Could you help me with this?" And she was like, "Oh, well, no. That’s something that your family need to help you with." Then, I heard from other classmates, oh, she’s really racist. I had her before. But I wasn’t really paying attention because I had to see it for myself. Then, she really started acting weird towards us. We would raise our hands, she wouldn’t pick on us or anything. …

110. Brayonna: Well, just because teachers wouldn’t help or teachers don’t understand. So it’s kind of like if you can’t help the student then it will be tough, because they can’t learn on their own. That’s what the teachers are there for. I guess when I change schools, because I used to go to [name]. I can say that my relationships with teachers are better just because I feel like teachers don’t understand certain students need certain type of help. Every student is different. It’s like help that student in a way that they’ll understand. Not just the way that you know how to teach, … I felt like I needed more help with stuff like learning just because certain teachers
didn't know how to handle me. Just because I asked a lot of questions and I like to be sure of things.

111. Imani: Other than that, my high school wasn't as hard, and I also had friends who got in fights a lot. I was the one that was like, it's not worth it because at the end of the day you're going to get suspended. You being black is already a red flag. You just got to ... I was the one that was trying to encourage all my friends. I want all of us to win. I was the one that was trying to keep us together, keep us focused, because I know we all had that potential. ... I mean, it's not tough, but sometimes when you go certain places, you know. You have that sense what it's like. Okay. You see where everyone's ... You're the one that's standing out. In college, it's like everyone's comfortable in college. Not to say everyone's broke, but it's like everyone is broke because we're all ... You know, college is expensive, so everyone's having the same mindset in college because you're paying for the classes. It's different. Since you're paying for it, you're going to try to, you know. In high school, everything's free, so I think that's why everyone just wilds out. I'm going to fight if I want to fight. I'm going to cuss if I want to cuss. I'm going to do what I want to do because it's free.

112. Brayonna: I'll just say being around certain students would bring me down at school just because some kids, they're just not the type that's always happy. So it's like they will make you feel down about yourself because they're down about their self. So I wouldn't be excited to go to school sometimes. Just because I felt like I'm always around negativity.

113. Amara: I felt all right. I didn't really have problems with racism, only that teacher. ... I had went to Carter at first, and there, it's like some of the teachers would act different towards coloreds. I mean, some of the teachers wouldn't, but when I went to [Miner 00:10:28], like they treat everybody the same. It was no racism, nothing.

114. Brayonna: Yeah. Okay. So where I live is called Railings. Others might know, there's not really a lot of black people there. I was at Citrus Valley High school and there's barely African Americans. So it's like you'll be in a classroom full of Hispanics, or whites and everybody'll look at you. When they talk about slavery or other stuff. Just because I'm smart, and I'm an African American. So they'll just give you that look of does she belong in here or stuff like that. It felt weird. It's like I didn't have to do so. I wasn't really worried about it.

115. Cenisa: Racism. I would say I did, but it never comes out straightforward. It's always around the corner, around the bush. So I don't pay it no mind. [So it didn't affect you?] No. [What did it make you feel like, though?] It, it hurts your feelings. It hurts my feelings, and I don't like when they try to add you in different groups, and different type of people. Because you know who you are. So, it'll hurt your feelings.
116. Jeneice: [Did you experience racism or stereotypes?] I don't think, no. Not really. ... I don't think, there was nothing different. I feel like they were treating me the same, equal rights and stuff, and that's what I liked about school and stuff. They're not treating you, oh, because you're black, we're going to treat you a different way.

117. Darnique: No, not me. I feel like some other people were labeled but no, not me.

118. Tiana: Yeah, I did. ... I felt like the work that I would put in wouldn't be looked at as what it's supposed to be because ... I was being judged or there's some type of racism or something.

119. Imani: I had a few teachers. It was two teachers I had that they ... Not to say they would pick on the people who were colored, but they would try to sit everyone in a certain spot if that makes sense. The colored people would be on this side, and other people would be on this side. People didn't notice it until I want to say the second week. Because we had a project, and usually projects, you can pick who you want to be with. He said, "Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side. Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side." We're like, "Why?" My best friend is over there. Why do I have to pick someone who's over here? Then we brought it [classroom segregation] to the principal's attention, and that's when it kind of got solved. I think that was the only major event that happened. I was like, okay. For example, the national anthem. A lot of things that happen in the world, my mom, she gave me a choice, like "You don't have to say the national anthem if you don't want to." I would stand, but I wouldn't say it. A lot of teachers would get mad, and it's like ... We didn't really get why they were mad. We stood still, while some students will sit down. Of course, they would say stuff to them too. It's like you can't force people to do things they don't want to do. Then when the would ask us why, I'm mean, that's why. We're just trying to help you understand from our point of view. I think that's the only thing. I feel like when it comes to the flag, I stand because a lot of people died for us to be where we are today. I don't say what we're supposed to say because I feel like it's not equal for everyone. Because there's so many things that happens where it's like it's not equal. There's no way it could be equal. That's why don't say it, but I'm still going to respect the whole thing we have to do.

120. Darnique: I see some people that would struggle and didn't ask for more help than some teachers would expect. And they would kind of get mad but they was like ... “Oh you're obviously not paying attention,” or I would see that the person is paying attention, but it's just the fact they need more help. And then she's just like, “Oh yeah you're obviously not gonna make it,” or, “Pretty sure you're gonna have to come back again.” She would just ... I just didn't like ... She would go straight for her, I don't remember her name, she'd go straight for one of the black students. An African-American male. I
felt like they just needed a little help, they were probably struggling. Everybody instantly expects you to be in some type of game, or they'll just look at you in a certain way because the way you dress. Some people don't even choose what they wear. They just down talk you and just, not lots of motivation coming towards African-American students. I just feel like they don't give us credit when it's due. We would try so much to get to that point but they would focus on the other races. It's like we're just there, just wanting to be successful like everyone else, but they don't really acknowledge us as much, but we're just there. I didn't really have relationships with teachers that weren't black. I used to come visit certain teachers just because they were nice teachers overall but I never got close to ... I only got close to African-American teachers 'cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from 'cause ... They don't understand where we come from, they don't understand our backgrounds, they understand where we struggle. They take advantage of that, they make fun of us 'cause they're low income people, stuff like that. So when we try to address them they're like, "Well it's not our fault you're this and this." I say it's not our fault either, we just have to deal with it. And us dealing with that made it hard for us also. It made it hard for us.

121. Kiara: it started my freshman year and at first I just brushed it off and I switched classes. I don't know. It felt like our community wasn't strong enough or we didn't have enough people to actually be there for us when something like that would happen. Like they didn't care. So, then it happened again my junior year … it was literally the first week of school. So teachers do the little opening and break down some class rules and stuff and the teacher goes, "I don't want any of that acting black or ghettoness in my class." There's only me and one other black girl in the class, but she [the other girl] didn't take it, I guess, how I took it, and I really felt some type of way about it.

122. Imani: I had one experience because I feel like a lot of people stereotype black people's hair a certain way. Freshman year, I came to high school with braids like these. Then I want to say three months in, I took them out. Then, a lot of people in my class were like, "Whoa, you have hair." I was like, "What's that supposed to mean? I have hair?" They were like, "You have a lot of hair." I'm like, "I know. What is that supposed to mean? Just because I have braids, I'm not supposed to have a lot of hair?" They're like, "Usually a lot a black people who have braids don't have a lot of hair." I'm like, "Well, I'm not one of those people." They're like, "Oh, that's cool." I'm like, "Why is it that you all think that? Not everyone who wears weaves, ponytails, all the extra hair, that doesn't mean we don't have hair. Sometimes I just get braids. I don't want to do my hair." To them, they made it seem like we have to have or we have to be mixed to have hair or
something. That's how I took it, because I'm fully black. I don't have any mixture, and I have a lot of hair, but that doesn't mean you have to be mixed to have a lot of hair. I've never understood that. I feel like I had moments where, people think everything's funny. You know, when we watch movies and stuff when black history and stuff, and certain things would happen. It's like people should just be looking at it, watching it, learning. People nowadays like to joke and think everything is funny. That's the only hard part of high school that you have to really ding. Sometimes you can't speak up on everything because people have different mindsets, and the teachers.

123. Tiana: Probably I would say kids always are trying to bully each other, I don't understand for what, but probably when I was fresh in high school, my Freshman year, I did have some. Because I'm mixed, so they were like, "What are you? Are you Puerto Rican? Or Mexican? Or black? You can't be both. You have to be one or the other." And you're trying to be this and that.

124. Kiara: I didn't address the teacher, but I just kept it to myself and I went to the vice principal. They didn't do nothing. Whenever I tried to go to the principal, they wouldn't let me talk to her. You know you always have to go in order I guess from the authority or whatever. So then after that, I would just mark down. I had a journal and I would write in there every time she would say something and I would go turn it in to the vice principals to make notes of it. Once they stopped doing like they just weren't going to do anything else about it, my mom tried to come to the school and have a talk with the teacher and everything. But then it ended up just ... [So] instead of switching the classes, I actually tried to take it somewhere like with another person for help. But then again, I still didn't get the help that I needed but I just looked at it as that's how life is. Life has to still go on no matter what people think about you or what kind of stereotypes they'll give out about us that we just have to prove them wrong. So, that's what I did. After that, we ended up just having to switch my class. So, then I got a teacher who was African American for English. I felt like in her class, she had no more over the class. The class was not disciplined better than my other class where she was talking about the African American students, but there was more order in the class. Then in my other class, we learned but it was hard learning because they look down on her as she's not really going to do nothing or if she does try, they'll make a lie. Because they'll believe the students when it comes to the African American teacher rather than the Caucasian teacher. It's different stereotypes and I've seen that in the school system also.

