2020

African American High School Graduates' Perceptions of their African American Principal's Leadership

Patricia Mitchell Marzett
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Patricia Mitchell Marzett

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Cheryl Keen, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Katherine Emmons, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Alice Eichholz, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

African American High School Graduates' Perceptions of their African American

Principal's Leadership

by

Patricia Mitchell Marzett

MS, Troy University, 1991

BS, Grambling State University, 1976

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

There is a need to increase high school graduation rates for African American students, decrease dropout rates, and narrow or close the achievement gap between African American students and White students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to determine the perceptions of African American students who graduated from high school regarding the leadership of their African American principal. Delgado and Stefancic's critical race theory and Bass's transformational leadership constitute the conceptual framework for this study. Nine participants who graduated from high schools led by an African American principal were interviewed, and transcripts were analyzed using in vivo coding. The 5 themes that emerged from the analysis showed that the African American students perceived that African American principals should promote a positive school climate, facilitate a sense of belonging, be focused on education and goals, be trustworthy and confidential, and be available and involved. The race of the principal was also perceived as an asset. Findings from this study may lead stakeholders to a better understanding of roles and behaviors principals may implement, which may contribute to positive social change by helping to increase high school graduation rates of African American students.

African American High School Graduates' Perceptions of their African American

Principal's Leadership

by

Patricia Mitchell Marzett

MS, Troy University, 1991

BS, Grambling State University, 1976

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2020

Dedication

My sons, my legacy, Mr. Patrick N. Mitchell-Marzett and Mr. Malcolm Jabari Mitchell-Marzett, made my dissertation possible because of their unconditional love and support. I thank God for anointing me to be your mother and for trusting me to take you from boyhood to manhood. With sincere gratitude and love, I dedicate my dissertation to my goodness and mercy who follow me all the days of my life. Love ya, mean it! Love you forever!!!

"For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of GOD ye might receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:36, King James Version).

"Knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. So, let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire wanting nothing (James 1:3-4, King James Version).

I thank you, GOD. You are my all in all!!!

Acknowledgments

I could not have accomplished this milestone in my life without the support of my village. I acknowledge the faculty of Walden University who guided me through this journey. To my committee chairperson, my mentor, Dr. Cheryl Keen, I thank God that we met. I appreciate your maternal kindness and constant support. Dr. Katherine Emmons, I am grateful for your guidance and commitment to my dissertation. To Dr. Joseph Gredler, a sensational editor, and Dr. Joshua Bass, my advisor, thank you for your patience and guidance. Thank you, Dr. Carol Koller, you are a superb editor and a special person.

I would like to thank my parents (in memorium) Nathaniel and Dora Mitchell, who taught me about love. Thank you, siblings, for being my anchors, Leila (Lucas) Zelaya (in memorium), Ruth Mitchell Cook, Linda (Larry) Bailey, David (Monet) Mitchell, Ronald Cook, Robin Jackson, Russell (Brenda) Cook, Maya (Jarrett) Pittman, Maryn Mitchell, Mycah Mitchell, and God sisters, Jacqueline Ford and Makhayla DesRosiers. They lovingly and patiently traveled with me throughout this journey. Thank you, Karen Zelaya, Alison (Kim) Bryan, Christopher Zelaya, Joye (Daniel) Hampton, Jr., Floria Mae Fields, Betty Allen, Edith Askins, Maryetta Askins, and Ramona Glover for your expressions of love. To Dr. M. Helen Frazier, a Godsend; special friends Carl "Bruiser" Branch, Tene (Otis) Hamilton, Latrea (George) Heyward, and Gloria Gardner; Godchildren Currey, Sydney, Jayden, and Jason; and special G-niece Constance for their love. I shall cherish you forever.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Although the average U.S. high school graduation rate was 85% in 2017, the

graduation rate for African American students was 78% (National Center for Education

Statistics [NCES], 2017). The problem of students not graduating from high school on

schedule continues to affect communities throughout the United States even though

several programs have been implemented to address this problem (Kena et al., 2014;

Morgan, 2014). Interventions that focused on high school graduation for African

Americans and students of color have included extended school, Saturday school,

rigorous instructional strategies, mentor programs, and networks that connected home,

school, and community (American Psychological Association, 2014; Morgan, 2014).

Other factors influencing students' high school graduation may be school leaders'

behavior, roles, and leadership strategies (Coelli & Green, 2012; Hays, 2013; Romero,

2013). Though schools may improve student outcomes by helping students develop

trusting relationships with school leaders (Romero, 2013), few studies exist about the role

that an African American principal might have in increasing the success of African

American students. Thus, this study was conducted to investigate the experiences of

African American graduates and the possible influences of their African American high

school principal. In this chapter, I address the following: background, problem statement,

purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions,

assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Background

Many factors can lead to lower graduation rates, but race may be an important

factor to address. African American students have ranked fourth behind Asian-Pacific

Islander students whose graduation rates were 91%, whereas White students had a graduation rate of 89%, and Hispanic students had a graduation rate of 80% (NCES, 2017). Additionally, in 2017, the national dropout rate was 5.4%, and African American students had the third highest drop out rate at 6.5% behind American Indian students at 10.1% and Hispanic students at 8.2% (NCES, 2017).

School leadership may be able to impact graduation rates by addressing potential achievement gaps. For example, low-income Black and Hispanic public schools with explicit organizational cultures have promoted the narrowing of the academic achievement gap (Hays, 2013). Research has also shown a significant connection between students' self-reported high school outcomes, personal behaviors, and perceptions of trust on the part of their school leaders (Romero, 2013). Principals of individual schools may affect student outcomes if enough time is allotted for changes to take effect (Coelli & Green, 2012). Principals' roles can be vital in the creation of healthy school climates that facilitate the achievement of goals (Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014). Thus, school leadership influences student outcomes with consistent effectiveness (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

High school dropouts impact individuals and communities throughout the United States. For instance, students who drop out are more likely to be incarcerated (Irby & Mawhinney, 2014). Additionally, only 33.8% of male nongraduates and 29.6% of female nongraduates were employed in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Therefore, findings from this study may lead to a better understanding of what can lead to an increase in graduation rates in the United States and for African American students.

Problem Statement

African American students may fail to graduate from high school and are

considered at-risk while they experience challenges remaining in school (Coelli & Green,

2012). Additionally, African American students' dropout rates are higher than White

students' dropout rates (Kena et al., 2014). However, there may be individuals, such as

teachers, parents, counselors, and coaches, who can play an important role in helping

students experience positive student outcomes. This includes principals (Coelli & Green,

2012), as African American students are more likely to obtain high school diplomas if

principals identify and implement strategies that motivate them to graduate (Hays, 2013).

Thus, it is important to explore patterns in relationships between leaders and students in

the successful implementation of school wide outcomes (Hall & Hord, 2015), which

includes addressing the gap in the literature regarding graduates' perceptions of how their

principal's leadership style affected them. This study was focused on the perceptions that

African American high school graduates had of their African American principal's

leadership and how that leadership affected their positive student outcomes.

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to discover how former African

American students who graduated from high school perceived their African American

principal's leadership as well as how they perceived that this principal might have

influenced their outcomes. The participants attended a high school in the southeastern

United States that had a predominantly African American population with an African

American principal as the leader. This research may help fill the gap in understanding

whether African American students believed the leadership of principals directly or indirectly influenced their positive student outcomes (Hall & Hord, 2015).

Research Question

What perceptions do African American students who graduated from high school have of the leadership of their African American principal?

Conceptual Framework

Critical race theory (CRT; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and concepts of transformational leadership (Bass, 1995) constituted the conceptual framework in this basic qualitative study and guided data collection and interpretation of findings. CRT had its beginnings in the civil rights movement to legally argue for racial reform in America and is now used to promote racial equity (Ladson-Billings, 1998). From an educational perspective, CRT focuses on issues concerning the promotion of racial equality in discipline, hierarchy, curriculum controversies, achievement, and IQ tests (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The racial divide may be understood through the CRT aspect of activism, which may transform a nation into a better society for all races (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

In addition, the conceptual framework included concepts from transformational leadership (Bass, 1995). According to Bass (1995), transformational leaders in schools minimize personal interests to maximize the interests of the students or the school. Transformational leaders in schools motivate followers, which includes students, to collaborate, so the school achieves successful outcomes (Bass, 1995).

Nature of the Study

The study was a basic qualitative study with data collected from one-on-one interviews (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In-depth, face-to-face interviews with nine African Americans who successfully graduated from high school were the primary sources of data along with my researcher's journal. From the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews, I gained an understanding of African American high school graduates' perceptions of their African American principal's leadership.

Definitions

Academic success. The degree to which students accomplish their educational objectives (Korbova & Starobin, 2015).

Dropout. A person from age 16 to 24 who left high school before obtaining a diploma or did not receive a general equivalency diploma. (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015).

Assumptions

I made three assumptions for this basic qualitative study. The first assumption was that the graduates answered all interview questions honestly. The second assumption was that all participants comprehended the intent of this study. The third assumption was that all participants' recollections of past situations, events, and communications were authentic and reliable.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this basic qualitative study consisted of African American leadership at a high school located in the southeastern United States. The experiences of graduates

who attended high school during the principal's leadership are reported in this study, as described by the students. Not included are the perspectives of the principals regarding their leadership characteristics.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study. Transferability of the findings of this study was limited because the participants graduated from various high schools in the southeastern United States. The data also originated from African American graduates' reports of their experiences. Thus, the self-reported data are limited by the perceptions of the participants.

Significance

In this study, I present findings regarding African American students' perceptions of their African American principal's leadership. With the students' perceptions, academic stakeholders may better understand how principals affect positive school outcomes. For instance, understanding a principal's leadership from the students' point of view may assist in developing more effective relationships between principals and students. Additionally, identified behaviors and roles in this study may be used by principals who can directly or indirectly promote positive student and school outcomes.

Summary

This study was focused on the perceptions that recent African American high school graduates had of their African American principal's leadership and how that leadership affected their positive student outcomes. CRT and transformational leadership represented the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study. I collected data

through interviews. This study may help fill the gap in research pertaining to African American principals relative to academic achievement and the success of African American students. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that relates to students' perceptions, principal leadership, and student academic achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Remaining in high school and graduating from high school are considered challenges that at-risk African American students may face. The purpose of this research was to determine successful African American graduates' perspectives regarding the impact their African American principal had on their student outcomes, particularly positive outcomes. In this chapter, I explain the literature search strategy used to further develop the conceptual framework. Additionally, the empirical literature review is divided into two themes: principals' effectiveness and race and culture.

The first theme of the literature review addresses effectiveness, trust, and school climate, which includes leadership styles, behaviors, and the learning environment's affect on student outcomes. Researchers have found a connection between student achievement and principals' behaviors that support a positive, nurturing environment that considers the culture climate of the school (Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014; Hays, 2013; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Rolland, 2011; Waters & McNulty, 2005). Students need trusting relationships with principals to develop positive school cultural climates (Gale & Bishop, 2014; Romero, 2013; Ward, 2013), and trust may be dependent on principals' leadership styles (Sammons, Davis, Day, & Gu, 2014).

The second theme in the empirical literature review, race and culture, is divided into color-consciousness, students' sense of belonging, African American identity, and student activism. Research has shown a connection between demographic data, such as

socioeconomic status, and African American students' academic achievement (Dixson, Roberson, & Worrell, 2017; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016).

Literature Review Search Strategy

Perspectives of African American students and African American principals or administrators in high schools include various subjects and topics. Literature search strategies included searching online databases for relevant, current, and peer-reviewed literature related to *African American principals*, *African American students*, *African American students' perspectives*, *African American student academic achievement*, and *African American identity*. The search terms *African American* and *Black* were both used. Additional searches included *principals' roles*, *behaviors*, *and leadership styles*; *critical race theory in education*; *color-blindness*; *student voice*; and *student activism*.

Further research strategies included conducting keyword searches within Walden University library databases such as Academic Search Premier, Education Source, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, and SocINDEX to review abstracts, peer-reviewed articles, and dissertations. Additionally, my literature review search included resources at the Children's Defense Fund, the *Journal of African American Males in Education*, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Conceptual Framework

CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998), along with transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1995), was the conceptual framework for the study. CRT can be used to focus on academic achievement in relation to race (Delgado

& Stefancic, 2012). The concepts of CRT used in this study (storytelling and activism)

consider race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT indicates that

racism in the United States is normal; therefore, it promotes racial equity through

storytelling or narratives that allows African Americans the opportunity to articulate their

perspectives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). One CRT tenet that

contributed to the conceptual framework of this study was the ability someone has to

name reality through storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Storytelling is a way for

marginalized groups, such as African Americans, to tell their version of the reality of

their conditions. Though the basic design of this study was compatible with storytelling,

I used semistructured interviews to reach saturation among the participants' responses to

the same interview questions. I invited African Americans graduates to use their voices

to report their perspectives of their African American principal's contributions to positive

student outcomes.

Further, racism may be eliminated through educational leadership's use of CRT

tenets, with the social justice goal of eliminating racism through diversity and equity

(Capper, 2015). The activism principle of CRT this study was used to comprehend the

racial divide in America and transform the nation into a better society for all races

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

An additional component of the conceptual framework for this study was the

theory of transformational leadership. Bass (1995) defined transformational leaders as

those who motivate followers to go beyond what is expected of them. Transformational

leadership involves leaders and followers, such as students helping each other, so they

may advance together (Bass & Bass, 2008). Transformational leadership can influence students' success when knowledge is shared among the members of a school (including students) from a multicultural perspective and may help policymakers understand the relationship between diversity and positive student outcomes (Pauliene, 2012). Therefore, this study incorporated transformational leadership in conjunction with CRT to discover students' perspectives of the impact of their principal's leadership.

Empirical Literature Review

Whether schools are affluent, low-income, suburban, urban, rural, African American, or ethnically diverse, principals function as leaders for educational institutions. Researchers have studied principals' behaviors concerning schools' visions, environments, stakeholders, and student academic achievement. For instance, Ward (2013) studied a first-year principal in a 94% Hispanic and 6% African American low-income, urban school in California over the course of 1 year and found that the principal provided an environment and vision that supported and included everyone. Additionally, Romero (2013) found a connection between students' self-reported high school outcomes and personal behaviors and students' perceptions of trust on the part of their school leaders.

In this section of Chapter 2, I synthesize empirical literature in two sections. The first section consists of principals' effectiveness based on effectiveness, trust, and school climate that include leadership styles, behaviors, and the learning environment's effect on student outcomes. The next section consists of race and culture as it pertains to color-

consciousness, students' sense of belonging, African American identity, and student activism.

Principals' Effectiveness

The effectiveness of a school's leadership may determine students' success. In this segment of the literature review, I address research that suggested effective principals establish trusting relationships with students through leadership skills, values, roles, and behaviors (Coelli & Green, 2012; Gentilucci, Denti, & Guaglianone, 2013; Romero, 2013; Sammons et al., 2014). Effective school leaders expect students to graduate, maintain safe and orderly environments, and promote the school's vision (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Strategies implemented by principals, such as building trusting relationships with students or applying collaboration and cooperation skills among school members, have affected student outcomes, including graduation from high school (Gale & Bishop, 2014; Romero, 2013; Ward, 2013). Student outcomes may be affected by the relationships between the principal, trust, and how race is organized at schools. Principals may also affect the climate of the school and may choose to use students' voice to advocate change in the school climate or school culture (Hanson, Polik, & Cerna, 2017; Volin, 2018).