125. Amara: I say no matter what, don't let nobody get in your way of what you want to do. If you have a goal, strive for it, and don't give up on your goals. It don't matter. Don't get a boyfriend because they're distracting, and just strive for your goals.
126. Brayonna: Yeah. If you experience racism, stereotype I'll just say just focus on yourself because at the end of the day, you'll have yourself ... you'll graduate high school and then when you're finished you'll have to worry about any of that stuff. ... I would say if you're going through hard challenges I would say, "Just push through it. You're going to graduate. You're going to get those rewards as you're hoping you'll get. If you're going through bullying or stressful situations I would say just keep on pushing through it, because at the end of the day you're going to make it."

127. Cenisa: They just gotta stay in their own lane and not worry about everybody else. Everybody's worried about boys and girls and stuff that does not matter. They just need to focus on they self, so in the end it could pay off. ... Be strong. Don't let people get in your head, and try to take you out your character. Because once you get out your character you look like the fool. You're embarrassing yourself. ... I just, I want everyone behind me to reach their goal. I feel like everybody should.

128. Kiara: The message would be to don't give up on what you have your goals set for. If you think you can do it, then you know that you can accomplish it no matter what anybody else has to say because you are a minority to society at this time and you just have to be different. Don't fall into what everybody else has to say. Just do what you want to do in life.

129. Imani: Stay focused, and don't let no one distract you. I think that's very important because you can have friends who could tell you to do something and you do it, say you guys get caught, you're all going to get caught. It's not just one person going to go down for whatever you guys did. It's all you guys. ... Just don't stop. That's so important because things can happen in your life, and you want to give up, but if you don't give up, I promise you it will be worth it.

130. Tiana: The advice that I would put out is, you really just have to ... That's something I feel like you have to dig within yourself, 'cause nobody can make you want to succeed or finish. Something within you has to be the reason that you want to do this. ... I feel like the best thing to do is focus when you're in the classroom. I know it's tempting 'cause you're with your friends or you just want to have fun, but I just feel like you should really focus on your work and always putting your best out there.

131. Jeneice: Well, I have a message. Whoever's having a tough life with family or whoever is slacking around and think school's not important, school is really important in my opinion because it helped me through so many challenges I've been through. And you're going to have a future career with your high school diploma. And that's what I have right now. I am a medical assistant. I just finished college for seven months. This is the things you're going to get.
132. Darnique: I just want to tell them that anything is possible. There isn’t anything in this world you can’t do. I feel like you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it.

133. Imani: [When I see other Black kids not succeeding] It makes feel hurt because I know they have the potential. It’s starts in your mind first. Because if your mind isn’t telling you have it and for you to keep going, you’re not going to keep going, because your mind is telling you something else. That’s where motivation and things come in, and a lot of people don’t have that. … The workload is going to get tough. But if you want to graduate, you can graduate. You have to have that mindset. Don’t let no one tell you that you cannot do it, because you can.

134. Darnique: Not many of those people that are probably behind me don’t even have anybody to talk to or to vent to, I just want to tell them that anything is possible. You’ve gotta believe in yourself, don’t take criticism. Don’t let nobody put you down. You gotta just believe in yourself, you gotta believe that you can do anything if you believe you can do it. I just feel like … There isn’t anything in this world you can’t do. I feel like you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. People say, “I’m not smart enough, or I will never be able to do it,” but I feel like you can. I feel like some stuff may be hard but I feel like you can do it. Anything’s really possible, you just gotta believe in yourself. You gotta trust in yourself before you trust anybody else. It’s really you. You gotta focus on you before you can focus on anybody else around you.

135. Kiara: If you think you can do it, then you know that you can accomplish it no matter what anybody else has to say because you are a minority to society at this time and you just have to be different. Don’t fall into what everybody else has to say. Just do what you want to do in life.

136. Tiana: I just feel like going through high school, as you’re going through it, you’re going through these changes and growing up and finding yourself. … Just enjoy the experience of being in high school. Try to get into some clubs or some sports or activities. Really just be involved and just enjoy your time being here.

137. Amara: A black students needs like all your full help and attention because some of them like is scared to speak to other races because they feel like, oh, well, this teacher’s going to act this way because she’s this color. I think that more teachers should act like … treat all students equally at the end of the day, and don’t treat nobody different.

138. Cenisa: Encouragement and love, they need to know that they’re going to get help, and that they’re being heard, and that everything isn’t hidden, and that they’re being seen. Because a lot of black kids feel like they’re not being seen. … A lot of kids now, are going through a lot of stuff I’ve never seen in my class. So I don’t know what’s going on, but I feel like everybody just needs to stop, and get it together. Because it’s getting bad. They feel
like they have to be ghetto and fit in at school, because everybody else is. And they have to feel like it's okay to stand out, to do what they want to do. Everybody in high school wants to fit in. Everybody wants to fit it and be someone they're not, and I feel like in hindsight everyone should learn how to be their self, learn how to learn yourself, so you can figure out what you want to be, and start working towards it.

139. Kiara: [inferred from story of not being listened to about the racist teacher that administration needs to listen to and support students; don't ignore their claims]

140. Jeneice: It is an honor and I am grateful that I am a Black student that is motivating myself and other people. And it just helps a lot being a wonderful Black student.

141. Darnique: Everybody needs just a little love or somebody just there, just to talk to. In some tutoring I see that it's kind of hard for kids, 'cause they don't like getting in groups, they don't even know how to open up to people or ask. They feel like they're dumb, and I feel like maybe we could talk to them one-on-one and get to know their story. We need more people out there to help us in our future generation to succeed. We need more motivation, mostly teachers just put their students down and I just feel that's not right. They need to get to know them before they judge them.

142. Imani: I say they need more clubs, because I know a lot of black students that like to do clubs to keep everyone together. Sometimes they want extra paperwork and curricular activities to be involved, but sometimes you don't need that. You can just have a classroom, everyone sit in a classroom and just talk. Talk about what's on your mind, what's bothering you. If you need advice, you guys give each other advice, just uplift each other. That can really change someone life sometimes.

143. Darnique: Maybe I think we should have more programs, to help those who actually need somebody to talk to. There should just be more motivational speakers here, coming to the schools. I feel like, some people feel like they aren't smart enough either, so there should be more one-on-one things like tutoring.
APPENDIX J

FINALIZED DATA ANALYSIS
Descriptors of high school

**Very challenging (4)**

- Amara: Challenging. Because high school is like a rocky ... It's like a rocky road that you go down. **Much harder than middle school:** When I first went to high school, it was like, oh, this is way much harder than middle school. Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school.
- Brayonna: Tough.
- Darnique: It's like a trial. It's just so much that you feel you need to accomplish. First it's like, “All right, I can do this, and just leave,” and then it's like, there's so many difficult pathways you have to go through, **many hard steps:** and so many steps you have to take forward to achieve that goal. It's not all simple and just easy. You have to really focus, really hard. It's many, many steps to accomplishing.
- Imani: Hard ... because high school, it makes you have a lot of ups and downs because you have a lot of work to do, and then you have a life at home. For me, I had a little sister so I wasn't able to do sports like I wanted to. I always had to watch her, and then I also had to do homework. It was like I was taking care of my sister and doing school at the same time.

**Fun and exciting (2)**

- Cenisa: Exciting. Because high school was the best time, ever. It wasn't as hard as now. ... It was just easy and fun.
- Tiana: I don't know. Fun, I guess, because I was really involved in the school, like school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance.

**Full of learning (2)**

- Kiara: A word would be learning I guess or lesson. My actual experience was ... Let me see. I would say different.
- Jeneice: Oh, that's a good word. I'll say interesting. It's like we're going through phases when we get to high school and we learned so many things that we never thought we would know and they're teaching us how to get out in the world and things that we need to know when we get a job or when we're on our own.
Self-descriptors

Active, involved, inquisitive (5)

- Amara: **Determined and smart**: I'm helpful, I'm determined, and I'm pretty smart. Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school. ... I really ignored people. I really tried to help a lot of people like if they're mad. I'll try to really help them instead of being mean towards them because I know sometimes people go through things and I know if you trigger them more and more, it's just going to get worse. I try to help before I just like leave the whole situation alone. ... I was a pretty good student because I never wanted to like mess up what I have with teachers.

- Imani: Loud, fun, and outgoing.

- Brayonna: I could say I was **happy. Excited to be in school**. Some points sad.

- Cenisa: Outgoing, spiritual, and **curious**. I was in everything. I was in step, I was in speech and debate, talent shoes, double Dutch.

- Tiana: I was really involved in school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance.