Effectiveness. Student success may be based on the effectiveness of the school's leadership. For example, Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis that showed ineffectiveness would decrease or increase students' achievement. Marzano et al. also found a .25 correlation between students' achievement and principals' leadership behaviors. Principals' leadership strategies may have an effect on student outcomes like graduation, specifically, students scheduled to graduate from high school. Coelli and

Green (2012) studied the effect principals had on students' English test scores and graduation rates and suggested that principals affect students' outcomes if enough time (i.e., several years) is allotted for the principal's efforts to take effect. This effect might be more pronounced during the principal's initial years at a particular school rather than after being at the school for several years However, the degree of effect may be based on whether the principals are of high or low quality from a leadership perspective (Coelli & Green, 2012). Further, principals might need to exert extra energy into promoting graduation for African American, Hispanic, and other marginalized students (Coelli & Green, 2012).

Research has also indicated that effective leadership consists of implementing and supporting a vision, promoting high academic standards, encouraging support throughout schools, associating with all stakeholders, and improving professionalism among educators (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). School leadership's high academic standards may be a key variable in positive student outcomes. For example, Hays (2013) studied the leadership of four successful public charter high schools in Boston, Massachusetts, whose populations were low-income and predominantly African American and Hispanic. Hays found that the presence of all three key elements contributed to leadership success: college completion was expected, the environment was safe and methodically arranged, and staff and students complied with the leadership's mission and vision. However, unlike the current study, Hays's study did not include the race of the school leadership.

Trust. Trust has also been studied as a characteristic principals need for successful schools (Gale & Bishop, 2014; Romero, 2013; Ward, 2013). Trust can be

summarized as an individual exercising vulnerability to another individual who is perceived as one who exemplifies integrity. Trust may reflect principals' support for teachers and student learning (Ward, 2013). Similarly, responsiveness and relationships were vital factors for effective student leadership (Gale & Bishop, 2014). These relationships were based on care and trust, which led to effectiveness in schools. Additionally, stability and length of time that principals have spent in the job may affect the principal's attitudes and behaviors and students' trust in them (Coelli & Green, 2012; Marzano et al., 2005). Principals' perspectives change over time, and principals need to develop hard skills such as functional, organizational, or business proficiencies as well as soft skills such as interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to build trusting relationships effectively (Colburn, 2018; Gentilucci et al., 2013).

When achieved, trust is a factor that can improve student outcomes. Romero (2013) conducted surveys in the United States with 216 students (61% White and 14% African American) in 10th grade, 12th grade, and 2 years past high school and found a significant correlation between students' self-reported high school outcomes and personal behaviors and students' perceptions of trust on the part of their school leaders. The students who reported fewer behavioral events and greater academic achievement were more likely to report trusting school leadership (Romero, 2013). Principals build trusting relationships with students by applying leadership skills, such as collaboration and cooperation, that may motivate students to achieve (Gentilucci et al., 2013).

Principals have also reported effectiveness in areas of stakeholder cooperation and collaboration for the betterment of the schools due to trust (Gale & Bishop, 2014). For

example, Sammons et al. (2014) found that schools improved over 3 years based on three different starting points. Schools that started from a high academic point needed more stability from leadership (see also Coelli & Green, 2012), and schools that started from a low academic point required more change to make improvements. Overall, school leaders influenced students through their actions, values, ability to establish trusting relationships with students, and their ability to distribute leadership responsibilities (Sammons et al., 2014).

Further, how race is handled in a school may affect trust and play a role in student outcomes. For example, students have established trusting relationships with educational cultural negotiators who enabled the students to use their voices to become active participants to navigate race, racial tensions, and culture issues in the schools (Grice & Parker, 2018). Race-informed mentorship and advocacy also impacts students' levels of empowerment in schools (Grice & Parker, 2018), though group level mentorship may not be effective on its own. Research has shown that student listening circles (which might be characterized as a kind of group mentoring) did not affect students' or staffs' perceptions of school climate or their personal abilities (Hanson et al., 2017).

School climate. School climate can refer to students' sense of belonging, students' and school personnel's attitudes toward the school and academic achievement, relationships students have with teachers and the principal, and classroom management skill exhibited by teachers (Chirkina & Khavenson, 2018). The school principal usually functions as the leader of the school, meaning they may play an important role in the climate of the school. For example, Gulsen and Gulenay (2014) found that teachers

viewed the principal's role as critical to positive student outcomes for the school because the climate of the school had been disrupted by the turnover of six principals in 5 years. This, as well as Coelli and Green's (2012) study, indicates that future research should focus on schools having stable leadership over time.

A principal may use student voice to change school climate and school culture. Student voice can be defined as students discussing their feelings, thoughts, opinions, and solutions to educational issues in addition to collaborating with stakeholders to resolve issues (Volin, 2018). Based on a study of democratic advocacy through student leadership along with student voice at the middle school level, behaviors that could encourage or discourage the sustainability of student voice included promoting leadership by students within the group, promoting cooperation with instructors, and promoting cooperation among students to do things like implement fund-raising activities to purchase textbooks. Therefore, students may have the ability to change school climate if given opportunities to do so by school leaders (Volin, 2018).

School climate may also affect student outcomes. For instance, principals can be influential in determining the learning environment, thereby promoting academic achievement by using multiple leadership styles (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Additionally, student perceived learning occurs when principals focus on student centered behaviors (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Furthermore, research has shown a connection among school environment, school leadership, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). Thus, the principal and the students can create a better school climate.

Learning environment. Researchers have found several factors that students perceive contribute to positive student outcomes, such as learning environment. If leadership creates surroundings that exemplify consistent effectiveness throughout the learning environment, positive student outcomes can occur (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). Leadership quality, which includes the characteristics of relationships with others in the school, affects the quality of the learning environment through the creation of consistent learning. There is a path that links leadership to student learning if leadership implements strategies to create a culture of learning. In addition, there is a relationship between school environment and school leadership, and leaders who focus on the effectiveness of teachers can influence student outcomes (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

Studying principals' consistency and stability in reference to school leadership may lead to understanding principals' effect on academic achievement. For example, Brown (2016) studied a principal who had been the leader of a diverse successful elementary school for 15 years. The school reported 42% low-income students, 22% African American students, and 15% English language learners with 95% reading and 88% mathematics scores on the state assessment. Brown found themes that included the principal having established goals and vision, having qualities and traits of an effective leader, and having a positive impact on the culture of the school. Additionally, Brown found that the principal implemented strategies that focused on professional learning and school communities in addition to using data to determine instructional needs and to implement interventions. The research showed that the principal might have affected

academic achievement indirectly through the strategies implemented. Connections also exist between effective principals, race, and culture.

Leadership styles. One path to academic achievement may begin with the principal's leadership style, which may affect student outcomes. Principal leadership styles can be described as transformational, transactional, instructional, and laissez-faire and may be used to determine indirect and direct effects (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Pietsch and Tulowitski's (2017) study identified leaderships' behavior and demonstrated that teachers are directly and indirectly affected by principals' actions. Laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional leadership styles showed moderately significant effects of principals' behaviors regarding teachers' practices. Furthermore, the findings showed that principals were influential in motivating their teachers to have a holistic learning environment (Pietsch & Tulowitski, 2017).

Dutta and Sahney (2016) studied principals' transformational leadership styles from the perspectives of teachers. By examining the teachers' perceptions regarding the affect of principals' behaviors on teachers' job satisfaction and students' outcomes, Dutta and Sahney found that teacher job satisfaction and student achievement were not directly affected by teachers' and principals' perceptions of principals' behaviors. However, findings showed an indirect positive affect of transformational leadership styles on school climate and job satisfaction. Principals may consider adopting a leadership style that empirically demonstrates an effect on student outcomes.

African American students may experience positive student outcomes in a holistic environment particularly if that environment reflects a principal's leadership style that is

compatible to African American culture. In addition, the school should reflect a

principal's leadership style that positively affects student achievement (Day, Gu, &

Sammons, 2016; Dutta & Sahney, 2016). Principals who promote academic achievement

can use multiple leadership styles (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Day et al. (2016)

identified strategies and behaviors principals and other school leaders perceived enabled

academic achievement and school improvements. Successful principals diagnosed the

needs of the school and then implemented instructional and transformational leadership

strategies layered in developmental phases over time (Day et al., 2016). In addition,

successful principals promoted improvement, directly and indirectly, by implementing

both leadership styles over time.

 Principals' behaviors. Various researchers have documented students'

perspectives regarding education involving the principal's roles and behaviors. Both

Damiani (2012) and Gentilucci and Muto (2007) researched students' perceptions of the

role that principals play in students' educational lives. Damiani's findings were similar

across the four schools studied; however, the principals' perceptions and students'

perspectives differed. Principals believed that the focus should be on administrative

duties, ensuring the safety of all students, and leading based on the specific needs of the

school and community. Conversely, the students preferred principals who were

approachable, emotionally and socially supportive, in addition to being active participants

in the students' academic achievements.

 Students can voice their perceptions about principals' leadership roles and

behaviors. In the Damiani (2012) study, students believed that principals should rely on

students to assist in determining the preferable approach for learning. While not asking

students if they should be involved in determining approaches to learning, Gentilucci and

Muto (2007) found that when principals focused on student centered behaviors as

opposed to administrative functions, the students perceived that learning occurs. Pinto

(2014), looking at students' perspectives of differences and similarities in principals'

behaviors that influence positive academic outcomes, found that students believed

principals should be proficient in monitoring, planning, advocating, supporting, and

implementing. Principals should also have high expectations for learning, have positive

connections with all stakeholders, be accountable for academic rigor, and should

maintain professionalism (Pinto, 2014). Students stated that high expectations for

learning and high standards for professionalism were priorities. The students also

perceived they knew what principals wanted them to do, and that they were influenced by

their principals, whereas principals perceived that they were not as influential where their

students were concerned.

Students' success, which includes graduation from high school, may be

influenced by the principal's effectiveness or ineffectiveness. Principals have been found

to use the schools' vision and their leadership skills, values, roles, and behaviors to

promote student success and to build trusting relationships with students (Gale & Bishop,

2014; Romero, 2013; Ward, 2013). The principal, along with the students, can create the

school climate. Consequently, students, with approval from the principal, may use

activism to advocate for changes and school improvements (Taines, 2014).

Race and Culture

Researchers have found a connection between race, culture, and education (Covarrubias et al., 2018). Students feel a sense of belonging when their racial identity is taken into consideration (Boston & Warren, 2017). African American students can use their voices to express their views to their principals.

According to Rolland (2011), students perceived that a positive learning environment that included African American male educators would influence their positive student outcomes. The findings from Rolland's study of African American male students attending a high school in rural Georgia indicated that these students perceived positive student outcomes to mean being self-motivated in setting and accomplishing goals. They perceived that their educators, parents, and peers served as motivators towards academic achievement. In addition, the students perceived that teachers' and the principals' attitudes, leadership skills, and assistance in promoting positive stereotypes contributed to their positive student outcomes. Furthermore, the students believed that communities should implement initiatives that encourage African American males to strive for positive student outcomes.

Color-consciousness. Preparing principals and school leaders to handle and be conscious of race, racism, and cultural issues, as well as lead their staff accordingly, may help White staff avoid culture shock and assist them in accepting racial differences in African American and Latina/o students. Milligan and Howley (2015), using CRT and narrative inquiry, studied educational leadership in predominantly African American student populations staffed by Whites and questioned how principals comprehended their

urban schools (majority African American students and majority White teachers) to determine if their understanding influenced the principal's leadership abilities. Findings indicated that racial backgrounds and experiences governed distinct variations between racism and racial incidents at the schools (Milligan & Howley, 2015). Principals judged racial situations as wrong based on their morals and ethics, administrative authorities, and racial background and experiences. Principals led their schools based upon knowing that White teachers were afraid of African American students and parents, and that the racial divide between leadership, teachers, and African American students and parents made leadership challenging for the White principal. Additionally, Milligan and Howley (2015) found that the leadership had levels of color-consciousness, the principals served as agents of morality, and that fear was a variable within the working environment. White staff needed to understand and accept racism as normal so that they, along with their students of color, could narrow or close the achievement gap.

Color-blindness and academic achievement may be connected. Annamma, Jackson and Morrison (2017) studied color-blindness and education. Focusing on the ideology of color-blindness and color-evasiveness, in addition to using the dis/ability CRT, Annamma et al. as well as Milligan and Howley (2015) and Covarrubias et al. (2018) showed that racism was common and concluded that ignoring race or choosing to be color-blind may be detrimental to the educational system.

Students' sense of belonging. Students have the sense of belonging; therefore, racial identity may affect student achievement. Boston and Warren (2017) examined the connection between the sense of belonging and particular aspects of racial identity on the

academic achievement (grades) of urban African American high school students using racial identity theory. The findings of the study showed a positive correlation between student-teacher relationships and racial group acceptance; between a sense of belonging and centrality, which is an individual's self-perception regarding race; and between grades and a sense of belonging (Boston & Warren, 2017). No correlation existed between grades and racial identity. Boston and Warren's findings indicate that a focus on race may foster the elimination of the racial achievement gap.

Supporting the racial identity of students could be reflected in the standards for hiring principals. Davis, Gooden, and Micheaux (2015) researched color-blindness using CRT by studying the language used in multiple states' U.S. licensure standards (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and the Educational Leaders Constituent Council). Davis et al. determined whether these standards included the words race, culture, or racism. Considering that the majority of the states in the United States used these standards to issue licenses to the principal and administrators, and considering that an achievement gap exists between White, African American, and Latina/o students, issues of race, racism, and culture should be included in the language of the standards if the gap is to be narrowed or closed.

School administrators view African American students through lens that differs from lens that African American students view themselves. Neal-Jackson (2018), also using CRT as a theoretical framework, synthesized studies that focused on the positive and negative educational experiences of African American females attending K-12 schools in the United States and the literature that focused on young African American

females who experienced successes and hindrances throughout their public school education. Focusing specifically on gender and race, Neal-Jackson researched how young African American women characterized their experiences and how school administrators, regardless of gender or race, perceived their experiences and academic achievement. The analysis showed that young these women had self-confidence and were ambitious and self-motivated. School administrators characterized the young African American women as having values contrary to the schools' norms. School administrators felt unable to approach or teach young African American women, and thereby blamed them for their substandard education. School administrators, therefore, may not comprehend African American students' cultural norms and may need to change their perspectives of African American students.

African American identity. Zirkel and Johnson (2016) examined the racial identity of African American students and explored labels (e.g., danger and unintelligence) associated these students which may have prevented their academic achievement. According to this research, strong racial identity and high academic achievement can be interrelated. Zirkel and Johnson posited that students might not label themselves as underachievers who need to mimic White people to be considered intelligent or to have positive student outcomes.

Certain variables may contribute to the academic achievement of African American students. Dixson et al. (2017) hypothesized that psychosocial variables, such as ethnic identity, growth mindset, grit, and other group orientation, contributed to academic accomplishments of high-achieving African American students. Dixson et al.

also considered the effect that demographic variables and socioeconomic status had on student achievement. The findings showed that psychosocial variables were not significant in predicting academic achievement in high-achieving African American students. Socioeconomic status showed a medium effect, and thereby, was a significant predictor of academic achievement. Demographic data, such as socioeconomic status, may also contribute to academic achievement of African American students (Dixson et al., 2017).