Helpful (2)

- Amara: I'm helpful, I'm determined, and I'm pretty smart. Because like when I was in ... When I was in elementary and stuff, I used to be like a straight A student, even middle school. ... I never was a kid that would disrespect anybody elder than me, so that was it.... I really ignored people. I really tried to help a lot of people like if they're mad. I'll try to really help them instead of being mean towards them because I know sometimes people go through things and I know if you trigger them more and more, it's just going to get worse. I try to help before I just like leave the whole situation alone.

- Imani: **Gained humility and desire to help from community service**: Yeah. I was in choir and church and at school I did ... it was two clubs that you do community service, other places. That helped me get community service for avid, but then I also stayed in it so I had more hours than I needed. Community service, I feel like it humbles you, because you see a lot of people who don't
have a lot things you have, so you look at things differently in the outside world outside of school. You see someone who needs help. You're like, "I'm going to help them."

Worried or sad (2)

- Jeneice: I'll say I was nervous, scared and worried because getting out of middle school, it's like, oh, here we go, freshman year and my school there was only freshmen, so no sophomore, junior, senior. So it was a good year. At least we didn't get picked on, you know, being freshmen. But yeah, I was scared because I'm like, oh, we're getting higher up in the level and just hoping we can focus and that'll help us.
- Brayonna: I could say I was happy. Excited to be in school. Some points sad. I was the type of student that wouldn't like to learn but

Academic performance

High achieving student (1)

- Kiara: A very book smart I guess. Well, my overall GPA is a 4.2. With honors.

Achieving student (4)

- Tiana: I got a mixture of A and B. I was a really good student.
- Amara: It was kind of easy but then again, it was like I don't remember this, it was so long ago. But it was pretty easy. I was like a B student.
- Imani: Academically I was a good student. I only had two times where I was struggling with grades, trying to keep them up. Other than that, I was good academically. ... I was more like a B. I had only two Cs, so yeah, more B, A.
- Jeneice: I'll say on a scale one to 10, I'll say a six.

Average student (3)

- Cenisa: I don't, I was a student. I was something else. A C student. [Compared to other students,] I would say I was in the middle. Because you have good kids, and you have kids that's just crazy. And I was a little bit in the middle. I wanted to do everything, but then I was scared to do everything. So I was in the middle.
• Brayonna: I would say a seven … because I felt like I needed more help with stuff like learning just because certain teachers didn't know how to handle me. Just because I asked a lot of questions and I like to be sure of things.
• Darnique: I feel like I was average. I feel like I could've learned more.

Feelings at graduation

**Excitement and happiness about major accomplishment (6)**

• Jeneice: I felt proud of myself. I felt like, Jeneice, this is amazing. You just accomplished one goal. You're going on to the next goal and focusing on your future.
• Amara: I was excited. I was excited because like I'm my mom's first child to graduate and there's six of us. My big brother and my dad, my older brother he didn't graduate on my dad's side, and then my mom kids, so I was her first to graduate. So I was happy to make them happy, and I was happy to actually graduate.
• Cenisa: It felt like you was graduating from college or something. **Felt celebrated and supported:** Everybody was rooting for you, everybody was happy, excited to see what college you was going to, it was perfect.
• Brayonna: I would say it was fun. It was exciting at some points.
• Darnique: I was just excited, actually.
• Kiara: Happiness.

**Relief (1)**

• Imani: Graduation was like a relief. Soon as you graduate, you just have this left weighted off your shoulders. No more work, no more stress, and then college is like dang. Stress came back.

**Not asked (1)**

• Tiana
Life Now

Working toward a college degree (3)

- Cenisa: Right now I'm working, I'm going to school for medical billing and coding. I'll be done in April 2020. And I'm in church. Supporting family: I have a daughter, she's five months. I pay my own bills, I take care of myself, and my daughter. I don't know, everything's good at the moment.
- Kiara: I go to Cal State San Bernardino.
- Imani: I go to Valley right now. Enjoying a strong self-esteem: Now I feel like I embrace it [my identity as a Black girl] everyday, from my hair to my feet. It's like I know my black is beautiful, but sometimes like you said at high school, you can have that feeling where it's like sheesh. Am I beautiful? Am I worth it? It's like now, I know I'm worth it.

Working to support family (1)

- Darnique: That's why now from this day forward, I constantly try to do my best to take care of them. They're living in hotels and stuff, I just feel like I have to get a job and once I got a job I started paying phone bills and helping her pay basically all the bills. Basically, I was paying all the bills for my parents. My mom had a rough past so she couldn't get a job in I don't know how long. I'd see her cry a couple of times because she couldn't get it. I think she had a felony, every time she was close to getting a job she couldn't get it. We never had a bond. And then a lot of stuff happened to me but I feel like I got a step up, even though I'm not the mother I still stepped up because I have relatives to take care, I still have a family, I'm not just gonna let you leave them like that. Affected ability to focus at school: Home is [the biggest obstacle I faced] mostly, I couldn't sleep. I don't even know. It was mostly drama I was trying to avoid, I kept getting dragged into.

Working after finishing a college degree (1)

- Jeneice: I am a medical assistant. I just finished college for seven months.
Figuring out next steps (1)

- Amara: It's pretty good. I'm still trying to figure out what's going on, what I'm going to do because at first I was going to go to Valley, it's too many people that I know there, and I just don't want to get distracted. I'm thinking about my dad and my mom want to go to a private college, West Coast University in Ontario, so I can get my RN. So I'm really happy about that.

Not asked (2)

- Brayonna
- Tiana

Reasons for success

RELENTLESSLY PURSUING SUCCESS (8)

Identifying and focusing on a clear and compelling goal (7)

- Amara: **School was top priority; avoided other distractions:** In high school, I really didn't talk to nobody because I didn't want to get distracted. I really didn't want to make lot of friends because it's a lot of drama when you make a lot of friends, but then, yeah. So I really stayed to myself and just hang by myself, like even at lunch. Like I had like a few of my cousins at school with me, so I would be with them. But passing period and stuff, I don't talk to anybody, I just go straight to my next class, do what I got to do, but then that's it. … My experience of high school was, it was okay. I'm not going to say it was great because I did go through some things, like I went through depression in high school. I went through … like a lot of stuff I was frustrated, but I never let anything get in my way to graduate.

**Strong desire to do well:** I used to be sad when I'd get lower than a B, like a C. Out of all my mom's kids, I'm the one that always like … If you want to get somewhere then I have to … I really have to work on getting there, and I'm not going to stop until I get there. When I first went to high school, I'm like, my goal is to not get nothing under a C. … That really helped me keep my grades up because I really loved sports and if my
grades dropped from the sport, I wouldn't want to play like a game if I see my grades going down. I rather pick up my grades than play a basketball, or a volleyball game. That used to help me like keep my grades up.

- Brayonna: As I got older, becoming a junior and a senior, then I really wanted to engage in more stuff. Just because I feel like I needed to and if I wanted to go to college I'd have to learn certain stuff. I had to understand certain things. … [Being the only Black girl didn't really affect me.] Not really. I just did what I had to do to graduate high school. I felt like they're not gonna be there my whole life. I'm just here to graduate school and learn.

- Cenisa: **Focused on graduating:** Graduation. Because graduation is everything. I feel like if you don't make it to graduation, it's just sad. Because that's the main goal. You go to school, you go through every grade to graduate, to get everything done, and finish, and move on to the next level. Yeah. … And I got through it [dealing with emotional abuse and neglect at home] by, school was my escape from everything. When I was at school I was not worried about, you know, "Ooh, [inaudible 00:04:58], ooh." I was not worried about nothing else but school, but worried about what I'm doing at school. I wasn't worried about fitting in, or anything. It was just me at school, trying to get through it.

- Kiara: **BFL made her want to go to college and live on campus:** It made me want to live on campus and **Built her interest in and skills for relationship building:** then it helped with my communication skills because I was already shy and didn't really care about making friends and stuff, but it helped. They taught us about networking and their own life experiences so they gave us advice on how to be able to get good jobs and stuff like that. **Personal experiences and motivation:** I would say the things that I went through when I was younger I guess it just was my own ... I was my own motivation. So, yeah

- Tiana: **always wanted to succeed:** I was always just eager to succeed. Be successful. Be sure I get good grades. … I'm just like that type of person. Always just wanting to put out my best. … **always wanted to go to college:** Well really just knowing that it's something that I have to do. But I don't know. I wanted to finish high school so that I can go on to the next step of education; which is college.

- Jeneice: **Pushed beyond temptation to fail by focusing on her desire to leave high school, be in the world, and go to college:** I feel it [my success] came from myself, my heart, my mind. … Well, I know there's two stories. I know the story. I remember I wanted to give up high school at first. I was like, oh, this is too hard. I don't know what to do. But then I motivated myself. I was like, okay, keep on going. And I know what kids are going through. They're just like, oh well you know what? High school is really not important. And they're just like, I just want to fail. I just want to give up. And that's their mindset. And then my mindset is like, [inaudible 00:06:32], but then I'm just like, man, if I don't graduate high school, I'm just going to be here another year and I just want to go out in the world, go to college, experience things I want to be in life. … I felt that at thought
times and stuff I had heavy [emotional] loads on me and I wouldn't let it affect school or anything. … Well, having lots of personal issues, challenges, I wouldn't let it affect me. I would just push it to the side just like this is not my time. It's not worth it. I'm just going to focus what I need to focus, get my grades up and everything else.