Minority educators work in diverse settings to find a bridge to close the educational and cultural gap between educators and minority students. Magaldi, Conway, and Trub (2018) found that the 108 minority teachers studied were not prepared to teach students from diverse cultures. The teachers experienced social justice issues and stressors, such as racism, along with students as well as conflicts with parents concerning student discipline. Additionally, Magaldi et al. found that minority teachers showed minority students that they might share common ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The findings indicated that minority teachers who teach minority students may be a bridge that connects the two entities in schools.

Academic achievement or socialization may not be the only factors that prevent high school completion or cause African American males to drop out of high school. Bell (2014) explored factors affecting dropping out and high school graduation of African American males. Bell found that 26% of African American males interviewed dropped out of high school because academic deficiencies or their dislike of teachers and 74%

dropped out for personal familial or medical reasons. Bell found that cultural, social, and academic issues prevented high school graduation.

The challenge of focusing on color-consciousness and eliminating color-blindness may be rectified through research on antiracism curriculum. Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver (2018) researched an academically successful urban private school that implemented an antiracism curriculum. Students', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of this high achieving African American school and its antiracism curriculum revealed that students recognized their self-knowledge, their responsibility to correct history, and their responses to news media. They were also inspired by the incident at Ferguson, Missouri. Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver found the school leadership was supportive of the antiracism curriculum.

Student activism. Students use activism and their voices to communicate desired school improvements or changes in their principals. Taines (2014) interviewed low-income students of color, teachers, principals, and community leaders to analyze support for or objection to three urban public high schools with a school organization that encouraged student activism. The findings showed that the principals preferred students use their voices in school councils or similar groups organized by the school as opposed to organizations they distrusted, such as groups that encouraged activism. Teachers supported activism, noting their preferences included students using their voices to improve school orderliness, discipline, and academic achievement. Students expressed the importance of being heard so that school changes and improvements could be made

based on their perspectives. Students felt that communicating their views to principals and teachers fostered school unity (Taines, 2014).

Student activism as a motivational factor and its relationship to positive student outcomes has been studied. Duwe (2017) studied a 2-year program and found positive outcomes when engaging students in activism and leadership. Duwe researched the opportunities, possible barriers, and significance of high school student activism, partnership with teachers and principals, and student leadership opportunities using ethnically diverse student focus groups as well as some teacher participation . The findings showed that student activism, partnership, and leadership motivated students in addition to facilitating students taking ownership in their achievements.

It may be beneficial for schools if administrators consider students' perspectives in decision-making. Bertrand (2018) explored how youth participatory action research assists students of color in obtaining inclusion and a voice in decision-making at a culturally diverse (85% Hispanic) school in Arizona. Bertrand questioned how 15 students' perspectives of how they were positioned at their school and how this might have implications concerning their school leadership. Bertrand also interviewed the principal, assistant principal, and 10 other adults from the school to determine the adults' participation in the youth participatory action research program, their perspective of students' role in the program, and the extent that youth participatory action research influenced students' participation in school decision-making. The findings showed that the student participants considered themselves to be in leadership positions, knowledgeable, and capable of making contributions to school improvements and

development. The adults supported the students using their voice; however, they undermined and disregarded their perspectives and research, specifically, issues regarding race. This study shows that even though school leadership may listen to students' perspectives, adults may need to accept and analyze students' voices if schools and communities are to improve.

Students' voices have been studied from a sociopolitical perspective. According to Seider et al. (2016), students' sociopolitical abilities can be predicted, particularly their capacity to confront unjust social powers. Seider et al. examined six urban charter high schools with predominantly students of color populations in five cities to determine what aspects of two distinct school models contributed to students' potential to analyze, navigate, and to challenge unjust social powers. Three schools implemented liberal educational principles and three implemented conservative no-excuses principles to govern the schools. In an analysis of the data, Seider et al. found a significant difference between the two schools. Students at the schools with conservative principles displayed more trust in their social intelligence than students at the school with liberal principles. Students at the liberal school strengthened their social intelligence levels by learning about and reflecting on racism and inequality through history courses. Furthermore, the conservative school prepared students for challenges of racism in the real world. Seider et al. found that regardless if the school is liberal or conservative, students had perspectives of racism and inequality, and their schools could attempt to address racism and inequality in their own way.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a literature review of African American students' perspectives of their African American principal's leadership. Themes included in this review consisted of principal effectiveness and race and culture. The specific problem that this chapter addressed was whether African American students perceived that their African American principals affected their positive student outcomes. The literature showed that globally effective principals exhibited trusting behaviors through their leadership styles. They enabled successful schools by implementing strategies that promote positive school climates. Additionally, attention to race and culture were inclusive in the vision and mission of the schools. However, this literature review shows a gap in the research on successful African American students' perceptions of their African American principal's effect on the students' success. Further research is needed to determine how African American principals' leadership promotes positive student outcomes for their African American students so that these students and other students of color may experience positive student outcomes.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this research was to determine how successful African American high school graduates perceived their African American principals had impacted their positive student outcomes. In this chapter, I present an overview of the basic qualitative study design with rationale, a description of my role as the researcher, a discussion of the methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. I justify procedures for recruitment and selection of the participants, the data collection instrument and procedures, as well as the data analysis plan. Additionally, I include issues of trustworthiness involving credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and coding reliability in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

In this section of Chapter 3, I restate the research question, discuss the research design, and describe the rationale for selecting the the basic qualitative design approach.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study is, What perceptions do African American students who graduated from high school have of the leadership of their African American principal?

Research Design

Qualitative research helps individuals to understand and investigate the source of issues from a humanistic perspective. I used a basic design to analyze the perspectives of the graduates using in-depth interviews. Further, the beliefs and meanings that people construct of their world and experience can be communicated through basic qualitative studies because these studies involve asking questions concerning participants'

interpretations of their experiences, which leads to rich descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the present study, the participants retold their experiences from which I constructed meanings and understandings (see Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Other qualitative designs were not deemed appropriate for this study. A case study was not selected because the research question did not suggest an in-depth analysis of a case, was not bound by time or place, and did not focus on a specific event (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Patton, 2015). Additionally, I did not have access to other sources of data that would allow for an exhaustive case study.

Ethnography was another possible qualitative approach for this study. Ethnographic research involves analyzing a culture in its natural environment (Creswell, 2013). The researcher identifies patterns, relationships, or trends from information gathered from the participants' feelings, beliefs, and views of a phenomenon in their setting through observations and interviews (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I could have sought to be immersed for several days in a school that had low-income African American students and an African American principal to understand better the students' descriptions of relationships with the principal. However, I was not granted access to a school for a significant length of time. If I had selected ethnography as a primary approach, I would have needed access to the students for many days, without my presence being disruptive.

Additionally, I could have selected grounded theory for this study by asking, "What is the central theory that explains African American students' perceptions of their

African American principal's leadership?" However, developing a theory about African American principals and African American students was not the purpose of this study. I also anticipated not being able to collect enough data to determine a theory, as it would be a challenge to conduct multiple interviews with young adults.

Further, I did not propose to analyze stories told by the African American participants, as in a narrative design (Patton, 2015). Narrative research is used to analyze stories, to attach meanings to the individuals telling the stories, and to interpret their world. A few students' extensive contacts with their principal were not the focus of this study; therefore, a narrative inquiry was not a suitable approach.

Finally, I did not choose phenomenology because I had a pragmatic question (Patton, 2015) about what the students' perceptions were and did not assume that students had enough sustained contact with the principal to be able to reflect on such a lived experience. In addition, the principal's leadership was the focus of the graduates' interviews, not the individual principal's experiences. Unlike a phenomenological study, which seeks to understand the essence and structure of a deeply lived experience, the goal of basic qualitative research is to understand a more pragmatic problem from the participants' perspective. My interests, as the basic qualitative researcher, consisted of understanding the meanings of African American students' perceptions of their African American principals' leadership.

Role of the Researcher

I was the only researcher and, as the interviewer, the main instrument in this study. It was my responsibility to design the data collection instrument (the interview

questions). Additionally, it was my responsibility to collect, interpret, analyze, and synthesize the data I collected.

I previously served as a substitute teacher in the school district where some of the participants attended high school and where the principal serves as a leader. I may have been a substitute teacher for some of the participants when they were in middle school, but otherwise, I had no relationships with them. There was no conflict of interest or other ethical issues. Further, issues of privacy and confidentiality were of primary concern during this study. To confirm the confidentiality of the study, I requested all participants sign a consent form. I distributed the consent forms to graduates who called, texted, or emailed me to express interest in participating in the study.

As the researcher, I also exercised transparency at the beginning of the research and maintained transparency throughout. I managed researcher bias through triangulation of interview data and by using a researcher journal. The participants were also asked to review interview transcripts for errors or omissions. Because the graduates were volunteering their time, I offered the participants gift cards of $25.00 as incentives to participate in the study.

Methodology

In this section, I describe the reasons for selecting the sites and principals for this study, detail the participants' characteristics, and the participant selection and sampling strategies. Additionally, I describe the data analysis plan.

Site Selection

I invited high school graduates who met the criteria of being an African American who graduated within the past 3 years and had an African American principal to participate in the study. Permission to use public school facilities in my community was denied. Therefore, I conducted the interviews at a rural library, an urban library, at a rural high school's conference room, by telephone, and by email.

Participant Selection Logic

To gather sufficient and suitable data, I used criterion sampling and snowball sampling to invite and select participants. I placed a recruitment advertisement in a community newspaper to solicit participants for the study. The first nine graduates who met the preestablished criteria of being a recent graduate and who returned completed consent forms with signatures were selected to participate in the study.

It was my goal to interview at least eight graduates. However, after conducting seven interviews (four face-to-face, one by telephone, and two by email), I conducted two additional interviews (nine total) to compensate for the lack of rich data from the two email interviews. Patton (2015) listed strategies for sampling according to the type and purpose of the study, which suggested that I should consider sample size based on the information I was seeking, the reason for seeking that information, how I planned to apply the results, and the availability of resources. Mason (2010) recommended that saturation should drive the sample size and research. Therefore, after nine interviews, I was satisfied I had obtained enough information to ensure that the subject of the research question was thoroughly addressed.

DePaulo (2000) and Jeffers (2010) stated that it was the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the information was usable by providing a sample size that was large enough to achieve saturation. Each participant must have been able to provide rich information about his or her daily interactions concerning the topic that supported the purpose of the study. Additionally, DePaulo suggested that researchers choose a sample size that was sufficient so that important perceptions could be heard. The sample size must ensure that the researcher did not miss any important information; when data becomes redundant, the topic would be considered saturated.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this basic qualitative study included an interview protocol (See Appendix). I designed the questions to solicit thick descriptions of African American students' experiences with African American principals. I aligned the data collection instrument with the purpose of the study to assist participants in responding to the interview questions. I asked each participant to reply to predetermined, ordered questions from the interview guide to facilitate triangulation of data and aid in credibility (Miles et al., 2014). I used probing questions to help understand the participants' intent. I audio recorded each interview.

Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed interview data by coding responses on a coding sheet. I coded the data immediately following each interview, while it was still fresh in my mind (Miles et al., 2014). Initially, I read memos and transcripts from the interviews three times, wrote additional memos in the margins, and familiarized myself with the data as a whole

(Creswell, 2013). Miles et al. (2014) suggested using first cycle coding and second cycle coding. I implemented first cycle coding through in vivo coding, using the participants' phrases and words (Miles et al., 2014).

Using in vivo and hand coding, I browsed through all interview transcripts in their entirety. Next, I reread the transcripts, line-by-line, made notes in the margins concerning relevant words, sentences, phrases, and sections that pertained to the principal's leadership, positive student outcomes, or school outcomes. Next, I made codes or labels of the relevant terms by grouping them according to importance or similarities. I conceptualized data by determining which of the codes could be combined. I sorted the codes into categories and then narrowed them into themes. I determined whether themes had importance or a hierarchy and summarized the results of the themes and their connections using descriptions. Finally, I interpreted and discussed the results of the findings. Any data that did not fit into any theme, discrepant data, was described.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility and Dependability

I established credibility and dependability through triangulation and member checking. I achieved triangulation by asking the participants identical interview questions and by collecting data from the graduates as well as from my research notes. To establish credibility using member checking, within 2 days following interviews, I emailed the participants with copies of the transcripts of their face-to-face interviews. I described to the participants my role in the study as it concerned the research setting. In addition, I ensured transferability through the participants' thick descriptions of their

experiences with their African American principal. I designed the interview questions to

solicit thick descriptions from the participants. I established confirmability through

detailed methods and procedures for conducting interview sessions. I detailed the

methods and procedures for data collection, processing, analysis, and display for this

study. As the researcher, I attempted to identify my values and biases and then worked to

separate them from my analysis to ensure objectivity. My committee chair read two

representative transcripts with codes to assist with reflection on the coding process.

Validity

Miles et al. (2014) stated that validity is a construct used in quantitative research

that should not be applied to qualitative studies. Qualitative studies should have internal

validity that shows the presence of what Saldana called the "'that's right!' factor" (as

cited in Miles et al., 2014, p. 313), with others agreeing to the findings and conclusions.

To establish authenticity, I asked the participants to reply within 1 week after emailing

their transcripts that they were correct. In the email, I proceeded to thank the participants

and scheduled follow-up interviews and debriefings. After receiving responses to these

emails, I coded the transcripts to determine patterns or themes.

<div align="center">

Ethical Procedures

</div>

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University approves studies

when the benefit of the study exceeds the risks to the participants. I submitted IRB

applications and received Walden University's permission to conduct this study to gain

access to the participants and the data they provided based upon the university's ethical

standards and U.S. Federal Agreements. The IRB approval number is 05-22-19-0189462.

Communicating through email, I informed the participants of the purpose of the study and how I would use the results. The participants all volunteered for the study, and I instructed them of their right to withdraw from the study and informed them via email that there were no negative consequences if they chose to do so. I informed the participants that all data were kept confidential and that I would use pseudonyms for the schools and participants. Additional information in the email included that I would store the data on a password protected computer hard drive, that I have sole access to the data, and that it will be destroyed after 5 years.

Summary

In this chapter, I stated the purpose of this basic qualitative study: to discover how students perceived their African American principal's leadership might have influenced the high school graduation rates of African American students, including what aspects of these characteristics, contributed to their success. I reiterated the research question, described my role as a qualitative researcher, and presented a rationale as to why a basic qualitative study was the preferred research method. I justified the site selection, participant selection, and instrumentation for this study. My plan for data analysis included descriptions of the data, coding procedures, and the themes selection process. Issues of trustworthiness, which include validity, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, are also discussed in this chapter. I described Walden University's IRB requirements relating to ethics involving the treatment of human

participants before, during, and after collecting data. Finally, I discussed procedures for storing and destroying the data.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to discover how former African American students perceived their African American principal's leadership and how they perceived that this principal might have influenced their outcomes. The research question helped address this purpose. In this chapter, I describe the settings, participants' demographics, the data collection process, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Setting and Demographics

There were various settings for the data collection for this study. All interviewees came from the southeastern United States, and I conducted all interviews in a place that was convenient for them. Four of the nine participants (RuhBen, Amy, Nigel, and Abraham) attended the same rural high school, and they had the same African American male principal, referred to as Mr. Wendell. Two of the nine participants (LaDonda and Zion) attended the same high school and had the same African American female principal, referred to as Ms. Stanleigh. All names are pseudonyms.