- Darnique: They [my family] all started dating at this age, and I was like "Nah, not into it." They wanted to party, I said, "Nah, I'm not into it." I was the person that would cry if I couldn't find school clothes. I'd cry, get mad. … Darnique: I would just pray. I would watch people and say, I wanna do that one day. I wanna be this one day, I wanna travel. The only way I can do that is if I succeed in life and I have to keep going.

**Taking initiative and persevering through challenges (4)**

- Amara: If my teacher didn't help me, then I tried to like at least figure it out on my own. **Asking for help when needed**: Because I asked when I need help with something and figured it. … But I started asking more, then going to tutoring and stuff, so I would know. **Understanding how high school works**: Then, when I started getting the hang of it, then I start like understanding more about it. When I got sophomore, junior, then I start getting my grades back up to As and stuff.

- Imani: Well, I came from a family where we don't give up. Giving up wasn't an option for me, even though I had obstacles and stuff. **Aiming for pragmatic goals rather than perfection**: For me, for example, assignment, I'd rather turn in what I have than not to turn anything at all. For me, I think that really helped me because I'd rather have a 50% and than a 0%. I think that's what really helped me. … Like math, I felt like I was not going to pass math, but I kept going and I did.

- Jeneice: [When I was struggling academically] I asked for help and I was like, you know what, I should just not give up. Just keep on going. And you're almost done with high school.

- Darnique: [My parents] weren't college graduates, not even high school graduates. So most of the stuff, I had to learn it on my own or try to Google it to see how I would learn some stuff. … I never had help with anything, relationships, nothing. I had to figure it out on my own. … I always told myself there was gonna be something, something's gonna throw me off, but I gotta to find a way to learn it, 'cause I'm a visual learner. I have to do one-on-one sometimes, I want you to constantly keep telling me something. So I'd get mad about that but … [I think I was] determined?
Wanting to be a role model and create positive change (4)

• Brayonna: I could say my uncle. He is a role model. He graduate. He's the only one that graduated out of my family, so that pushed me to want to graduate to be the second one then be a role model to my siblings, my younger siblings, because I'm the oldest.
• Darnique: I realized when I motivate myself I can actually motivate other people, which I did. I helped people graduate along with me. People that were in higher/harder classes than me, I helped them, 'cause they didn't believe they could do it. I felt like maybe if I can motivate myself then maybe I can motivate other people. Maybe we can keep the little trail going, and everything may change in the future, maybe. … There was nobody else willing to go down the pathway that I was going, so it was hard for me to bond with lots of people 'cause I was trying to motivate them. They wouldn't wanna hear it but I kept going, 'cause lots of people were trying to give up. I didn't let them give up 'cause I wanted them to be as successful as me. I like to put people down, I want them ... You have some friends that don't want you to do better than them, and honestly I will congratulate you if you are doing better than me, I just wanna also see ...
• Jeneice: Well, I feel like I was taught that on my own because I in my family, I wanted to be the first person to graduate high school. And then go on to college.
• Tiana: Well like I said, I've always been the type of person to want to succeed and be successful because of the things I've seen within my family and my family members going through school. And some of my parents, or my siblings, not finishing high school or getting to college, I always wanted to be the first one to do that.

RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM OTHERS (8)

Support from school staff (8)

• Amara: advice from principal: When I got my first C in one of my classes, I was really sad, and I was crying to my principal. He was like, "Don't be sad. All you have to do is just go to tutoring. You could get your grade up." I was really happy when I finally got my grade up, so yeah. … Help from various school staff: But mainly, if I needed help I would go to my counselor, tutor, or my teacher. … Guidelines from sports coach: I was in sports, basketball, volleyball, and softball. … I would do my practicing after I do my homework. But that's how our coaches was, they'll tell us, you have to do your homework first, then we'll go outside and practice. That really helped a lot.
• Brayonna: counselor: Yeah I had this one counselor. His name was Mr. Brown. He was my main support once I transferred schools. He helped me get everything. He made sure my credits was there. He made sure my grades was up. He would reward me, so I could keep up my work, and he was there before he retired. … help with hard classes: My math classes [were] really tough. I could say that as I became a senior, and they became more easier just because I feel like I got more help. I was in certain classes and tutoring, so it got a little more easier.

• Cenisa: I had teachers, … coaches. It was a lot of people that helped.

• Kiara: Academic guidance from counselor: The main reason I was able to receive those grades would be because of one counselor that I had. His name was Mr. Berkeley, but yeah. He was really there for you. He really helped you make sure you’re in the right courses for your [inaudible 00:02:05] to go to a four year university.

• Imani: Yes. I had one teacher named Miss Johnson, and she was one of those people. If you needed help or she had something that you feel like she can help you with, she will. No matter if it’s money, advice, anything. She was that person. She’s going to give you. Whatever you need, she had it. She was black [and] the reason why we connected was because we were in BSU, and that kind of brought us together, but she also would help people outside of the Black race. That's why I say it kind of does but it doesn’t.

• Tiana: Coach motivated me to always do my best: My basketball coach, Danesha Culverson, she made me want to always put my best foot forward

• Jeneice: Track coach taught principle of perseverance: What helped me was actually track and field. It was my senior year and I loved it. It helped me and motivated me on my senior year through high school. Why it supported me was because I remember my coach saying, when you start, don’t give up because you know you won’t finish. And it’s like the same thing to do it throughout high school. Understanding and emotional support from teachers: They were all positive [my relationships with teachers] and that's what I loved. I needed motivation from them, too. I remember I would cry when I'm stressed and they're like, it's okay, you got this. Just breathe in. Don’t worry about it. And they knew I've been through a lot on my plate and I just love how they're helpers. They make me feel better.

• Darnique: teacher positively reframing student challenges: Okay, no matter how bad I talk, I'd say, "My mom's this, this and this," you just kept turning everything into a positive. Even though I didn't wanna hear a positive, you just kept changing my perspective of things. Teacher emotional and moral support: You were just so happy and motivated and you encouraged me to that, 'cause I had a lot of low self esteem. And me just talking to you in my day and stuff, actually made me feel better, attitudes and stuff. I was like, "Oh, she might be my teacher but I'm go talk to Miss Hawkins," or I just thought about you in my head and I was on my breaking point. I knew my mom wasn't the person to talk
to, that's why I tried to talk to you. I'd mention family a lot to you or Miss Coverson, is she still here? **Black teachers became her surrogate parents:** I only got close to African-American teachers 'cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from ... I was close to the African-American teachers, not being picky, but I just feel like they understood me more. I got close to one, in middle school I got close to one, and I treated her as a mother. Every holiday, I'd buy her something, I'd visit her every day, talk to her about everything. Mother's Day, I'd spend lots of money on her. I never spent it on my mom because I felt like she was just there. I felt like she wasn't there as a mother. She does stuff as a mother but I feel like when I needed her most ... That's why I got so close to most of the African-American female teachers, I got involved with them as a mother.

**Support from family members (5)**

- **Amara:** **Advice from mom:** I used to be sad, and my mom just used to go, "You have to just work and ask." ... **Help from multiple family members:** [To support my success,] my mom helped me, and my dad helped me, my grandma helped me. ... **Mom advocated to get student switched to another class:** [In my freshman year when I had a teacher I thought was racist,] I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that class.

- **Kiara:** **mother's encouragement:** I would say the things that I went through when I was younger I guess it just was my own ... I was my own motivation. So, yeah my mom went to school. She has two degrees. She has an AS and a AA too, but she always pushed us to do better than her. That's what she always said. I always want my kids to be better than me and stuff like that. So, I would say the different things that I went through in life with my dad and stuff like that too. **Strong guidance and regular accountability from grandfather:** My grandfather. He was always on me and even though he lives in Atlanta, every week I would always still receive a phone call, a grade check and having to check in and from being a freshman all the way up to senior year, it was always about college. So, that's what he instilled in me from even when I was younger but when I got to high school, it's more scholarships, college, making sure that my grades would look good for when it was that time to start applying and then when the applications came around, he was always on me. Like, "Oh, how many applications you do this week?" Or for scholarships and stuff too. So, yeah.

- **Imani:** **Accountability from parents:** Well, for me, my parents were on me. They made sure if I needed help, I could go to tutoring or something. I was able to. I feel like other kids, their parents weren't as strict on them, so maybe that's
why they didn't have motivation to go to school and be on time and do the work on time and all the things I need to do. Because you have to have some type of support system to help you because your mind can go crazy sometimes. I don't want to do it. You know? If you have someone there to help you, you could do this. You got this. It's easier for you, and I had a little support system, so it was easier for me. … [In terms of support,] I had my parents as well. **Cousin would help with math:** And I had a cousin who was good at math. When I needed math help, I had him to help me.

- **Tiana:** **model and encouragement from dad:** My dad. He's always pushed me to ... Well telling me that I have to always put out my best and try my hardest and it would pay off. So pretty much my dad. He was really my role model. I just seen how hard he works and he's just a hard worker. And I'm like ... I look up to that and I respect that, so it made me want to work just as hard.