RuhBen, 18 years old, had interests including books, computers, and learning "how stuff works." His goal was to enlist in the Army. Amy, 18 years old, ran track for 6 years, played volleyball since eighth grade, and had a scholarship to run track at a university. Nigel, 18 years old, will attend a local technical school for 2 years and then transfer to a 4-year college or university to study aeronautics and automotive engineering. Abraham, 18 years old, has a passion for children and tutoring and will major in early childhood education at a major university. Interviews with RuhBen, Amy, and Nigel

occurred at the local library, and Abraham was interviewed at the high school in the office conference room.

Maryah, a 19-year-old blogger, attended a historically Black college and is involved in politics. She stated that she was "very aware, socially aware of what is going on in our society today." Maryah had to travel on the day of the scheduled interview, but rather than cancel, requested a telephone interview while traveling to her destination. Alaafia, 21 years old, attended a historically Black college after graduation from high school. Her goal is to graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology. Her interview was conducted by email, having declined a telephone, Skype, or Zoom interview. Ado'Nye, 18 years old, enjoys playing sports and "learning new things no matter what it is." His interview was conducted by email as he also declined a telephone, Skype, or Zoom interview. LaDonda, age 21, graduated fourth in her high school class and attended a university in her state after high school. Her goal is to graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology, and she is the president of the university's chapter of her sorority. I conducted her interview in a local library. The final participant was Zion, who was 18 years old and homecoming queen her senior year. She attended a university in her state after high school. She is majoring in hospitality management, with a minor in French. Her interview was conducted at a local library. Table 1 lists the participants by pseudonyms, year of graduation, age, the gender of principal, whether they reside in an urban or rural area, and interview type.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	Year of graduation	Age of participant	Gender of principal	Urban or rural	Interview type
Maryah	2017	19	Male	Urban	Telephone
RuhBen	2019	18	Male	Rural	Face-to-face
Amy	2019	18	Male	Rural	Face-to-face
Nigel	2019	18	Male	Rural	Face-to-face
Abraham	2019	18	Male	Rural	Face-to-face
Alaafia	2016	21	Male	Urban	Email
Ado'Nye	2019	18	Female	Urban	Email
LaDonda	2017	21	Female	Urban	Face-to-face
Zion	2019	18	Female	Urban	Face-to-face

Data Collection

I recruited participants until I reached saturation at nine. I obtained rich data using a semistructured interview protocol as the data collection tool. To ensure the accuracy of the data, I recorded face-to-face and telephone interviews using an audio recorder. Each participant was interviewed one time. I interviewed five participants face-to-face at a local library and one at a rural high school. Additionally, I interviewed one participant by telephone. Two participants submitted their interviews by email. Each face-to-face and the telephone interview lasted approximately 1 hour.

In advance of data collection, I distributed recruitment flyers at local high schools, mailed these to local churches to be read as announcements, had them published as a public service announcement in the local African American newspaper. I posted the flyer's content on my Facebook and Instagram pages. Furthermore, I consulted colleagues who were educators and requested assistance with recruitment. Six of the nine participants received a $25 gift card directly after their interviews. I sent three of the nine participants' $25 gift cards within 2 weeks via the U.S. Postal Service. After I transcribed the interviews, I sent each participant a thank you email with the transcript attached for accuracy checking. I asked one participant additional questions for further clarification. All participants accepted the transcripts as correct.

Data Analysis

I began the data analysis process by reading each transcript three times, writing memos of my thoughts as I read. On the third reading, I assigned a color to each transcript and highlighted quotes and stories in each transcript that related to the research question. Next, I merged the memos taken during the interviews with the notes written on the transcripts. After this step, I made tables of the participants' responses to the interview protocol, quotes, and stories.

I coded the responses by applying categories to the table of the participants' replies to the interview protocol. Categories included meanings, concepts, key words, feelings, behaviors, strategies, and participation. I combined responses to the categories on a table to determine whether themes emerged. I found seven initial themes in the following order related to participants' consensus regarding their principal:

- Caring, compassionate, encouraging, and motivational

- Available and involved

- Relatable, connected, and forms bonds

- Trustworthy and confidentiality

- Focused on education and goals

- Other leadership skills: knowledge, attitude, and skills communicated.

- Disparate cases: discipline, environment, and school climate.

I applied the responses with the seven initial themes to a table. I analyzed the table of the participants' responses to the specific interview protocol that described the ideal principal, looking for patterns or subthemes. Next, I conducted second-cycle coding of all responses to find subthemes and to minimize the number of responses in each theme.

I determined that some of the responses I coded as discrepant cases could be categorized in other themes. After further analysis of the data and revision of the seven themes, the final five themes emerged and are listed here with the subthemes in order of consensus among the participants. The interviewees found their principal either created a dynamic in the school, like a sense of belonging or had other attributes listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Promotes a positive school climate	Exhibits inspiring cultural theme Influences motivation Demonstrates compassion
Facilitates a sense of belonging	
Focuses on education and goals	
Exhibits trustworthiness and confidentiality	Maintains confidences Emerges from the same background
Models availability and involvement	

In the presentation of the findings, I developed each theme and included representative quotes from the nine interviews. I found that the responses from RuhBen, one of the four participants who had Mr. Wendell as the principal, were discrepant, as his perspectives of Mr. Wendell differed from his three classmates in all five themes. Furthermore, RuhBen's perspectives differed from the other three participants who did not attend Mr. Wendell's school. However, RuhBen's responses are included within each of the five themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility, Dependability, and Confirmability

I used transcript checking and triangulation of the interview transcripts to establish credibility and dependability. I asked the participants identical interview questions. I described my role in the study to the participants prior to the interviews. To

ensure objectivity, I worked to identify and separate my personal values and biases from my analysis. To establish confirmability, I used detailed methods and procedures of data collection, processing, analysis, and display. My committee chair also read two representative transcripts that I coded and reflected with me on my coding process.

Transferability

Transferability of the findings of this study to other geographic regions of the United States is limited because the participants were graduates from high schools in the southeastern United States. During the interviews, transferability was established through the participants' thick descriptions of their experiences with their African American principals. The interview questions were written in a manner that solicited thick descriptions from the participants.

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to discover how former African American students perceived their African American principal's leadership and influence on their outcomes, which the research question addressed. To answer the research question, I describe the findings in five major themes identified from coding data from the nine interviews. In the following subsections, I develop each theme and include representative quotes from the nine interviews. The first three themes were present in every interview. The final two themes were present in seven of nine interviews. One participant's responses were discrepant in viewpoint from the others but were still reflected in the five themes.

Theme 1: Promotes a Positive School Climate

This theme was the strongest finding and emerged largely in response to the question, "How would you describe the cultural climate at the school?" Seven of the nine participants felt that the race of their principal was an asset for the kind of climate that existed at their school, and that the principal's leadership seemed a large part of the school's climate. Three graduates did not understand what was meant by "cultural climate," but after explaining it they were able to respond to my interview questions. Three subthemes within the theme of promoted a positive school climate emerged from the data: inspiring cultural climate, motivating, and compassionate. The subtheme of inspiring cultural climate includes some of the participants' reflections that the race of the principal did contribute to the school climate.

Exhibits inspiring cultural climate. I asked participants, "In what ways, if any, did you connect to your principals on a racial or cultural level?" Seven out of the nine participants stated that they connected to the principal on a racial or cultural level. I also asked participants, "In what ways, if any, did you feel the principal's race contributed to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the school?" Seven out of nine participants stated that their principal's race contributed to the effectiveness of the school, although sometimes the reference was implicit. Zion described her experience with her African American principal as "eye opening." When asked to elaborate on her comment, she said,

> You don't see too many African American females in that position . . . you see
> majority males or Whites in that position . . . it can happen and you should believe

that it can happen. It is very motivational . . . take that and put that into your life.

And you shouldn't feel like you are less than, or you should stay at the minimum.

You should try to strive to be more . . . if you want to be a teacher, you should try

to be an assistant principal and then the principal. You should try to be more . . .

don't try to be at the same level.

Maryah said, "Just by him being a Black man and me being a young Black

woman . . . not only are you leading a high school, but you are leading a very ethnic high

school." Maryah further stated, "But it's not all made up of Black children. . . . So

although you can relate to the majority of the population . . . you still have a whole other

half that you have to cater to that you have to understand." Thus, Maryah implied that

the principal has to relate to other cultures as well as African American culture.

Additionally, Maryah expressed that the shared culture contributed to her success

because she recognized that she could "make friends with other people that don't look

like me while also still identifying as me." She stated that it helped her to "navigate

through the work field, you know, internship, externship, career opportunities, you know,

higher learning opportunities." Furthermore, she said, "You are not always going to be in

the room with people that look like you, but it's ok to still identify as you. You don't

have to change yourself to adjust to your environment." Supporting this statement,

Alaafia said,

Depending on where you were raised, a lot of people grew up hearing they would

not ever be anything because of how they came up. It was great to hear that we

can be whatever we want to be as long as we put our mind to it, especially coming

from an African American background.

Nigel also felt that the culture supported by the principal contributed to his success:

He [the principal] pushed me to do better . . . for myself and like my family, just

in general . . . made me want to do better, be better . . . everyone would be like

successful in their own way because of him . . . how he motivated them and took

up time with them.

Likewise, Ado'Nye made this claim about similar cultures: "The shared culture did

contribute to success because it made me love coming to school, and get good grades,

and hang with my friends."

Related to this subtheme, I asked the participants, "In what ways, if any, did you

feel the principal's race contributes to your success as a graduate?" Maryah, Amy, and

LaDonda also felt that their principal's race contributed to their success. Maryah stated

that the principal emphasized that high school graduation cannot be their "peak" or the

end of their life's journey. The principal motivated her by saying, "You're almost done. .

. . Let's push through. You're almost there. . . . I know you're getting senioritis . . . tired

of getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning . . . tired of riding the bus. I know that this can't

be it." Similar to what Maryah's principal stated, Amy shared that her principal

encouraged her to get her diploma by explaining, "Education is what's best. . . . It's what

gets you further in the future." LaDonda's perspective included her feelings about the

race and gender of her principal:

[She is] an African American female as a principal, which you don't see that too often. You see the majority males in a position like that. So to see her being the predominant leader . . . an African American female, it just felt like, I just feel like "I can do that."

Maryah also responded to whether she thought it would have been a different cultural climate if the race of the principal were different by recalling what she experienced with a White principal:

I think that our school would be . . . our school would not have respected a principal that did not have a personal connection with the students. And I actually seen it when I was a freshman and we had an interim president who was White, and he was not respected. The students did not like him. And he, he actually had to leave. He wasn't a good fit . . . because he wasn't understanding. You know, there are a lot of issues that happen with middle class children . . . that are Black or Hispanic or minorities you can't relate to unless you know. And I feel like he, the White principal, did not do his research on the demographics of our high school. So a lot of issues that could have been like a parent teacher conference and it end [*sic*] up being, like, in suspensions. I mean or you know, you can't come back to this school for a year. It was just a lot of misunderstanding. And like I said I feel that he did not understand because he was White. . . . Behaviors wise, like when students, and you know . . . how they are acting out in class doesn't mean they are just coming here to be a class clown. Ask them what's going on at home. Ask them why they are after school every day until 4 or 5

o'clock. You know, maybe just digging a little deeper and having some compassion. That would change the outcome for a lot of situations.

Abraham believed that if the principal was "Caucasian, it would be hard for me to . . . excel because they wouldn't understand like where I was coming from. . . . I feel like it would be difficult to grasp . . . [if he] wasn't my race." Alaafia felt that her principal's race and the connection she and her principal made mattered because "when you can relate to a person, you will genuinely care about if they succeed." However, Amy, whose principal was African American, hoped that everything at school would basically be the same if the principal were White. She stated, "Well, every person is different. But I would hope it would be the same." Ado'Nye felt that the race of the principal was not important to his success. He said, "I don't feel like the principal's race had to do with me graduating, but her ideas and policies did."

Abraham expressed that he hoped that his principal would be there "for a long time because as long as he is here, we are going to keep going up; am really happy in that I was able to graduate with him as my principal." Furthermore, Abraham felt that Mr. Wendell's race contributed to his success as a graduate. Abraham said he could see that Mr. Wendell was "a Black man who graduated from high school and college that I could be a Black man who graduated from high school and college." Abraham believed that he was "kind of like in his [Mr. Wendell's] shadow…where I can follow what he was doing as well. So I really feel like that contributed to my success."

Despite feeling that her school was slighted because her principal was African American, Maryah was proud of her principal's status at the school. She stated, "You

hardly see Black men leading education institutions. . . . You can see them teaching, see them working there as a staff member." Maryah admired him for leading her school.

Abraham felt that his African American principal was "easy to talk to" because Mr. Wendell was not "foreign." He said, "Sometimes a White principal, he understands you. But sometimes it's hard for him to really get you." Maryah explained not having to change made her "successful . . . and I don't have to change myself to adjust to that environment, regardless of the language barriers. You know. Regardless of any of that, he just always just suggested to us to be kind."

RuhBen's perspective differed from that of the other participants. RuhBen noted that Mr. Wendell was

> a good person . . . [but] showing people that he cared might not have been one of
> his best things because I was one that he didn't show me that he cared like that.
> That caused me not to put faith in him.

RuhBen felt that Mr. Wendell listened to him, but he did not "really try to hear me out" because he communicated to RuhBen that he had other concerns. Mr. Wendell would say "I'm busy right now" or "I'll get back with you" or "Come to my office and see me." Even though Amy, Nigel, Abraham, and RuhBen attended the same high school, RuhBen's perspective of Mr. Wendell differed from the other three graduates. Additionally, RuhBen shared that he "always was complaining about something" to Mr. Wendell. He also remarked,

> Due to the fact that he was a Black principal and I was a Black young man, I feel
> as though he should take his time out to make sure that another Black young

brother is succeeding . . . and making sure that he is going to be just as successful. I don't think he did that and took that into his mind. I feel as though, like, he just didn't care about that. You see what I am saying? You know like . . . he's a grown Black man, and I am a young Black boy. I feel as though he should just encourage me and show me things like how to handle things. . . . he didn't do that. Handle situations where, like how I felt as though the teachers wasn't [*sic*] being fair to me. He could have showed me how I could have handled that and just give me life lessons like that. Maybe things he could. . . . He probably could have went [*sic*] through the same things and maybe share with me. I don't know. Maybe. But he didn't. It's just like he would be, "I'll deal with it." That's that.

Influences motivation. Five of the nine participants said that the principal motivated their success and kept them going when things were hard. Amy said,

I mean that's what you do want in a principal. . . . You want someone you can be able to talk to . . . having Mr. Wendell as the principal, it was the best 2 years of my life . . . [it] was difficult at certain times, but having him . . . made it easier.

Abraham said, "Mentally, he was a real light in helping me get to where I am today." Nigel provided an example of when Mr. Wendell motivated him to take a class:

One thing he influenced about [*sic*] it is the outcomes; he made sure I had a backup, which was the manu [manufacturing] first class. He was there, and, like, I talked to him about it. And he gives us an introduction on what it was. And, I think that was before I decided to go to a 2-year [college], I was going to do like a 4-year. But I just ended up going to the class and then we talked about it. And

that's when I decided that I would do that and I would do a 2-year and then transfer to a 4-year.