- **Darnique:** **encouragement from grandmothers:** Both my grandmothers ... kept me going, they kept telling me I can, besides everybody else. … It was just her, I would just talk to her. Half the stuff I didn't know what she was talking about but she was the reason I stuck to it.

**Support from friends (3)**

- **Cenisa:** I had friends that helped me through everything ... I had friends, my friends' parents, and everyone around me. … It was a lot of people that helped.

- **Kiara:** **At Black Future Leaders, made lasting friendships with other college-bound Black students:** Then we would build relationships. Like I still talk to most of the people who are in there with me still. We stay connected on social media and then that was being able to connect with other students around me that were the same because it was all about African American students.

- **Imani:** I had a few friends that we had the same majors and stuff, so we kind of all would work together.

**Support from community leaders (1)**

- **Kiara:** **lasting connections and support from BFL support:** So, I would recommend it to a lot of young high school students because once you go through the program, it's like you get a look on the real world. That's what they don't give to you in a regular high school, but these people they're here to help you get through the world. [Now,] Even after [the Black Future Leaders program is over] I can call any one of them and they'll still be there for you even after high school.
CREATING A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT (7)

Seeking inspiration from role models (6)

- Brayonna: I could say my uncle. He is a role model. He graduate. He's the only one that graduated out of my family, so that pushed me to want to graduate to be the second one then be a role model to my siblings, my younger siblings, because I'm the oldest.
- Kiara: mom has two associate’s degrees: my mom went to school. She has two degrees. She has a AS and a AA too, but she always pushed us to do better than her. That's what she always said. I always want my kids to be better than me and stuff like that.
- Imani: Determined to not make the mistakes her friends did [fighting, suspension, grades drop]: I seen what all of my friends would do doing the things they did. I didn't want to do those things. Like I said, my friends that fought and everything, they got suspended, and then their grades dropped. They weren't able to do the things that they needed to do to graduate. That's when I was like, I don't want to be that person that has to go to Sierra and come back to get my credits. Just to take a different path. For me, I was just like I'm just like I'm going to do what I have to do so I can get high school over with and live my life.
- Tiana: dad was hard worker, wanted to be like him: My dad. He's always pushed me to ... Well telling me that I have to always put out my best and try my hardest and it wou... Well like I said, I've always been the type of person to want to succeed and be successful because of the things I've seen within my family and my family members going through school. And some of my parents, or my siblings, not finishing high school or getting to college, I always wanted to be the first one to do that.
- Jeneice: I feel like I had my cousins as a role model because she was in college and I was like, if she can do it then I can do it.
- Darnique: Aspired to succeed like others: I would watch people and say, I wanna do that one day. I wanna be this one day, I wanna travel. The only way I can do that is if I succeed in life and I have to keep going. … Learned to lift others up from her grandmother: What really motivated me was my grandmother, 'cause she always told me, “You shouldn't put people down, you should always uplift them, and you should always motivate them,” and she was just one of the most helpful people. She was 94 when she started telling me her little stories. She would constantly receive mail from Caucasian people, I guess that she took care of back then, 'cause she was born in 1918. She constantly got
mail telling how she helped them, and basically she was my motivational person. She was my inspiration, I wanted to make a change like she did. She changed lots of people, she took care of people when she didn't have to, she let them in when she didn't have to. Everybody thought of her as a mother figure. … I'm young, but I feel like I should just follow in her footsteps. Both my grandmothers were my motivation. **Determined to not be like her family:** I see how my family struggled and I was like, "I'm gonna do anything and everything possible to never let this happen again." It was horrible: Having to move house to house, living with other people, meals, gas bills that haven't been paid for over a year. Always had to warm water or go to other people's house to take showers throughout middle school and high school. It was an experience I didn't want to experience.

**Avoiding or ignoring racism and stereotypes (6)**

- **Amara:** *Mom advocated to get student switched to another class:* [In my freshman year when I had a teacher I thought was racist,] I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that class. … *transferred from a class with unkind teacher:* [In my freshman year when I had a teacher I thought was racist,] I would tell my principal like, "I don't want to be in her class." And he wouldn't change me, so I had to tell my mom like, "I don't want to be in her class. Mom, talk to the principal and make him like switch us." I said, "It ridiculous that I have to go all the way home, tell my mom, and I told you several times I didn't want to be in this class." But they changed me out of that class.

- **Brayonna:** Yeah. Okay. So where I live is called Railings. Others might know, there's not really a lot of black people there. I was at Citrus Valley High school and there's barely African Americans. So it's like you'll be in a classroom full of Hispanics, or whites and everybody'll look at you. When they talk about slavery or other stuff. Just because I'm smart, and I'm an African American. So they'll just give you that look of does she belong in here or stuff like that. It felt weird. It's like I didn't have to do so. I wasn't really worried about it.

- **Cenisa:** Racism. I would say I did, but it never comes out straight forward. It's always around the corner, around the bush. So I don't pay it no mind.

- **Kiara:** But then again, I still didn't get the help that I needed but I just looked at it as that's how life is. Life has to still go on no matter what people think about you or what kind of stereotypes they'll give out about us that we just have to prove them wrong. So, that's what I did.
• Tiana: At times I just felt really uncomfortable … so [I learned] just to not listen to it. That's what I had to learn to do when I was getting those signals. Or feelings when I was in a classroom, I just had to ignore it and just focus on my work.

• Darnique: **avoiding people she thought couldn’t understand her:** I didn’t really have relationships with teachers that weren’t black. I used to come visit certain teachers just because they were nice teachers overall but I never got close to … I only got close to African-American teachers ’cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from ’cause … They don't understand where we come from, they don't understand our backgrounds, they understand where we struggle. They take advantage of that, they make fun of us ’cause they're low income people, stuff like that. So when we try to address them they're like, “Well it's not our fault you’re this and this.” I say it’s not our fault either, we just have to deal with it. And us dealing with that made it hard for us also. It made it hard for us.

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Deepening connection and engagement with school (1)

• Brayonna: Yeah I was in softball. I did track. It's not really a sport, but I did computer design. I was a teacher assistant and office assistant when I was in school. **Activities improved school connection and engagement:** I could say being a teacher’s assistant helped me because I was around other students. I helped the teachers. I got more engagement. Softball I could say helped me with leadership.

Participating in college-bound programs (1)

• Kiara: **School program:** Another thing I could say to was being in the Avid [program]. So, in Avid, you were required to stay on top of your grades and stay organized and stuff like that. **Very helpful to have a program for good, not great performers like her:** As a black student, it helped me because I mean we don't have a lot of programs that are really destined just for us because it's either you’re in the light or not in the light. So, if you're not the top black student, then there’s nothing for you really. They don't recognize us as much and so with the program, it's like you’re around a lot of students who have the same abilities and strengths that you do. Because there's different requirements. You have to have a 3.0 or above so you’re with students who have the same mindset as you I guess you can say. It helped me because at my own high school, we didn’t really have a lot of programs like that. So, it was like I was able to connect in a different way of joining a club or something. **Community program**
Future Leaders: one weekend a year: on college campus, learn STEM, Black history, etc.: I did a program called Black Future Leaders for my sophomore year. Yeah I found out about it my sophomore year and I did it all the way up to my senior year ... on-campus You go to stay at Cal State for the weekend and it was run by Danny Tillman and we would do STEM projects for the week, the weekend or we would do ... I know one year it was STEM. One year it was black history so we learned about the different African cultures and stuff like that. Every time we would go we'd always have to write an essay about what we're going to do for the weekend before we go. ... Other activities throughout year: We also did different things outside of our weekend that we'd have once a year. We would go to the black college expo or we would just have times where we just get together, go to Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles and stuff like that. It was a good experience.

PRACTICING SELF-CARE (6)

Engaging in self-encouragement (4)

- Brayonna: I really had to teach myself to go to school more, be more excited about school, encourage myself just because I didn't have the push from parents or certain teachers. I had to get myself together and wanted to be able to be happy to go to school. ... I wasn't this child that grew up with my own mother and father. I had help from a grandmother. She's much older. So she didn't know more about how the current generation is. So I really had to help myself to get myself there, because she didn't know how to help me and teachers didn't know how. I'm really by myself. I was my own support system.
- Cenisa: Self-encouragement
- Jeneice: I felt proud of myself. I felt like, Jeneice, this is amazing. You just accomplished one goal. You're going on to the next goal and focusing on your future.
- Darnique: But then I just started to motivate myself because I realized when I motivate myself I can actually motivate other people, which I did. I helped people graduate along with me. People that were in higher/harder classes than me, I helped them, 'cause they didn't believe they could do it. I felt like maybe if I can motivate myself then maybe I can motivate other people. Maybe we can keep the little trail going, and everything may change in the future, maybe. ... I would just pray.
Seeking healthy distractions (2)

- **Cenisa:** **cognitive distraction relieves stress:** It helps you. Because it [extracurricular activities] takes your mind off everything negative. And you're not really thinking about nothing but what you're doing at that moment. ... school was my escape from everything. When I was at school I was not worried about, you know, "Ooh, [inaudible 00:04:58], ooh." I was not worried about nothing else but school, but worried about what I'm doing at school. I wasn't worried about fitting in, or anything. It was just me at school, trying to get through it.

- **Tiana:** **having an escape from the stress:** I was really involved in school activities. Little things we did. And then I was involved in almost every sport. I played basketball, volleyball. I did track for a year, and dance. They were kind of like an escape from school. I was able to be free. Just because I was always ... How do I say it? Making sure I was on top of everything. So it really got stressful at times. ... [Sports] took me away from everything [and] played a big role in high school. ... Basketball, specifically. It just really brought me at peace and took me away from school and everything else I had going on, so I was able to let it all out on the court.

Experiencing emotional growth and healing (1)

- **Kiara:** Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot ... because my dad was an alcoholic. ... I held a grudge towards my dad until we got back in contact my junior year and ... once I forgave him, I started doing better.

Obstacles to success

**STRESS IN THE HOME (7)**

**Emotional abuse and neglect (5)**

- **Cenisa:** **Emotional abuse and neglect from dad:** My biggest [obstacle] thing that I had was with my dad. My dad is very negative, he puts you down, everything.

- **Kiara:** **alcoholic father, often absent:** Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot, but when he was there, sometimes it was good memories, but sometimes it wasn't because my dad was an alcoholic. So, when I was younger I never really understood why I couldn't go see him every weekend or why they couldn't be together and stuff like that. But as I got older, this is the topic that I wrote for my
... You know the senior personal insight? So that essay and I used to hold a grudge once I got to middle school and high school. I held a grudge towards my dad until we got back in contact my junior year and it was like I felt like once I forgave him that I started doing better. So, I don't know. It's very difficult before. I would feel like I had to do something better. Like I felt like I wasn't good enough before so I felt like if I did better then my dad would want to come back into my life or something like that.

- Imani: **Family responsibilities—watch sister:** Hard ... because high school, it makes you have a lot of ups and downs because you have a lot of work to do, and then you have a life at home. For me, I had a little sister so I wasn't able to do sports like I wanted to. I always had to watch her, and then I also had to do homework. It was like I was taking care of my sister and doing school at the same time.

- Tiana: Sometimes it was really hard to separate what I had going on at home and personally and other things outside of school when I got to school. Sometimes I would lose focus. I would just daydream, thinking about the stuff that I have going on. So I would lose focus sometimes. ... When I was about graduate my senior year, things started getting a little crazy at home; like living situations. So sometimes it was really hard for me to just get up and get out of bed. Be motivated to go to school and finish. I don't know what it was, but I just finished.

- Darnique: **emotional toll from home made it difficult to focus at school:** 'Cause, besides home, things you're doing at home, some people deal with so many different things at home. I know what I dealt with at home. So coming to school and having to try to focus on that, and things you deal with, it's kind of a difficult path, shall I say? It was kind of hard, you have to get through some stuff, 'cause it's kind of hard to focus ... **lack of connection with mom:** It was mostly mom problems, I never really had a bond with her. Never. **Dealing with family members’/mom’s criticism/abuse because Darnique focused on school:** And after it was kind of sad that the family treat me different, because of who I was. You know how they all started dating at this age, and I was like "Nah, not into it." They wanted to party, I said, "Nah, I'm not into it." ... My mom, she always said mean things, out of proportion, 'cause I was different. It's like she was jealous as a parent, which I feel she shouldn't have been. ... Darnique: Well at home I can't say that. At home, no. I feel like they're the reason I chose to do what I ... I knew I was 'cause they kept saying ... My mom got mad and she kept saying, "You're not gonna graduate, you're gonna be like all of us. You're sixteen, get pregnant, drop out, you're not gonna make it." **Parentification:** I remember, I think I was in middle school, and my older brother and sister were in high school, and I don't know how but I helped them with their homework. ... I felt like I once had a bond with her but she was ... it's like we're switched, I feel like I'm the mother and she's the child. I feel like she wasn't prepared for this, as she feels she was. I understand she helps and stuff like that but I just felt, she could've waited, or she could've tried to help better. I feel like I was a parent, I helped all my siblings with their homework and ... a lot of stuff I had to give up. I helped my
two youngest brothers keep going, 'cause they wanted to give up. It was like, a
difficult thing. … That's why now from this day forward, I constantly try to do my
best to take care of them. They're living in hotels and stuff, I just feel like I have to
get a job and once I got a job I started paying phone bills and helping her pay
basically all the bills. Basically, I was paying all the bills for my parents. My mom
had a rough past so she couldn't get a job in I don't know how long. I'd see her
cry a couple of times because she couldn't get it. I think she had a felony, every
time she was close to getting a job she couldn't get it. We never had a bond. And
then a lot of stuff happened to me but I feel like I got a step up, even though I'm
not the mother I still stepped up because I have relatives to take care, I still have
a family, I'm not just gonna let you leave them like that. **Affected ability to focus
at school:** Home is [the biggest obstacle I faced] mostly, I couldn't sleep. I don't
even know. It was mostly drama I was trying to avoid, I kept getting dragged into.
**Regarding graduation:** First I was scared, 'cause, you know how I find those
[inaudible 00:02:09] stuff, I was like, "Oh yeah, this is gonna be some stuff."

**Lack of academic support (4)**

- Brayonna: I wasn't this child that grew up with my own mother and father. I
  had help from a grandmother. She’s much older. So she didn't know more
  about how the current generation is. So I really had to help myself to get
  myself there, because she didn't know how to help me and teachers didn't
  know how. I'm really by myself. I was my own support system.
- Cenisa: I didn't have nobody at home. At home it was not a lot of help at all. It
  was kind of like with school nobody knew how to help me with assignments,
  nobody knew anything about school. It was no concern at all.
- Jeneice: Oh, growing up, life, it was hard with family situations and affects your
  schooling sometimes. And I know I haven't had my family around and stuff. I've
  been here and there and it just motivated me to go through during high school
  and without my family, living with my uncle and auntie, it was a horrible
  experience. I wanted my family to be there. I wish life was perfect. A lot of people
  don't have perfect life, but I just pushed through it, kept on going, and finally
  finished high school and onto college. … Environment at home, it was really
good. The neighborhood was really nice. It was not scary or
  anything. It was protected and safe.
- Darnique: I never had help with anything, relationships, nothing. I had to figure it
  out on my own, so it was ... Kind of difficult, should I say? ... You never really
  heard, “I'm proud of you,” from nobody in my family.

**Death of family members (1)**

- Imani: I think one that really took a toll on me was when my aunt and my
  uncle died, because they were a big part of my family that kept us
together. We would see all our family members more, and it's like now I only see a lot of my family members when we have to go to a funeral or something. I think that really affected me because it just me get really down.

SCHOOL ISSUES: Unprepared for amount and difficulty of workload (4)

- **Darnique:** **Unprepared for academic challenges:** Before I went to high school they kept saying, “It's not gonna be this easy in high school,” they actually didn't prepare us for what you guys were gonna actually teach us. [inaudible 00:05:35] It wasn't there. So when I came to high school I was like, “Oh, I've never seen this before in my life. They didn't prepare me for this.”

- **Amara:** **Wasn’t used to how it all worked:** But when I got to high school it was kind of rocky at first because I'm not used to this, and I'm not used to going to all these classes, and stuff like that. That measured me like how to be.

- **Imani:** Being at school wasn't so hard, but I just think the work that, like the overload that they would do. Because at least for me I was an avid. Avid is what made it hard, because you had to do all the notes and the binding checks and then on top of that have your other six classes.

- **Jeneice:** When I was at [this school], it was a challenge. It was different because I moved from Texas to here in California. So it was just different skills and stuff. Like English. ... Well, I was stressed out for my academics and stuff. I didn't know what to do. I was struggling

PERSONAL ISSUES: Withdrawal and low self-esteem (3)

- **Amara:** **Disengaging from school and the learning process in response to unkind teacher, perceived racism:** No, I just kind of stayed to myself. When I seen her act like that, I'm like, I'm not going to just say nothing else. I'm just going to wait until my mom talked to the principal, and I switched my class. But ever since she was acting like that, I just stayed to myself. I did my work. ... [but] it made me not want to raise my hand anymore, answer questions even though I knew the answer, but I didn't want to raise my hand anymore or anything. **Being afraid to ask teachers for help:** Sometimes I used to be scared to ask teachers because some teachers used to be mean, so I didn't really want to ask.

- **Darnique:** I can't really say nothing much affected me. If anything affected me it would be myself. I kept getting discouraged or I kept telling myself I couldn't do it. **Sense of debilitating learned helplessness after racism:** Well I feel, for me, just because I was black I couldn't do what they would do. I'm not smart like them, I can never do what they're doing. I was like, “Dang, why can't I be like them?” I just always felt like it was a race thing to me, it's always felt like it. But then at the end I feel like, we're all just one. There's no white, purple, yellow or
whatever color. (laughs) We're all just one. I feel like we all are a family, whether you believe it or not, we're just there ... There's nobody who can ... No I can't really say that. People don't feel like they belong in a certain area because of their skin color and they can't talk to people because of their skin color. They just feel like they're judged because of their skin color. I want them to know that it's not just all race to people, many people are racist out there. I feel like it's not just race though. I don't really know what to say.