As a result of attending the manufacturing class that Mr. Wendell recommended, Nigel reported he is certified in manufacturing and can be employed at major manufacturing companies such as Boeing, Volvo, or BMW. Nigel stated Mr. Wendell made sure that he had a plan during his high school years and after graduation.

Amy reported that Mr. Wendell implemented a strategy where teachers wore foam hands to high five the students as they entered the classroom. Amy and Abraham stated that this strategy helped the student-teacher bond and made them feel good. Abraham said the strategy helped him to realize that each day is "going to be a lot better." Maryah shared that her principal motivated a successful yearbook publication by constantly "checking up on us." In addition, he ensured that yearbook staff had "proper tools" and "proper funding to get the vision across."

That motivated us because that was my first time being the editor-in-chief of the yearbook, and that was very scary. He was very lenient with us going to different classrooms photographing everything that we needed to photograph, [and he was] very supportive and making sure he was in the loop.

Three of the nine participants shared that the principal inspired students daily thorough "motivational speeches" on the intercom, encouraging them to "do better." Amy, Nigel, and Abraham shared that Mr. Wendell encouraged them over the intercom every morning and sometimes in the afternoon. The student-of-the-month winners would be treated to breakfast. Mr. Wendell selected different students each month for this

honor. In addition, Abraham stated that Mr. Wendell motivated students who were not

selected as winners or not eligible to participate with other celebrations. Abraham noted

that Mr. Wendell would state over the intercom that "just because they weren't allowed

to come this time doesn't mean that they cannot come the next time . . . use that time in

the classroom to work on what they missed and be able to improve on it."

Another demonstration of students feeling that the principal influenced motivation

was when Maryah shared that her principal motivated the students to go to college.

Annually, he had students go to the cafeteria to receive pamphlets and information about

college. Each semester, students traveled to colleges to tour campuses, which

encouraged them to consider a higher level education through college or trade schools.

Her principal consistently told students, "Don't let this [high school] be the end of your

learning journey. Don't let this be your peak."

Amy's story of Mr. Wendell motivating others differs from RuhBen's perspective

of the same principal. Amy shared,

> Yes. Well, there was one of my friends; she was a very hard worker. She
>
> participated in a bunch of clubs as well. Well, I feel like the people who . . . work
>
> hard and put in the work of what they want and what they want to do after they
>
> graduate, he encouraged them. He was there for them as well as he was there for
>
> me.

RuhBen believed that because his principal was Black, that Mr. Wendell should have

imparted to him some of his wisdom and survival skills.

He could pass something else to the young Black man how to be strong, and help

him just thrive and do what he is supposed to do to help him keep his grades up . .

. like Mr. Wendell. . . . I think he is good and I don't think he is trying to, like, . . .

put some of his goodness off on the younger Black men just like himself.

RuhBen shared that both he and Mr. Wendell "could have talked about other things," but

that he did not know what to ask. However, RuhBen felt that his principal should have

known what to ask him:

I feel as though there are questions you could ask students, like, "How are your

grades looking?" But he didn't take . . . he didn't ask me questions like that.

Like, his mind would be on everywhere except the people that is [*sic*] trying to

come to him to try to make things better for themselves. I don't think he like tried

to make a relationship with everybody. And I feel as though principals should try

to have a relationship with everybody. Everybody. Not just certain people.

Alaafia's principal had a student body meeting to remind them that they "can be

someone great no matter to what people say." Her principal consistently reminded them

that "a mind is a terrible thing to waste." He told her that education was important, and

that there were "many roads you can take to become successful, such as going in the

military, to college, or [being a] manager at a restaurant." Seven of the nine participants'

perspectives of their sense of belonging were similar in that the principals emphasized

that the student should "be the best they that could be." Mr. Wendell's four students

stated that he told them, "Just do your part." Alaafia's principal said, "Just be the best at

it."

Alaafia stated that she was proud to be a graduate of that school. She emphasized that she was "blessed to have a principal who cared. "It motivated me to choose a historically Black college or university to further my education. It was the best decision I could have ever made." Additionally, Alaafia said that her principal's race "pushed" her to "want more" for herself. Ado'Nye's principal encouraged students to "always be better than last year."

Maryah spoke specifically about her principal's changes or advancements in academics, technology, the physical environment, as well as changes in personnel for the betterment of the school, and to promote her sense of belonging. She believed that "him being present at our school, actually raised test scores." Maryah stated that he purchased new teaching equipment and smartboards, which "improved our quality of learning in our classroom and our participation." In addition, Maryah shared that the school received funding for construction and beautification of their campus.

RuhBen stated that the principal did not motivate his success. RuhBen said that he is responsible for his own success. RuhBen shared that Mr. Wendell motivated the "people who made good grades, honor roll, yea, he motivated them." He stated that Mr. Wendell encouraged them by saying, "I know you make good grades. I know you are going to be successful." RuhBen encouraged himself and stated that he did not need Mr. Wendell to motivate him because he knew how to motivate himself.

Sometimes, the motivation came in the form of encouragement. Amy described her relationship with Mr. Wendell as one that uplifted and encouraged her. Amy enjoyed it when he said good things about her and motivated her by saying, "Putting in hard work

pays off in the end." Abraham noted that Mr. Wendell congratulated him and told him
"you're doing good." In addition, Abraham recounted an experience when he was
temporarily removed from his home. Graduating from school was not his priority. Even
though Abraham missed classes and assignments, Mr. Wendell "did not hold that
against" him and encouraged him to stay in school and to graduate. Abraham stated that
Mr. Wendell was "extremely comforting."

Abraham experienced Mr. Wendell's influence regarding motivation. Abraham,
who learned from a fight his brother was involved in and Mr. Wendell's response,
recalled his most useful lesson learned from his high school principal during a period
when he was kicked out of school. He stated, "The most useful lesson that I learned from
Mr. Wendell was to . . . not let what is going on around you . . . prevent you from
reaching your goal . . . block me from realizing what needed to be done." Abraham
laughed and explained this by stating,

> Mr. Wendell, he doesn't play games. Meaning, like if there's something he has to
> tell you, he is just going to tell you straight up. And I admire . . . how he didn't
> sugarcoat anything. And if he had a goal, he was going to do it. There wasn't
> any playing around. And I think I really admire his focus. So . . . that influenced
> me to try to stay on track as well.

Amy stated that "the type of relationship that I had, he [Mr. Wendell] had with
other students." She said it was "easy for him to connect with other students, too." Amy
recalled many instances where she witnessed Mr. Wendell encouraging or motivating
others. One experience that stood out in Amy's memory was when a student who was

quiet, good in class, not good at sports, and stayed to himself, won a raffle. She recalled that Mr. Wendell encouraged the entire school to cheer for this student. The student's attitude about school changed. Amy felt that "even the ones who feel like they aren't heard are heard. He wanted everyone to feel like they had a place."

Amy said that daily, Mr. Wendell would go to each table in the cafeteria and talk and connect with the students to determine how their day was going. Mr. Wendell attended football and volleyball games to observe and cheer. Abraham stated that Mr. Wendell encouraged his classmates, also. He said that he recognized other students' scholarship awards and congratulated students who graduated but "weren't going to college."

Abraham recalled new programs and strategies that Mr. Wendell used that made him "feel welcome" during the principal's second year as administrator. Mr. Wendell had conferences, or what Abraham referred to as "sit down talks" with the senior class throughout the year. In the beginning of the school year, he welcomed them to their senior year, told them that they had much to accomplish, and that everything was possible. At the middle of the year, he discussed their progress and the requirements for graduation. At the end of the year, he congratulated the graduates. Abraham shared how that strategy affected him:

> [It] made me real comfortable just to see that he wanted to keep reports on us and just to keep us, keep us motivated. I feel like that was really beneficial. It made me feel really welcome over the year. To me, he communicated to me like an uncle or something like that.

Demonstrates compassion. Amy spoke of the compassionate and comforting character of her principal, Mr. Wendell, by sharing her experience with the principal when her mother died. Her principal encouraged Amy to stay in school saying, "She [her mother] would want the best for you." Amy said the principal was a counselor for her and was there for her when she was going through hard times. Nigel described Mr. Wendell as one who "makes you feel comfortable." Abraham recounted his experiences of Mr. Wendell when his cousin's mother died. He stated that Mr. Wendell comforted his cousin, encouraging her to stay in school and to graduate:

> One of my cousins . . . has a full ride to the University of T. for track. And her
> mother died in September, and Mr. Wendell made sure that everyone comforted
> her . . . we all made sure we comforted her during that time. . . . He made sure that
> we knew that CHS was her home. And I could tell that really made a difference
> in her to help her get through such a hard time.

Abraham recalled Mr. Wendell's compassionate response when his brother "got into this big fight."

> And it really wasn't a fight . . . [it] wasn't physical . . . arguing during school.
> And I was there trying to pull them back . . . away from the people he was arguing
> with. And Mr. Wendell had to sit down with my mom and me and my brother. . .
> . He was more understanding . . . he talked about how he went through some of
> the same things . . . talked him into realizing that it was not worth; it wasn't worth
> dwelling on it. I think that played a big part in my brother's life as well as mine.

I think that was one of the . . . moments that [I] gained even more respect for Mr.

Wendell.

Both Nigel and Abraham felt Mr. Wendell helped them turn themselves around during a

tough time in their lives.

Theme 2: Facilitates a Sense of Belonging

All nine participants agreed a principal's responsibility is to promote a sense of

belonging that consists of feeling safe and secure and allows students to trust their

feelings about their environment. Amy described the ideal principal as someone who

"showed up with a smile." Ado'Nye's ideal principal was a "fantastic leader, not afraid

of being friendly to the students"; who "leads and not a dictator"; and "makes school fun

for the students."

Abraham stated that at one point, the fights at the school were getting out of hand.

He shared that Mr. Wendell noticed how the violence was affecting the school climate

and was "having an impact on the new freshmen." Abraham stated that Mr. Wendell

dialogued with the students about the increased violence. They were able to ask him

questions and discuss the topic. Abraham said that this specific strategy helped to "lower

the chance of conflict. I really liked the approach he had on affecting the climate."

LaDonda could not recall any fights or conflicts at her school among students.

Ms. Stanleigh held schoolwide and class events, such as spirit week and senior week that

helped them "come together" to feel a sense of unity and school pride. However, Zion

recalled a situation that challenged her sense of belonging:

I think it was [in] 2018 there was a spirit week. It was a fight. . . . I was a junior . . . the fight was between freshmen. Ms. Stanleigh took away all of our spirit week activities. . . . It wasn't our classes . . . sophomore, juniors, or seniors. So, why punish all of us for their mistakes? She didn't want to listen to that point I would say because she took it away from all of us. Yes. [pause]. . . I personally went to her to try to go to her about it. But she didn't listen. [long pause] When she was in the hallway and I talked to her, I said, "Why do all of us have to be punished because of two freshmen? Because it was multiple, it was two fights but they were all freshmen. We didn't do anything. Why didn't you just take spirit week from them?" She said, "That's not how it works" [voice softens to a whisper]. I didn't ask her any other questions. I just moved on from it. I would have felt better if she had taken it into consideration. Or at least but I felt not listened to. I felt brushed off.

After hearing the definition of school climate, Nigel shared that not everyone liked each other. However, everyone learned how to get along. After RuhBen heard the brief definition of school climate, he gave a brief response, "Everything in the environment was all friendly with each other [*sic*]."

Participants spoke of other aspects of their African American principal's behavior that contributed to their sense of belonging. Ado'Nye shared that his female principal's "tough punishments" for bullying and fighting made him feel safe and secure. Nigel said Mr. Wendell did "stuff" that made him feel comfortable; however, Nigel could not recall anything specific. All four of Mr. Wendell's students spoke about his contribution to

their sense of belonging. Nigel stated, "He would always take up the time to see most of us. He already made me feel like I belonged."

Amy spoke about Mr. Wendell, the assistant principal, and the resource officer "observing the environment." She said that the students did not pay attention to their surroundings because they knew those three persons were "looking out for us, making sure that we are safe throughout the school." She felt that she could focus on academics because she knew that no one would enter the school who she could not "trust" or who "would harm anyone of us." She stated that this "made the environment feel safe because the principal and assistant principal would stand on the ends of the hallway," and that it "felt like he [Mr. Wendell] made the environment feel comfortable for each and every one of us." She and Nigel believed that Mr. Wendell and his team would keep them safe. Amy's experiences with Mr. Wendell were similar to Abraham's. RuhBen agreed that Mr. Wendell cared about the environment and students' sense of belonging. However, RuhBen believed that Mr. Wendell did not care about RuhBen's sense of belonging, and that a principal should care about "everybody."

Nigel recalled an event during his senior year that the principal implemented for the incoming freshmen.

> It was like a big gathering in the gym. And everyone made the freshmen feel welcome. We had a red carpet event. Like, they would walk down the red carpet and they would clap for them, cheer them on, and make them feel welcome at the school.

Abraham stated that the principal was not "complicated," and that he could "just speak as how I would speak at home." Abraham spoke of being able to communicate with Mr. Wendell because they came from similar backgrounds and cultures.

> I didn't really have to worry about that too much with Mr. Wendell. Because he would speak to everyone in general ,like how a principal supposed to speak. But when him and me would have a conversation, it was kind of like I could talk like how I would at home, which I feel was really, really easy. He would understand what you are saying because he has been around people like that or he's talked to people like that. He grew up around it so it wasn't as hard for him to understand. He's been through hard times, just like I've been.

According to Alaafia, she did not feel as if she was "secretly being judged." She said that she felt great being around others who shared her sentiment about being an African American and being judged when entering a room. Alaafia shared, "Many people will assume you are uneducated before you even get a chance to speak." She added,

> Depending on where you were raised, a lot of people grew up hearing that they would not ever be anything because of how they came up. It was great to hear that we can be whatever we can be as long as we put our mind to it, especially coming from an African American background.

Maryah spoke specifically concerning changes or advancement in academics, technology, and personnel for the betterment of the school and to promote her sense of belonging. She perceived, "Him [the principal] being present at our school actually

raised test scores." In addition, Mr. Wendell purchased "new teaching equipment [and] smartboards" that "improved our quality of learning in our classroom and our participation."

Ado'Nye did not "see her [the principal] do those things" that promoted his sense of belonging. Zion did not feel a sense of belonging until her senior year:

> [I] kind of, like, flew under the radar most of my years until like senior year. I won homecoming queen. When I won that. I thought I was going to be one of those high school students who did not have any memories of their senior year to look back on. I just flew under the radar to my work and didn't really interact much. So when I won . . .that's when all my school pride developed. . . . That's when I feel [*sic*] like I belonged.

Maryah described the ideal high school principal as "involved." RuhBen stated that the ideal principal "interacts with everybody, knows everybody, and has good relationship with everybody."

Theme 3: Focuses on Education and Goals

All nine participants described the ideal high school principal as focused on educational goals. Nigel described the ideal principal as one who "looks out for them . . . makes sure they get whatever they need. Alaafia believed that the model principal "focused on bettering students educationally and socially." Ado'Nye described the ideal principal as someone who "always has to know what is going on," educationally. RuhBen stated that the model principal was strict and made sure that the students are doing what they are supposed to do. LaDonda stated that an exemplary principal should

have strong leadership skills and be able to "guide a group of people in the right direction." RuhBen added,

> I just feel as though this principal should get involved and interact with everybody . . . to be a principal . . . you have to love it . . . to make sure . . . people who will be successful . . . encourage them to be a better person . . . make sure the school, everybody is getting along . . . love each other . . . just a big happy environment that . . . make students love to come to school and not be dreadful to come to school.

Additionally, RuhBen stated that he had a discussion with Mr. Wendell about the teachers "overpowering him with work, work, work." He believed that Mr. Wendell should have known that he "never had a lesson," that they "always had worksheets." RuhBen said, "They don't teach us and give us lessons. To be successful we have to have a lesson." He added, "A principal needs to be involved with everybody and everything that goes on in the school."

> Nigel indicated that he trusted Mr. Wendell because he made sure [Nigel] had extra help. He made sure everyone had a plan. He made the same opportunity for, like, juniors [and] upcoming freshman. He'd do different stuff . . . get different people to come to the school like college fairs, job fairs, stuff like that. Most importantly, he would be there watching over.

RuhBen stated that Mr. Wendell made sure that their grades were "right." Alaafia's perceptions were similar to Nigel's and RuhBen's. She stated, "He would do what he could so that every student would and could succeed in life."

When asked what the principal did to influence their academic success or other positive outcomes, three out of nine participants responded to the theme of focused on educational goals. Maryah gave an example of the block schedule that her principal implemented, where each class was 90 minutes. He ensured that the

> curriculum was taught in an effective way [as] him [*sic*] and the assistant
>
> principals would come around and do teacher evaluations . . . just sit in your class
>
> for 15 to 45 minutes . . . for a couple of sessions just to see the different classroom
>
> dynamics . . . to give our teachers feedback on how to teach each class.

Maryah stated,

> [The principal] did a lot of changes: swapping out positions, getting his people in
>
> order, so that way he could better serve my school. . . . I am happy about that
>
> because it could provide effective change and all the resources that are necessary.

Amy provided examples of Mr. Wendell appointing guidance counselors to the students so they could "have a one-on-one with [counselors] to talk to about our grades. . . . What we needed to do to get into the colleges . . . to ensure us that we had a spot in that college, [and] made sure I had a backup." It was important to Mr. Wendell that Amy had a discussion with him about her "steps, your plan" after high school graduation.

Abraham told a story about being selected student-of-the-month for his grades. Being recognized by the principal "helped with me being successful," indicating that recognition "just pushed me harder to just . . . [to] prove to him that I was going to keep that up." Abraham said, "I wasn't the only one watching what I was doing," but Mr. Wendell's attention "helped me academically." Ado'Nye responded that the principal

"always wanted us to be better than the last year," and that the principal promoted

growth, success, and excellence. Amy shared how Mr. Wendell motivated her success:

> Every athlete, you would have to make sure that you don't have below a D. If
>
> you do, you would have, like, basically probation [and have to] take the classes
>
> over, [and] have to take tutoring if you need the help. Everyone, every athlete,
>
> has to have the grades before they could have the success of the sport. Most of
>
> the school was athletic. Almost everyone did something: track, or volleyball, or
>
> football, band, or cheerleading. He wanted everyone to see that grades are what's
>
> most important.

Similarly, Ado'Nye noted that his principal "motivated our athletic success like our

academic success."

Abraham shared what he saw or experienced Mr. Wendell do to motivate positive

school outcomes. He saw Mr. Wendell "reward grade levels [witt] pizza if they would do

good on standardized tests" or "throw parties in the gym as an incentive for students."

Abraham said, "Everyone would be like 'I'm going to ace this test. . . . I'm going to get a

high score so I could be able to go to this.'" As a result of focusing on educational goals,

Ado'Nye stated that the "principal turned my school from a war zone . . . [to a] to well

established educational facility." Abraham felt that it was easier for him to get closer to

his goal if he stayed focused as Mr. Wendell suggested. As a result of refocusing on his

education, Abraham earned many college scholarships.

According to Zion, Ms. Stanleigh "went all out," implementing programs that

assisted students in increasing their standardized test scores. She shared that since her

school was a school of technology, students participated in programs that offered student employment after high school. Companies included Boeing, Bosch, and Volvo. The principal implemented "work keys" and "work readiness" programs that rated students on their work ethics and job skills. Zion stated that Ms. Stanleigh's priorities were on educational goals and preparing students for college, the military, or the workforce. Maryah told a story about how her principal motivated positive school outcomes.

> My principal was always stopping by and saying, "Do you need anything?" "What's going on?" "Give me an update." "How's my interview going?" He would have booster club meetings . . . sports teams, soccer, and football. He would go to events and say that their efforts were greatly appreciated. He would go behind the hotdog stand . . . cook a couple hotdogs . . . take the money . . . sell a couple hot dogs so that people would know who he was. He was very neighborhood friendly. He would make parents feel that he was very involved in that there was not a gap of communication, not a gap in the relationship between the principal and the parents. He was very personable . . . come to the classroom sometimes, just sit . . . engage with us . . . listen. That would push, like, us to do more and be better. Just knowing, like, he was there . . . made us want to do better and we did.

Theme 4: Exhibits Trustworthiness and Confidentiality

I asked the participants, "In what ways did you trust or did not trust your principal?" Trust was important to seven of the nine participants, with all but RuhBen and Zion stating that they felt they could trust their principal. The subthemes of keeping

confidences and being from the same background emerged from the data in the theme of trustworthy and confidential.

Maintain confidences. Amy felt that despite being able to talk to Mr. Wendell and "trust him with things that . . . were personal. I felt I could trust him keep that thing to himself and would not speak upon [*sic*] it to people." Amy believed that she and the principal would have an agreement between themselves and everything would be confidential.

Nigel trusted Mr. Wendell and noted that he was "always there for you" no matter what the situation. LaDonda shared, "You want to be able to take other people's opinions and listen to what they have to say . . . honesty goes a long way." LaDonda stated, "My sister, we are three years apart, so she was a freshman when I was a senior. She, too, would tell me that they would have these conversations like we were having, which I knew nothing about." Ms. Stanleigh kept her and her sister's conversations confidential.

Zion's experiences with Ms. Stanleigh were different from LaDonda's. When asked whether she trusted her principal, Zion replied after a long pause:

I would say yes . . . when it was decisions to make on the school [achievement]. I feel like she would have done a good job if she had questions based on students [achievement]. She would have much insight. . . . My other concerns . . . if you need something inside the school . . . if you were to ask Ms. Stanleigh what are some of the things your students are interested in, she probably wouldn't be able to answer that. [Long pause] No, I wouldn't trust her with matters concerning me—if that makes

sense—as a student, because Ms. Stanleigh didn't interact with us like what we would like to have in the school.

Emerges from the same background. Abraham felt that it was easier to "trust someone who come from the same background." He believed that having an African American principal worked to his advantage as far as trust was concerned. Alaafia stated that she "trusted him with my education." Maryah trusted her principal, indicating that

> he was very just in decisions . . . listened to both parties . . . [had] no bias [*sic*]
>
> opinions . . . [and] did not show favoritism when it came to other clubs. He was
>
> open to hearing or finding effective ways of changing problems or fixing them but
>
> also being a just leader.

Maryah emphasized that she "completely" trusted him. She "knew that he always had our best interests at heart. I trusted him very easily." Ado'Nye also trusted the principal because she had the "students' best interests at heart." Additionally, Ado'Nye noted, "Trust is important. I trusted every administrator there."

LaDonda shared that Ms. Stanleigh had talks with the student body that made her trust Ms. Stanleigh and may have been influenced by Ms. Stanleigh's race. Her principal would say,

> "This is what's going on." This is what needs to happen." She would like ask for
>
> questions or comments. It wasn't like "I am the principal, and ya'll need to do
>
> that or that." It would be like, "How do you feel about this?" or "Do ya'll want to
>
> change this?" "How can we change this?" And that made us trust her, and you
>
> know she knows and understands us and we get it.

However, RuhBen did not trust that what he said to Mr. Wendell would be confidential. He shared:

It's hard to gain somebody's trust because . . . once I told him [about the problems with the teacher], if he would have jumped on it . . . I probably would have trusted him. He say [*sic*] he would do it. But then, you know, he would stop.

RuhBen felt that Mr. Wendell did not do what he said he would do; therefore, he did not trust him. RuhBen also said that Mr. Wendell "glamourfied" the "A" students. He said, "I think I just made that word up . . . [laughs] those students that he was like "ahh," "ooh,"[and] like all over [them], like his A students. The top of the class students like the high-grade students." RuhBen felt that Mr. Wendell showed favoritism, and he was not one of his favorites.

When I asked the participants whether they had anything else to share about race, culture, and their African American principals, LaDonda stated that her African principal, "Just wanted to us to believe that we can be what we wanted to be or do what we wanted to do, whether you are black, white, pink, or purple." Abraham recalled the most useful lesson he learned from his principal.

To . . . not let what is going on around you . . . prevents [*sic*] you from reaching your goal. And I would say that because it was so much [that] happened to me this year beyond me getting kicked out. It was just so much going on with my family and [a] financial problem. It was just a lot going on. And I knew I had to find a way to pay for my school. My mom would not be able to fund it. . . . and it was just really, really, stressful. And times, I wanted to just give up. And I just

would come here and just be stressed out. I learned that I shouldn't let everything

that was happening to me block me from realizing what needed to be done. And I

think when I started realizing that, it was just easier for me to get closer to my

goal.

Zion concluded her interview by stating,

I went to an all Black elementary school, an all Black middle school, and an all

Black high school. . . . All my principals were African American. . . . I feel like

that prepared me for a PWI (predominantly White institution). I go to a PWI . . .

that [by attending Black schools] instilled confidence in me. Even if I face

racism, I know how to deal with it because I am confident in who I am. . . . [long

pause] It instilled pride in me being around most of my peers. It instilled an extra

boost of confidence in me that going to the school I go to now, that if I ever face .

. . racism . . . I would speak up for one . . . it won't affect me . . . take a toll on me

mentally. Because I have pride in myself and who I am, my people and my skin

color. That was instilled in me.

Ado'Nye stated, "Black principals in Black communities are the most hardworking

people in education." He added, "[The] principal, as well as the students, and teachers,

make a school no matter the race or color of the people in it."

Theme 5: Models Availability and Involvement

I asked participants, "How would you describe your relationship with the

principal?" Seven of the nine participants responded to the interview questions with

contributions that reflected the emergent theme of available and involved. Amy said that

the ideal principal is "there when we need them." Nigel stated that the ideal principal

"takes up time with each and every one" and "gets to know them personally." The

participants believed that the ideal principal and the actual principal should listen to

students.

Amy described her principal as available and involved. Amy's principal, Mr.

Wendell, wanted the best for everyone and was "easy to talk to." Maryah felt that her

principal listened her to when she was in high school because he had an open door policy.

Maryah described her high school principal as a person who "communicates" and

conducted "parent meetings for the community" and was "very involved in our student

life outside of school." Similarly, Nigel described the cultural climate at his school by

sharing how Mr. Wendell's involvement in their community contributed to the success of

the school. Nigel said, "He would be like at gatherings" and at "senior night he would

interact with the families."

Zion shared that the ideal principal is "actively involved with their students" and

should be "hands-on." However, her principal "was scarcely there" or only there "once

in awhile," mostly at award programs. She described her principal as a "nice woman,"

but she was not "actively involved" with all students. According to Zion, Ms. Stanleigh

showed favoritism to specific students. Zion did not have a personal relationship with

Ms. Stanleigh.

Three of the nine participants described their relationship with the principal as a

relationship that could be implied as availability and involvement. Nigel stated that when

he had a problem or difficult situation, he and Mr. Wendell would "talk about it and work

it out" and he would receive help from him. Amy shared that she achieved personal

success and that it motivated her when she received recognition from her principal. Amy

said, "The staff and students were all in one place. He was there telling what he observed

over the years having me as a student. . . . Yes, he wanted everyone to feel like they had a

place." That experience made her feel special. Nigel said that he would see the principal

in the hallway, and they would share one-on-one for a few minutes. Nigel said,

> One time we talked for a short time. Yes, I felt he was listening to me. He
>
> always takes up time with you. He knew you were interested, really engage with
>
> you, hear me out, listen, and take up time with me, and talk back to me, and listen.
>
> Maryah thought about what her principal might have done to promote her sense of

belonging, her feelings of safety, security, and trust, and her feelings about her

environment. She stated,

> The principal didn't do anything to help my sense of belongingness, not for me
>
> personally, but he did stuff, like, for the community, such as car washes, booster
>
> club, football team, basketball team, a couple of fundraising events, and rallies.

Similarly, Amy shared,

> Every morning and certain times in the afternoon during lunchtime he would
>
> stand in the hallway. He would be on one end and the assistant principal would
>
> be on another. He made the environment feel comfortable for each and every one
>
> of us.

Nigel stated, "He would always take up the time to see most of us. He already made me

feel like I belonged." In contrast, RuhBen said that the principal "didn't seem like he was

really getting involved." The principal had "frequent talks" with the students and teachers. Additionally, Abraham said that Mr. Wendell's "just being involved with a lot of what was going on," made his high school an effective school.

When asked, "Which positive student outcomes of others did his principal motivate?" RuhBen responded that he "hardly ever saw him. When I did saw [*sic*] him, I be [*sic*] complaining about something." Similarly, Ado'Nye said he did not form a relationship with his principal because he had "barely seen her until my senior year." Ado'Nye stated, "She would say 'Hey' to me every now and then. We really didn't say much to each other." Ado'Nye said he did not have a relationship with his principal because she was "barely in [the] school [building] for my 4 years." However, Ado'Nye did witness his principal holding "pep rallies," a "great homecoming week," and "senior week." In addition, Ado'Nye said, "I played football and she always supported us." Alaafia noted that her principal "made it his mission to be around the extracurricular activities." Alaafia provided reasons why she felt a sense of belonging at her school. Alaafia stated that her principal listened to students' opinions, taking his time to determine what benefits all students.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I addressed the research question for this study and the results from my analysis of interview data. I described the settings and the demographics of the participants. I explained data collection process, data analysis and themes, and that discrepancies were evident in all five themes. I explained the credibility, dependability,

transferability, and confirmability of the study. In addition, I summarized the major

themes and introduced key findings of the study.

The data analysis led to findings related to the African American high school

graduates' perceptions of their African American principal's leadership. Five themes

emerged from the data. In Theme 1, eight of the nine participants described their high

school principal as promoting a positive school climate, with subthemes of exhibiting an

inspiring cultural theme**.** In Theme 2, participants felt that their principal facilitated a

sense of belonging at their school. All nine participants agreed that the principal's

responsibility was to promote a sense of belonging that consisted of feeling secure and

thath allowed students to trust their feelings about their environment. In Theme 3, all

nine participants felt that their African American principal should be focused on

education and goals. Theme 4 centered on exhibiting the trustworthiness and

confidentiality shared between the participants and their African American principals.

Theme 4 included subthemes of maintains confidences and emerges from the same

background. Trust was important to seven of the nine participants. All participants, with

the exception of RuhBen and Zion, trusted their principal. Finally, seven of the nine

participants responded to the interview questions with contributions that reflected Theme

5, indicating that the principal maintain availability and involvement. The participants

believed that the principal should listen to students.