- Kiara: Well, my dad was in and out of my life a lot .... my dad was a alcoholic. So, when I was younger I never really understood why I couldn't go see him every weekend or why they couldn't be together and stuff like that. ... I would feel like I had to do something better. Like I felt like I wasn't good enough before so I felt like if I did better then my dad would want to come back into my life or something like that.

LACK OF OTHERS' SUPPORT (3)

Teacher refusal to help (2)

- Amara: One time, when I first became a freshman, I had like a racist teacher. She would act different towards all colored people. Soon as she started, I went to her desk one time and I told her like, "I need help with this." She just handed us the paper and was like, "Do this and you bring it back tomorrow. It's homework." So I went to her desk like, "Could you help me with this?" And she was like, "Oh, well, no. That's something that your family need to help you with." Then, I heard from other classmates, oh, she's really racist. I had her before. But I wasn't really paying attention because I had to see it for myself. Then, she really started acting weird towards us. We would raise our hands, she wouldn't pick on us or anything. ...

- Brayonna: Well, just because teachers wouldn't help or teachers don't understand. So it's kind of like if you can't help the student then it will be tough, because they can't learn on their own. That's what the teachers are there for.

Failure to adapt to students' needs for help: I guess when I change schools, because I used to go to [name]. I can say that my relationships with teachers are better just because I feel like teachers don't understand certain students need certain type of help. Every student is different. It's like help that student in a way that they'll understand. Not just the way that you know how to teach. ... I felt like I needed more help with stuff like learning just because certain teachers didn't know how to handle me. Just because I asked a lot of questions and I like to be sure of things.
Peer negativity or lack of focus on school (2)

- Imani: **students don’t take education seriously because they aren’t paying for public high school; instead, they fight and go “wild”.**

  Other than that, my high school wasn't as hard, and I also had friends who got in fights a lot. I was the one that was like, it's not worth it because at the end of the day you're going to get suspended. You being black is already a red flag. You just got to ... I was the one that was trying to encourage all my friends. I want all of us to win. I was the one that was trying to keep us together, keep us focused, because I know we all had that potential. ... I mean, it's not tough, but sometimes when you go certain places, you know. You have that sense what it's like. Okay. You see where everyone’s ... You’re the one that's standing out. In college, it's like everyone's comfortable in college. Not to say everyone’s broke, but it's like everyone is broke because we’re all ... You know, college is expensive, so everyone’s having the same mindset in college because you're paying for the classes. It's different. Since you're paying for it, you're going to try to, you know. In high school, everything's free, so I think that's why everyone just wilds out. I'm going to fight if I want to fight. I'm going to cuss if I want to cuss. I'm going to do what I want to do because it's free.

- Brayonna: **Negativity from other students**: I'll just say being around certain students would bring me down at school just because some kids, they're just not the type that's always happy. So it's like they will make you feel down about yourself because they're down about their self. So I wouldn't be excited to go to school sometimes. Just because I felt like I'm always around negativity.

Experiences of racism

Did not personally experience racism or stereotypes (5)

- Amara: I felt all right. I didn’t really have problems with racism, only that teacher. … I had went to Carter at first, and there, it's like some of the teachers would act different towards coloreds. I mean, some of the teachers wouldn't, but when I went to [Miner 00:10:28], like they treat everybody the same. It was no racism, nothing.

- Brayonna: Yeah. Okay. So where I live is called Railings. Others might know, there's not really a lot of black people there. I was at Citrus Valley High school and there's barely African Americans. So it's like you'll be in a classroom full of
Hispanics, or whites and everybody'll look at you. When they talk about slavery or other stuff. Just because I'm smart, and I'm an African American. So they'll just give you that look of does she belong in here or stuff like that. It felt weird. It's like I didn't have to do so. I wasn't really worried about it.

- Cenisa: Racism. I would say I did, but it never comes out straightforward. It's always around the corner, around the bush. So I don't pay it no mind. [So it didn't affect you?] No. [What did it make you feel like, though?] It, it hurts your feelings. It hurts my feelings, and I don't like when they try to add you in different groups, and different type of people. Because you know who you are. So, it'll hurt your feelings.
- Jeneice: [Did you experience racism or stereotypes?] I don't think, no. Not really. … I don't think, there was nothing different. I feel like they were treating me the same, equal rights and stuff, and that's what I liked about school and stuff. They're not treating you, oh, because you're black, we're going to treat you a different way.
- Darnique: No, not me. I feel like some other people were labeled but no, not me.

TEACHERS (4)

Discriminatory treatment (2)

- Tiana: Teachers reviewing work differently: Yeah, I did. … I felt like the work that I would put in wouldn't be looked at as what it's supposed to be because … I was being judged or there's some type of racism or something.
- Imani: Teachers segregated students in classroom: I had a few teachers. It was two teachers I had that they ... Not to say they would pick on the people who were colored, but they would try to sit everyone in a certain spot if that makes sense. The colored people would be on this side, and other people would be on this side. People didn't notice it until I want to say the second week. Because we had a project, and usually projects, you can pick who you want to be with. He said, "Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side. Everyone who's on this side picks who's on this side." We're like, "Why?" My best friend is over there. Why do I have to pick someone who's over here? Administration resolved classroom segregation: Then we brought it [classroom segregation] to the principal's attention, and that's when it kind of got solved. I think that was the only major event that happened. I was like, okay. Teachers not respecting students’ desires not to say national anthem: For example, the national anthem. A lot of things that happen in the world, my mom, she gave me a choice, like "You don’t have to say the national anthem if you don’t want to." I would stand, but I wouldn't say it. A lot of teachers would get mad, and it's like ...
didn’t really get why they were mad. We stood still, while some students will sit down. Of course, they would say stuff to them too. It's like you can't force people to do things they don't want to do. Then when the would ask us why, I'm mean, that's why. We're just trying to help you understand from our point of view. I think that's the only thing. I feel like when it comes to the flag, I stand because a lot of people died for us to be where we are today. I don't say what we're supposed to say because I feel like it's not equal for everyone. Because there's so many things that happens where it's like it's not equal. There's no way it could be equal. That's why don't say it, but I'm still going to respect the whole thing we have to do.

Stereotypes (2)

- Darnique: **Assuming that struggling students aren't trying or paying attention:** I see some people that would struggle and didn't ask for more help than some teachers would expect. And they would kind of get mad but they was like ... “Oh you’re obviously not paying attention,” or I would see that the person is paying attention, but it's just the fact they need more help. And then she's just like, “Oh yeah you're obviously not gonna make it,” or, “Pretty sure you're gonna have to come back again.” She would just ... I just didn't like ... She would go straight for her, I don't remember her name, she'd go straight for one of the black students. An African-American male. I felt like they just needed a little help, they were probably struggling.

  Judging based on clothing or skin color: Everybody instantly expects you to be in some type of game, or they'll just look at you in a certain way because the way you dress. Some people don't even choose what they wear. **Patronizing toward or failing to engage with Black students:** They just down talk you and just, not lots of motivation coming towards African-American students. **Failing to recognize achievement in Black students:** I just feel like they don't give us credit when it's due. We would try so much to get to that point but they would focus on the other races. It's like we’re just there, just wanting to be successful like everyone else, but they don't really acknowledge us as much, but we're just there. Darnique: **Non-Black teachers don’t understand:** I didn't really have relationships with teachers that weren't black. I used to come visit certain teachers just because they were nice teachers overall but I never got close to ... I only got close to African-American teachers 'cause they understood me more. Like an African-American mom and dad to me, they understood where we come from 'cause ... They don't understand where we come from, they don't understand our backgrounds, they understand where we struggle. They take advantage of that, they make fun of us 'cause they're low income people, stuff like that. So when we try to address them they're like,
“Well it's not our fault you're this and this.” I say it's not our fault either, we just have to deal with it. And us dealing with that made it hard for us also. It made it hard for us.

- Kiara: **Bad teacher freshman year, switched classes:** it started my freshman year and at first I just brushed it off and I switched classes. I don't know. **Felt no one there to care and help:** It felt like our community wasn't strong enough or we didn't have enough people to actually be there for us when something like that would happen. Like they didn't care. **Stereotyping teacher junior year, tried to get help, not helped, concluded “that’s life, must prove them wrong”**: So, then it happened again my junior year … it was literally the first week of school. So teachers do the little opening and break down some class rules and stuff and the teacher goes, "I don't want any of that acting black or ghettoness in my class." There's only me and one other black girl in the class, but she [the other girl] didn't take it, I guess, how I took it, and I really felt some type of way about it.

**Peers’ prejudicial attitudes (2)**

- Imani: **stereotypes about Black hair:** I had one experience because I feel like a lot of people stereotype black people's hair a certain way. Freshman year, I came to high school with braids like these. Then I want to say three months in, I took them out. Then, a lot of people in my class were like, "Whoa, you have hair." I was like, "What's that supposed to mean? I have hair?" They were like, "You have a lot of hair." I'm like, "I know. What is that supposed to mean? Just because I have braids, I'm not supposed to have a lot of hair?" They're like, "Usually a lot a black people who have braids don't have a lot of hair." I'm like, "Well, I'm not one of those people." They're like, "Oh, that's cool." I'm like, "Why is it that you all think that? Not everyone who wears weaves, ponytails, all the extra hair, that doesn't mean we don't have hair. Sometimes I just get braids. I don't want to do my hair." To them, they made it seem like we have to have or we have to be mixed to have hair or something. That's how I took it, because I'm fully black. I don't have any mixture, and I have a lot of hair, but that doesn't mean you have to be mixed to have a lot of hair. I've never understood that. **People making jokes of Black history course material:** I feel like I had moments where, people think everything's funny. You know, when we watch movies and stuff when black history and stuff, and certain things would happen. It's like people should just be looking at it, watching it, learning. People nowadays like to joke and think everything is funny. That's the only hard part of high school that you have to really ding. Sometimes you can't speak up on everything because people have different mindsets, and the teachers.
• Tiana: refusal of multiculturality: Probably I would say kids always are trying to bully each other, I don't understand for what, but probably when I was fresh in high school, my Freshman year, I did have some. Because I'm mixed, so they were like, "What are you? Are you Puerto Rican? Or Mexican? Or black? You can't be both. You have to be one or the other." And you're trying to be this and that.

ADMINISTRATION: School administration does not believe Black students allegations of non-Black teachers’ racist comments (1)

• Kiara: School administration does not believe Black students allegations of non-Black teachers’ racist comments: [When my White teacher made racist remarks the first week of Junior year,] I didn't address the teacher, but I just kept it to myself and I went to the vice principal. They didn't do nothing. Whenever I tried to go to the principal, they wouldn't let me talk to her. You know you always have to go in order I guess from the authority or whatever. So then after that, I would just mark down. I had a journal and I would write in there every time she would say something and I would go turn it in to the vice principals to make notes of it. Once they stopped doing like they just weren't going to do anything else about it, my mom tried to come to the school and have a talk with the teacher and everything. But then it ended up just ... [So] instead of switching the classes, I actually tried to take it somewhere like with another person for help. But then again, I still didn't get the help that I needed but I just looked at it as that's how life is. Life has to still go on no matter what people think about you or what kind of stereotypes they'll give out about us that we just have to prove them wrong. So, that's what I did. Switched to a class with a Black teacher: After that, we ended up just having to switch my class. So, then I got a teacher who was African American for English. I felt like in her class, she had no more over the class. The class was not disciplined better than my other class where she was talking about the African American students, but there was more order in the class. The Black teacher didn’t have authority over White students: Then in my other class, we learned but it was hard learning because they look down on her as she's not really going to do nothing or if she does try, they'll make a lie. Because they'll believe the students when it comes to the African American teacher rather than the Caucasian teacher. It's different stereotypes and I've seen that in the school system also. School administration does not support Black teachers if White students complain
Advice to students

Focus on academic goals and resist distractions (8)

- Amara: I say no matter what, don't let nobody get in your way of what you want to do. If you have a goal, strive for it, and don't give up on your goals. It don't matter. Don't get a boyfriend because they're distracting, and just strive for your goals.

- Brayonna: Yeah. If you experience racism, stereotype I'll just say just focus on yourself because at the end of the day, you'll have yourself ... you'll graduate high school and then when you're finished you'll have to worry about any of that stuff. ... I would say if you're going through hard challenges I would say, "Just push through it. You're going to graduate. You're going to get those rewards as you're hoping you'll get. If you're going through bullying or stressful situations I would say just keep on pushing through it, because at the end of the day you're going to make it."

- Cenisa: They just gotta stay in their own lane and not worry about everybody else. Everybody's worried about boys and girls and stuff that does not matter. They just need to focus on they self, so in the end it could pay off. ... Be strong. Don't let people get in your head, and try to take you out your character. Because once you get out your character you look like the fool. You're embarrassing yourself. ... I just, I want everyone behind me to reach their goal. I feel like everybody should.

- Kiara: The message would be to don't give up on what you have your goals set for. If you think you can do it, then you know that you can accomplish it no matter what anybody else has to say because you are a minority to society at this time and you just have to be different. Don't fall into what everybody else has to say. Just do what you want to do in life.

- Imani: Stay focused, and don't let no one distract you. I think that's very important because you can have friends who could tell you to do something and you do it, say you guys get caught, you're all going to get caught. It's not just one person going to go down for whatever you guys did. It's all you guys. ... **Keep going:** Just don't stop. That's so important because things can happen in your life, and you want to give up, but if you don't give up, I promise you it will be worth it.

- Tiana: The advice that I would put out is, you really just have to ... That's something I feel like you have to dig within yourself, 'cause nobody can make you want to succeed or finish. Something within you has to be the reason that you want to do this. ... **Focus in class and do your best work:** I feel like the best thing to do is focus when you're in the classroom. I know it's tempting 'cause
you’re with your friends or you just want to have fun, but I just feel like you should really focus on your work and always putting your best out there.

• Jeneice: **Finishing high school is critical:** Well, I have a message. Whoever's having a tough life with family or whoever is slacking around and think school's not important, school is really important in my opinion because it helped me through so many challenges I've been through. And you’re going to have a future career with your high school diploma. And that's what I have right now. I am a medical assistant. I just finished college for seven months. This is the things you're going to get.

• Darnique: I just want to tell them that anything is possible. There isn’t anything in this world you can’t do. I feel like you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it.

**Believe in and encourage yourself (3)**

• Imani: [When I see other Black kids not succeeding] It makes feel hurt because I know they have the potential. It's starts in your mind first. Because if your mind isn't telling you have it and for you to keep going, you’re not going to keep going, because your mind is telling you something else. That's where motivation and things come in, and a lot of people don't have that. … The workload is going to get tough. But if you want to graduate, you can graduate. You have to have that mindset. Don’t let no one tell you that you cannot do it, because you can.

• Darnique: Not many of those people that are probably behind me don't even have anybody to talk to or to vent to, I just want to tell them that anything is possible. You've gotta believe in yourself, don't take criticism. Don't let nobody put you down. You gotta just believe in yourself, you gotta believe that you can do anything if you believe you can do it. I just feel like … There isn't anything in this world you can’t do. I feel like you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. People say, “I'm not smart enough, or I will never be able to do it,” but I feel like you can. I feel like some stuff may be hard but I feel like you can do it. Anything’s really possible, you just gotta believe in yourself. You gotta trust in yourself before you trust anybody else. It's really you. You gotta focus on you before you can focus on anybody else around you.

• Kiara: If you think you can do it, then you know that you can accomplish it no matter what anybody else has to say because you are a minority to society at this time and you just have to be different. Don't fall into what everybody else has to say. Just do what you want to do in life.

**Enjoy and make the most of high school (1)**

• Tiana: I just feel like going through high school, as you’re going through it, you’re going through these changes and growing up and finding yourself.
… Just enjoy the experience of being in high school. Try to get into some clubs or some sports or activities. Really just be involved and just enjoy your time being here.

Advice to administration

Love, listen to, and support students (5)

- Amara: A black students needs like all your full help and attention because **Be aware that some students of color are afraid to be discriminated against**: some of them like is scared to speak to other races because they feel like, oh, well, this teacher's going to act this way because she's this color. **Treat all students equally**: I think that more teachers should act like ... treat all students equally at the end of the day, and don't treat nobody different.

- Cenisa: Encouragement and love, they need to know that they're going to get help, and that they're being heard, and that everything isn't hidden, and that they're being seen. Because a lot of black kids feel like they're not being seen. … A lot of kids now, are going through a lot of stuff I've never seen in my class. So I don't know what's going on, but I feel like everybody just needs to stop, and get it together. Because it's getting bad. **Encourage students’ individuation**: They feel like they have to be ghetto and fit in at school, because everybody else is. And they have to feel like it's okay to stand out, to do what they want to do. Everybody in high school wants to fit in. Everybody wants to fit it and be someone they're not, and I feel like in hindsight everyone should learn how to be their self, learn how to learn yourself, so you can figure out what you want to be, and start working towards it.

- Kiara: [inferred from story of not being listened to about the racist teacher that administration needs to listen to and support students; don't ignore their claims]

- Jeneice: It is an honor and I am grateful that I am a Black student that is motivating myself and other people. And it just helps a lot being a wonderful Black student.

- Darnique: Everybody needs just a little love or somebody just there, just to talk to. In some tutoring I see that it's kind of hard for kids, 'cause they don't like getting in groups, they don't even know how to open up to people or ask. They feel like they're dumb, and I feel like maybe we could talk to them one-on-one and get to know their story. We need more people out there to help us in our future generation to succeed. We need more motivation, mostly teachers just put
their students down and I just feel that's not right. They need to get to know them before they judge them.

Create more programs for Black students (2)

- Imani: **Create more opportunities for Black students to bond and support each other:** I say they need more clubs, because I know a lot of black students that like to do clubs to keep everyone together. Sometimes they want extra paperwork and curricular activities to be involved, but sometimes you don’t need that. You can just have a classroom, everyone sit in a classroom and just talk. Talk about what’s on your mind, what’s bothering you. If you need advice, you guys give each other advice, just uplift each other. That can really change someone life sometimes.
- Darnique: **motivational:** Maybe I think we should have more programs, to help those who actually need somebody to talk to. There should just be more motivational speakers here, coming to the schools. **Tutoring:** I feel like, some people feel like they aren't smart enough either, so there should be more one-on-one things like tutoring

No response (2)

Brayonna

Tiana
REFERENCES


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