In Chapter 5, I analyze and interpret the findings of this study using the lens of the

literature review and conceptual framework. I discuss the implications of the fndings for

social change and provide recommendations for implementation and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to discover how former African American students perceived their African American principal's leadership and influence. Using a semistructured interview protocol, where participants responded to open-ended questions, I interviewed nine African American high school graduates. Key findings emerged from analysis of participants' perspectives and led to five themes related to their principals: (a) promotes a positive school climate, (b) facilitates a sense of belonging, (c) focuses on education and goals, (d) exhibits trustworthiness and confidentiality, and (e) models availability and involvement. In this chapter, I interpret the findings in light of the conceptual framework, discuss the limitations of the study, make recommendations for future research, and state implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section I will interpret the findings through the lens of the conceptual framework and the literature review.

Interpretation in Light of the Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1995) along with CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998) shaped the conceptual framework for the study. Transformational leadership consists of leaders and followers who help one another advance together (Bass & Bass, 2008). Transformational leaders motivate followers using collaboration to successful outcomes (Bass, 1995). All participants told stories of leaders and students working toward the common goals of educational achievement such high school graduation. Three of Mr. Wendell's four students shared stories that

represent a transformational leadership style, including collaboration among the senior

class and first-year through all grades, and senior students mentoring first-year students,

and assisting them with their transition from middle school to high school to facilitate

academic achievement. Addtionally, Alaafia's African American principal encouraged

his high school students to collaborate with elementary schools in the community.

However, two of the participants who had Ms. Stanleigh as a principal, did not describe a

transformational leadership style or note any strategies that she implemented that could

be what Bass (1995) considered collaboration.

Further support of transformational leadership theory in the participants'

responses is that principals' leadership styles may facilitate trusting relationships

(Sammons et al., 2014). Maryah trusted her principal because the principal encouraged

collaboration among the different races, cultures, parents, and students at her school

thereby developing a positive cultural climate. Academic achievement has also been

found to increase when the principal's leadership promotes a positive and nurturing

environment (Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Rolland, 2011). For

example, despite RuhBen's negative feelings about his principal, Mr. Wendell, he voiced

that Mr. Wendell encouraged teachers to have a cordial, working relationships with

RuhBen.

Representing the tenets of CRT, all participants shared stories about their

experiences; they articulated their perspectives, named their own realities through their

stories, and told the realities of their conditions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-

Billings, 1998). In addition, all participants considered having an African American

principal an asset. The participants chose to focus on the race of their principals, using

the principals as role models, someone to emulate, and someone to look up to because the

principals were African American. Through experiences with African American

principals in leadership positions, these students perceived that the principals served as

catalysts for future endeavors that included graduation from high school, attending

historically Black colleges or other colleges and universities, enlisting in the military, or

joining the workforce. Choosing to not engage in color-blindness and color-evasiveness

(Milligan & Howley, 2015), the participants used their principal's race as motivation to

"become better," to "do better," or to "go beyond what is expected."

Interpretation in Light of the Empirical Literature

      Interpretation of Theme 1: Promotes a positive school climate. Eight of the

nine participants described their high school principal as promoting a positive school

climate by advocating an inspiring cultural climate, being motivating, and being

compassionate. Research has also indicated that implementation of student voice occurs

when students discuss their feelings, emotions, thoughts, and solutions to educational

problems (Volin, 2018), which can lead to a positive school climate. Student voice can

be used to facilitate change in the learning environment and school climate. For instance,

Alaafia shared that her principal cared enough to listen to students' opinions then

determine what was beneficial for the entire student body and the school. Additionally,

three out of four of Mr. Wendell's students had positive conversations with him to

discuss their feelings about academic and personal issues. Mr. Wendell exercised

compassion with Amy and Abraham when they discussed the death of loved ones with

him. Nigel and Mr. Wendell also had an eventful conversation about Nigel's future after high school graduation, which included his certification for possible employment in the manufacturing industry. However, RuhBen shared his feelings with Mr. Wendell about being wronged by teachers but felt that Mr. Wendell disregarded and dismissed his feelings and did not validate his emotions.

Another way that principals promote positive school climate is by implementing skills such as cooperation and collaboration, which leads to students who are motivated to achieve and succeed (Gentilucci et al., 2013). Amy spoke of Mr. Wendell implementing a program for senior students to work cooperatively with those who were not seniors to encourage educational excellence. Maryah reported that her principal motivated her as she served as the editor-in-chief on the yearbook team. LaDonda expressed her feelings about having a caring African American female principal who also motivated her to strive for personal success. Because Ms. Stanleigh was the "predominant leader," LaDonda felt motivated to emulate her African American principal. Similarly, Zion expressed that Ms. Stanleigh motivated her to go beyond what was expected because she was a strong-minded, sympathetic African American woman. LaDonda perceived that Ms. Stanleigh's strength came from her African American culture . LaDonda felt that Ms. Stanleigh's had a "harder" life than a White male or female principal because as an African American female, she had "more eyes on her." LaDonda indicated that Ms. Stanleigh passed strength on to her by showing her the ropes, standing her ground, and being a role model.

Finally, research has indicated that students have perceived a link between positive academic outcomes, setting and accomplishing goals, and being self-motivated (Rolland, 2011). Alaafia reported that her principal motivated her to graduate from high school and attend college. As a result of that encouragement, Alaafia is proud that she will graduate from college in the near future. However, RuhBen and Zion felt they were self-motivated because their African American principals did not motivate or inspire them.

Interpretation of Theme 2: Facilitates a sense of belonging. Having a sense of belonging was important to the participants in this study. All nine participants suggested that it was the principal's responsibility to promote a sense of belonging at their schools. Thus, the results indicated a relationship between students feeling a sense of belonging and their perceptions of their positive student outcomes and perceptions of the principal's leadership. Previous research has similarly indicated a positive correlation between grades and a sense of belonging and racial identity (Boston & Warren, 2017).

Conversely, principals can take away a sense of belonging by having different perspectives of students or exhibiting favoritism. Research has shown that school administrators, both Black and White, who did not have the same perspectives of the students, blamed the students for not doing well academically (Neal-Jackson, 2018). Similarly, research has shown the harm of labels associated with African American students, such as dangerous and unintelligent, that students do not associate with themselves (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). Only two of the participants felt that their African American principal saw less in them than they wished. For instance, RuhBen shared that

it was necessary for him to motivate himself, as he felt that Mr. Wendell avoided him, using the term glamourified to refer to students in comparison with himself. Zion also felt that Ms. Stanleigh "brushed her off." In addition to these two students' perspectives, all participants agreed that students should feel a sense of belonging at their high school, not just those who are glamourfied. LaDonda mentioned several times that she graduated fourth in her class and that her principal, Ms. Stanleigh, had a close relationship with the top 10, admitting that the principal showed favoritism to her and her senior class. But RuhBen and Zion believed that they could obtain academic achievement without being their principal's glamourfied students.

Despite research supporting a sense of belonging, one finding did not align with the current study's findings, which is that students may feel a sense of belonging when their principal hears them and can subsequently lead to positive changes like activism. Student activism motivates students and facilitates students' ownership in their achievement (Duwe, 2017). Principals may choose to use students' voice to advocate changes in the school climate or school culture (Hanson et al., 2017; Volin, 2018). It is important for school leaders to listen and analyze students' voices and perspectives and determine whether their suggestions would be beneficial to the school (Bertrand, 2018). For example, principals prefer students to use their voices in organizations such as student councils (Taines, 2014). However, in the present study, I found that when two students used their voice and practiced activism, they reported their principals rejected them. None of the other nine participants mentioned behavior on their part that I would be characterized as activism.

Interpretation of Theme 3: Focuses on education and goals. All nine participants believed that the high school principal should be focused on educational goals, promote positive student and school outcomes, and "look out for" the students academically. Similarly, Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that effective principals of all races and cultures expect students to graduate, and also found implementing and supporting the school's vision and promoting high academic standards for students enhanced the school's and students' positive outcomes. Hays (2013) confirmed these findings, noting that two of several key elements signify successful school leadership: the expectation of students' graduation and students' compliance with the school's vision. In this study, for example, all of Mr. Wendell's four students described him as a principal who always inquired about students' grades and that all students had a plan after high school. Nigel stated that Mr. Wendell provided academic interventions for him when he needed "extra help." Amy shared that Mr. Wendell held conferences with students to reevaluate and revise their post high school plans. Even though Amy was an athlete, she knew that Mr. Wendell expected academic excellence from her because grades were important. Similarly, Ado'Nye's principal expected the students to experience academic success annually to "be better than last year," and her principal promoted academic excellence in conjunction with athletic success.

Further research has shown that principals might affect academic achievement indirectly through strategies like curriculum and standards alignment, common assessment, instruction driven by data, teacher and parent association, an organized behavior program, systematic budgeting, and uninterrupted academic schedules (Brown,

2016). Alaafia shared that her principal implemented programs to ensure students'

success such as career days, college days, and Dr. Seuss day. Maryah's principal visited

classes during instruction to ensure that the curriculum was taught effectively. In

addition, Maryah stated that her principal "swapped out" teachers to facilitate an effective

curriculum. RuhBen valued this kind of intervention but believed that Mr. Wendell

should have been more aware of whether the curriculum and instruction were rigorous.

Heck and Hallinger (2014) found that the quality of principals' leadership, which

included relationships with everyone in the school, determines the quality of the school

climate and the learning environment. Leadership should implement a culture of learning

that is effective for all students because there is a relationship between the principal and

the school environment. Heck and Hallinger found that teacher consistency and

effectiveness coincide with student outcomes. All the participants articulated similar

ideals about quality leadership, with all but two feeling their principal met that quality.

Interpretation of Theme 4: Exhibits trustworthiness and confidentiality.

Effective principals exhibit positive characteristics and leadership skills thorough their

behaviors, actions, and values, which enable principals to build trusting relationships with

students (Gale & Bishop, 2014; Gentilucci et al., 2013; Romero, 2013; Sammons et al.,

2014; Ward, 2013). Effective principals exhibited trustworthiness by keeping

confidences. Maryah reported that she trusted her principal because he was "open to

hearing or finding effective ways of changing problems or fixing them, but also being a

just leader." On the other hand, RuhBen shared that he did not trust his principal because

Mr. Wendell did not react to his concerns. RuhBen said, "It's hard to gain somebody's

trust . . . what caused me not to trust him . . . he don't [*sic*] act like . . . don't show me that

he cares. Maybe if he showed me that he cared . . . maybe I would trust him."

Amy expressed that she trusted Mr. Wendell because he kept their conversations

confidential, "just between me and him." Zion expressed that she did not trust her

principal, Ms. Stanleigh, because she "wasn't really there." Zion needed Ms. Stanleigh to

"be there more . . . be involved more . . . talk to us more as a whole school."

Interpretation of Theme 5: Models availability and involvement. Principals

and students have been found to differ on principals' priorities (Damiani, 2012).

Damiani (2012) found that principals believe that administrative duties and ensuring the

safety of all students should be their first priorities, while students felt principals should

be approachable and supportive, socially and emotionally, and be active participants in all

facets of the school. Seven of the nine participants responded to the interview questions

with contributions that reflected the emergent theme of available and involved. Ado'Nye

indicated that his principal was often not available. However, his principal was always

available during athletic events. Zion shared that Ms. Stanleigh was accessible and

involved until the class of 2016 graduated, the class to which Ms. Stanleigh was

perceived to show favoritism. Mr. Wendell exhibited his availability through

inspirational and motivational speeches over the intercom daily, by comforting students

during bereavement, by preventing the arrest of fighting students, and through additional

instances of involvement. RuhBen reported Mr. Wendell's involvement, but indicated

that Mr. Wendell showed favoritism to the glamourfied students. Zion stated that her

sister was glamourfied by Ms. Stanleigh, but Zion felt rejected by her African American

principal. Alaafia expressed that availability was her principal's mission. Maryah's

principal made himself available to students, parents, and the community during athletic

events.

All participants indicated that their principal had high expectations because these

were communicated on a regular basis. Principals have been found to influence students

more than principals perceive (Pinto, 2014). Alaafia shared that her principal talked to

the entire school body about various issues and connected with everyone in a manner that

made students feel comfortable with him. On the other hand, Zion's principal, Ms.

Stanleigh, was not available and delegated her responsibilities to her administrative team.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study. Transferability of the findings of this

study is limited because the participants were graduates from only four high schools in

the southeastern United States in urban and rural communities. The data originated from

African American graduates' reports of their experiences from 3 months to 3 years after

the experiences occurred, which may mean the students' memories could have been

distorted. The self-reported data is limited by the perceptions of the participants, who

self-selected to participate in the study for reasons that are not known.

Recommendations for Future Research

Many researchers and educational leaders have focused on narrowing the

achievement gap between African American high school students and White students,

and this study makes a modest contribution to that ongoing focus. Principals should

reflect on their own leadership styles so they can positively affect African American

student and school outcomes (Day et al., 2016; Dutta & Sahney, 2016). They might also consider further development of the five leadership attributes that surfaced in this study: (a) offering a sense of belong; (b) being focused on education and goals; (c) being caring, compassionate, encouraging, and motivated; (d) beng available and involved; and (e) being trustworthy and confidential. Principals may use multiple leadership styles to promote academic achievement (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017); however, the preferred leadership styles should take into account the perspective of the student (Day et al., 2016; Dutta & Sahney, 2016).

An adaptation of Pietsch and Tulowitzki's (2017) research may determine the extent to which principals motivate students. Pietsch and Tulowitzki found that principals' leadership styles could affect the school climate and that principals can promote academic achievement using multiple leadership styles. Future research should include a study that is an adaptation of Pietsch and Tulowitzki's research and includes high school students.

Boston and Warren (2017) examined the connection between the sense of belonging and the particular aspects of racial identity on academic achievement. The promotion of sense of belonging was the most important attribute of a principal identified by the participants. Future research could include a larger qualitative study to further examine the connection between the sense of belonging, racial identity, and positive school outcomes.

Another question to consider is, what are the perceptions of African American high school graduates who had African American principals throughout their education

(i.e., elementary, middle, and high school)? One participant in the present study shared that she only experienced African American principals.

Students may want validation about race from their school leadership. Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver (2018) recommended that schools implement an antiracism curriculum. Their research findings demonstrated that school leaders supported an antiracism curriculum and that students recognized self-knowledge. Regardless of the race of the principals, if the students are African American, principals need to identify whether their thoughts, behaviors, or words can be considered racist. Zion expressed that in one situation, the White teacher "was not racist, but the statement was racist." School leaders need to be able to differentiate between being racist and making racist remarks. Future research on students' perspectives, positive or negative, may contribute to learning how African American students can experience positive school outcomes thereby narrowing the achievement gap and increasing the high school graduation rate for African American students.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The present study presents numerous possible implications for positive social change. African American students expect African American leaders to be role models. All nine participants voiced sentiments about the race of their principal and the principal's mentorship potential. All participants mentioned that their principal held assemblies to talk with individual classes or the student body as a whole. One student desired more opportunities to voice concerns that may create change in her school.

Schools can create opportunities in the curriculum for principal and student forums, focus groups, or similar gatherings so African American students can be heard.

The activism tenet of CRT represents one aspect of the conceptual framework of this study. Two of the nine participants, one male and one female, expressed displeasure with their African American principals, one male and one female. Both participants shared that they attempted to discuss their concerns with their principals but felt rejected. Occasionally, African American students may need to discuss issues that may be perceived as negative by school leadership. These disappointed high school graduates suggested that principals should invite students who are not glamourfied and fly under the radar to sit at the table with their principal to discuss issues that may enhance their sense of belonging.

There may be other high school students like RuhBen and Zion whose voices need to be heard. It is possible that these two students volunteered to be interviewed because they wanted to vocalize their complaints and concerns about their high school experience, and that they do not represent the majority. RuhBen and Zion were successful and graduated despite feeling rejected and neglected. Future research on students' perspectives, positive or negative, may also contribute to learning how African American students can experience positive school outcomes to close the achievement gap and increase the high school graduation rate for African American students.

In the present study, six out of nine African American students had an African American male principal. Five out of those six participants trusted their principal. My final recommendation is for school districts to continue to recruit African American

principals to lead schools that have predominantly African American populations.

African American students need to see more people who look like them and more African

American male and female role models around them in leadership positions. This present

study on the perspectives of African American high school graduates may be considered

in ongoing discussions on CRT in education.

Conclusion

Focusing on race instead of pretending that race does not exist may help foster the

narrowing or closing of the racial achievement gap. School administrators may not

comprehend African American students' cultural norms and may need to develop more

fully their perspectives of African American students. The African American participants

in this study expressed the desire to feel a sense of belonging at their high schools. Their

African American principals facilitated this sense of belonging by focusing on education

and goals, through availability and involvement, by showing their students compassion

and care, by inspiring and motivating, and by creating trustworthy relationships.

Marian Wright Edelman (2016) said, "Empower children. Make them feel strong

inside." My interviewees had similar thoughts. Maryah expressed, "Our school would

not have respected a principal that did not have a personal connection with the students . .

. not a good fit." Amy said, "Having that leadership role [Mr. Wendell as principal]

shows that . . . there is a leader in all of us." Nigel expressed the compassion that Mr.

Wendell showed towards him instead of sending him to jail for fighting. Nigel said, "If

ya'll really men, ya'll can work this out." In addition, Nigel shared, "Everyone would be

. . . successful in their own way because of him and how he motivated them and took up time with them."

This focus on feeling strong inside surfaced in other interviews as well. Abraham shared that his principal, Mr. Wendell, "He was a Black man who graduated from high school and college [so] that I could be a Black man who graduated from high school and college . . . so I really feel that contributed to my success." Alaafia said, [the principal] made most students feel like he cared about how far we go in life. We knew he would do what he could to make [to make] sure we graduated with the right education to get us somewhere." Ado'Nye shared, "The principal as well as the students and teachers make a school no matter the race or color of the people in it." Additionally, Ado'Nye stated, "My principal turned my school from a war zone to a well established educational facility." LaDonda said, "Everyone should try to be accepting to everyone's race and culture . . . we are different in ways . . . in some ways we are kind of similar . . . we are all still people all together". Zion expressed, "Race does not matter, but racism does."

Capturing recent social media attention, an African American high school senior in Texas who wears dreadlocks was suspended from school in early 2020 and was denied the chance to return or participate in the graduation ceremonies if he did not cut his hair. His response to school administration was for them to be "open to other cultures. At least let us [other cultures] try to tell you some things. Don't just shut us out" (TheEllenShow, 2020). Schools and districts should consider student activism and provide opportunities for African American students to tell their stories about their realities, to voice their

concerns from their perspectives, to share personal issues, to bond with their principals,

and to make schools, as RuhBen said, "one big happy place."

References

American Psychological Association. (2014). *Facing the school dropout dilemma.*

Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout-

prevention.aspx

Annamma, S. A., Jackson, D. D., & Morrison, D. (2017). Conceptualizing color-

evasiveness: Using dis/ability critical race theory to expand a color-blind racial

ideology in education and society. *Race and Ethnicity and Education, 20*(2), 147-

162. doi:10.1080/13613324.2016.1248837

Bass, B. M. (1995). Theory of transformational leadership redux. *The Leadership

Quarterly, 6*(4), 463-478. doi:10.1080/13613324.2016.1248837

Bass, B. M., & Bass, R. (2008). *The bass handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and

managerial applications.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Bell, E. E. (2014). Graduating black males: A generic qualitative study. *The Qualitative

Report, 19*(13), 1-10. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss7/1

Bertrand, M. (2018). Youth participatory action research and possibilities for students of

color in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 54*(3),1-

30. doi:10.1177/0013161X18761344

Boston, C., & Warren, S. (2017). The effects of belonging and racial identity on urban

African American high school students' achievement. *Journal of Urban Learning,

Teaching and Research, 13*, 26-33. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1150199)

Brown, G. (2016). Leadership's influence: A case study of an elementary principals'

indirect impact on student achievement. *Education, 137*(1), 101-115.

https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/prin/ed/

Capper, C. A. (2015). The 20th-year anniversary of critical race theory in education: Implications for leading to eliminate racism. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51*(5). doi:10.1177/0013161X15607616

Chirkina, T. A. & Khavenson, T. E. (2018). School climate: A history of the concept and approaches to defining and measuring it on PISA questionnaires, *Russian Education & Society, 60*(2), 133-160. doi:10.1080/10609393.2018.1451189

Coelli, M., & Green, D. (2012). Leadership effects: School principals and student outcomes. *Economics of Education Review, 31,* 92-100. doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2011.09.001

Colburn, M. (2018). An alternative to categorizing skills as soft or hard. *OD Practitioner 50*(4), 65-66. Retrieved from https://www.odnetwork.org/page/Publications

Covarrubias, A., Nava, P., Lara, A., Burciaga, R., Vélez, V., & Solorzano, D. (2018). Critical race quantitative intersections: A testimonio analysis. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 21*(2). doi:10.1080/13613324.2017.1377412

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

Damiani, J. (2012). Unlocking students' perspective of leadership. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 6*(2), 229-256. Retrieved from https://www.iejee.com/index.php/IEJEE

Davis, B. W., Gooden, M. A., & Micheaux, D. J. (2015). Color-blind leadership: A critical race theory analysis of the ISLLC and ELCC standards. *Education*

Administration Quarterly, 51(3). doi:10.1177/0013161X15587092

Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 52*(2), 221-258. doi:10.1177/0013161X15587092

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.).New York: New York University Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

DePaulo, P. (2000). Sample size for qualitative research: The risk of missing something important. Retrieved from www.quirks.com/articles/a2000/20001202.aspx?searchID=513603740

Dixson, D. D., Roberson, C. C., & Worrell, F. C. (2017). Psychosocial keys to African American achievement? Examining the relationship between achievement and psychosocial variables in high achieving African Americans. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 28*(2), 120-140. doi:10.1177/1932202X17701734

Dutta, V., & Sahney, S. (2016). School leadership and its impact on student achievement: The mediating role of school climate and teacher job satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Management, 30*(6), 941-958. doi:10.1108/IJEM-12-2014-0170

Duwe, B. E. (2017). *A collective case study: Student voice and the implications for partnership, activism and leadership* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from

https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2374&context=etd

Freeman, J., & Simonsen, B. (2015). Examining the impact of policy and practice interventions on high school dropout and school completion rates: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 85*(2), 205-248. doi:10.3102/0034654314554431

Gale, J. J., & Bishop, P. A. (2014). The work of effective middle grades principals: Responsiveness and relationships. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 37*(9), 1-23. doi:10.1080/19404476.2014.11462112

Gentilucci, J. L., Denti, L., & Guaglianone, C. (2013). New principals' perspectives of their multifaceted roles. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, *24*, 75-85. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1013151)

Gentilucci, J. L., & Muto, C. C. (2007). Principals' influence on academic achievement: The student perspective. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin,* 91(3), 219-236. doi:10.1177/0192636507303738

Grice, A. W., & Parker, L. (2018). Educational cultural negotiators (ECNs) for students of color: A descriptive study of racial advocacy leaders. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 21*(1), 45-62. doi:10.1080/13613324.2017.1294565

Gulsen, C., & Gulenay, G. B. (2014). The principal and healthy school climate. *Social Behavior and Personality, 42*(1), 93S-100S. doi:10.2224/sbp.2014.42.0.S93

Hall, G. F., & Hord, S. M. (2015). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles and potholes* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Hanson, T., Polik, J., & Cerna, R. (2017, February). *Short-term impacts of student listening circles on student perceptions of school climate and of their own competencies*. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Institute of Education Science, U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2017210.pdf

Hays, P. S. (2013). Narrowing the gap: Three key dimensions on site-based leadership in four Boston charter public schools. *Educational and Urban Society, 45*(1), 37-87. doi:10.1177/0013124511404065

Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2014). Modeling the longitudinal effects of school leadership on teaching and learning. *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*(5), 663-681. doi:10.1108/JEA-08-2013-0097

Hitt, D. H., & Tucker, P. D. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Education Research, 86*(2), 531-569. doi:10.3102/0034654315614911

Irby, D. J., & Mawhinney, L. (2014). Strategy development for urban dropout prevention: Partnering with formerly incarcerated adult noncompleters. *Preventing School Failure*, *58*(2), 110-119. doi:10.1080/1045988X.2013.785923

Jeffers, J. (2010, October 21). The underutilization of ethnography in user experience research [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://blog.gfk.com/2010/10/the-underutilization-of-ethnography-in-user-experience-research/

Kena, G., Aud, S., Johnson, F., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Rathbun, A., & Kristapovich, P. (2014). *The condition of education 2014* (NCES 2014-083). National Center for

Education Statistics. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED545122)

Korbova, N., & Starobin, S. S. (2015). A comparative study of student engagement, satisfaction, and academic success among international and American students. *Journal of International Students, 5*(1), 72-85. doi:10.31274/etd-180810-1555

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7-24. doi: 10.1080/095183998236863

Magaldi, D., Conway, T., & Trub, L. (2018). "I am here for a reason": Minority teachers bridging many divides in urban education, *Race Ethnicity and Education, 21*(3), 306-318. doi:10.1080/13613324.2016.1248822

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *11*(3). Retrieved from http://www.qualitativeresearch.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1428/3028. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and Implementation.* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Milligan, T., & Howley, C. (2015). Educational leadership in our peculiar institutions: Understandings of principals in segregated white-staffed urban elementary schools in the United States. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 17*(1), 43-61. doi:10.18251/ijme.v17i1.873

Morgan, L. M. (2014). *Review of the literature in dropout prevention.* Colorado Department of Education, USDE High School Graduation Initiatives Project. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *The condition of education 2017.* Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017144

Neal-Jackson, A. (2018). A meta-ethnographic review of the experiences of African American girls and young women in K–12 education. *Review of Educational Research, 20*(10), 1-39. doi:10.3102/0034654318760785

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Pauliene, R. (2012). Transforming leadership styles and knowledge sharing in a multicultural context. *Business, Management and Education, 10*(1), 91-109. doi:10.3846/bme.2012.08

Pietsch, M., & Tulowitzki, P. (2017) Disentangling school leadership and its ties to instructional practices: An empirical comparison of various leadership styles, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 28*(4), 629-649. doi:10.1080/09243453.2017.1363787

Pinto, D. A. (2014). *Effective principal leadership behavior: The student perspective*

(Doctoral dissertation, California State University, San Bernadino). Retrieved from http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd

Rolland, G. (2011). *African American male students' perceptions of factors that contribute to their academic success* (Doctoral dissertation, Georgia Southern University). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/386

Romero, L. (2013). Trust, behavior, and high school outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration, 53(2*), 215-235. doi:10.1108/JEA-07-2013-0079

Sammons, P., Davis, S., Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2014). Using mixed methods to investigate school improvement and the role of leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*(5), 565-589. doi:10.1108/JEA-10-2013-0121

Seider, S., Graves, D., El-Amin, A., Clark, S., Soutter, M., Tamerat, . . . & Sklarwitz, S. (2016). Preparing adolescents attending progressive and no-excuses urban charter schools to analyze, navigate, and challenge race and class inequality. *Teachers College Record, 118*(12), 1-54. Retrieved from https://www.tcrecord.org/

Taines, C. (2014). Educators and youth activists: A negotiation over enhancing students' role in school life. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*, 153-178. doi:10.1007/s10833-013-9220-y

TheEllenShow. (2020, January 29). *Ellen pleads for student's return to school after dress code controversy* [Video file]. YouTube. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aInpfPQRnyc

U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *Sex by school enrollment by educational attainment by employment status for the population 16 to 19 years.* Retrieved from

https://data.census.gov/cedsci/

Volin, K. C. (2018). The challenges and possibilities of including students in middle

school leadership: Building and sustaining change. *Journal of Ethical Educational*

Leadership, 1, 67-75. Retrieved from http://www.cojeel.org/

Ward, C. (2013). Why leadership matters: One school's journey to success. *Educational*

Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 24, 62-67.

Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1013148)

Wiggan, G., & Watson-Vandiver, M. (2018). Urban school success: Lessons from a high-

achieving urban school, and students' reactions to Ferguson, Missouri. *Education*

and Urban Society, 51(8), 1-32. doi:10.1177/0013124517751721

Wright Edelman, M. (2016, March). *A conversation with Marian Wright Edelman. Race*

and social justice. 2016 Event Series, College of Charleston, SC. Retrieved from

https://friendsof.cofc.edu/home

Zirkel, S., & Johnson, T. (2016). Mirror, mirror on the wall: A critical examination of the

conceptualization of the study of Black racial identity in education. *Educational*

Researcher, 45(5), 301-311. doi:10.3102/0013189X16656938

Appendix: Interview Protocol for Graduates

Research Question

What perceptions do African American students who graduated from high school have of

the leadership of their African American principal?

Participant Questions

1. How would you describe the ideal high school principal?

   Probe:

   - What else might this ideal principal do to contribute to school

     improvement?

2. How would you describe your principal?

   Probe:

   - Have you seen your principal at community or afterschool events? What

     did you notice about her behavior at the events?

3. How would you describe your relationship with the principal?

   Probes:

   - What kind of experiences did you have with your principal?

   - What else have you seen the principal do to promote those experiences?

   - In what ways did you trust or not trust your principal?

   - In what ways did you feel that you were listened to or not listened to?

     Give me an example.

   - In what ways, if any, did you feel a sense of belonging at OHS? Can you

     tell me how?

- What else have you seen the principal do to promote your sense of belonging?

- Are there ways the principal worked to improve the school climate at OHS?

- What else did you see the principal do to improve the school climate?

4. In what ways, if any, has the principal influenced your academic success or other positive outcomes?

   Probes:

   - Which positive student outcomes of yours did the principal motivate?

   - What have you seen or experienced the principal do to motivate positive school outcomes?

   - Which positive student outcomes of others did the principal motivate?

   - What else have you seen the principal do to motivate positive school outcomes in others?

5. The principal identifies as an African American, and you identify as an African American. How would you describe the cultural climate at the school?

   Probes:

   - How have you heard the principal talk about the goals of the school?

   - What did you see or hear?

   - How could you imagine the cultural climate might have been if the race of the principal were different?

- In what way, if any, was the race of the principal important to you or has influenced how you experienced her leadership?

- In what ways, if any, did you feel the principal's race contributes to your success as a graduate?

- In what ways, if any, did you connect to your principal on a racial or cultural level?

- In what ways, if any, did you feel the principal's race contributes to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the school?

6. What else would you like to share about the principal, the cultural environment, the school, or positive student outcomes?

Background/Demographic Questions

- Number of years at the school and years since graduation

- Number of years with an African American principal