YOUR VOICE IS MY FAVORITE SOUND: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF

ROYALSAPPHIRES MEMBERS & TEACHERS AT REGAL ACADEMY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Safety, security, freedom of expression, love, and support are critical components for adolescent youth that encourage growth and development. This study explored how Black girls make sense of their educational experiences while partnering with school staff through the RoyalSapphires program. Children must be in relationships with well-intended caring adults to facilitate adolescent growth and leadership. This study included a focus group with school administrators in charge of the curriculum for the afterschool program; members participated in semi-structured interviews and focus groups with members of RoyalSapphires.

The findings suggest that members felt safe with the coordinators of RoyalSapphires, which was critical in sharing and learning through the afterschool program. Additionally, participants enjoyed these curated spaces dedicated to girls being in fellowship with each other. Finally, the time spent with RoyalSapphires was a source of validation and joy at the end of the school day. The program coordinators outlined their intentions to create a welcoming program for members facilitated by adults with their best interests at heart. The themes from this study were instrumental in creating an action plan grounded in creating a curriculum designed with the needs of participants at the forefront and led by a 3–5-member advisor board.

The advisory board will seek representatives who are trailblazers in education, business, and leadership domains to create programming to share with middle school administrators to pilot this afterschool curriculum in their location. Using Yosso's (2005) six types of Community of Cultural Wealth as an asset framework when working with students from marginalized backgrounds, the curriculum will be instrumental in creating practical programming relevant to participants while providing assessment throughout the program. Ultimately, this afterschool curriculum seeks to partner with Black girls to enhance their skills through an all-girl environment while introducing valuable topics and activities to spark leadership development for high school and beyond.

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Ama, and niece, Gabrielle, who I learn from and love. They are the future, and I am so grateful to witness their awesomeness and amazingness. To my sister, LaVetta, who refuses to read anything but is nonetheless supportive and encouraging; my neighbor, Erin, who was the catalyst for my relationship with RoyalSapphires; my dear friend Marian; my cohort sistas, Chantelle and Chavone; my sorority sistas, LaKeisha, Jackie, Makeda, Amaka, Rita, and a host of outstanding women - Erica, Martha, and Lizz that I am fortunate to know, learn and grow from – I am truly grateful.

Finally, my favorite doctoral memory came from an interaction with my mom. I was reading and must have made a noise because I was not "picking up what the literature was putting down," She wondered what I was doing. I told her I was reading for school, and it was challenging. She turned to me and said, "You're going to get that degree." As always, she was right. I dedicate this to my mom, my inspiration and guidance, Peggy Jean German Stubblefield.

Dr. Aryn Baxter, thank you for everything. You were attentive and thoughtful when you took our cohort under your wing. I am so grateful for your kindness. It was so good to spend time with you at CIES. Special shout out to **Dr. Liz Essex**; thank you for everything. You stepped right in there and cheered us on to this moment. I loved learning from you in class, and now you, as my DiP Chair, are the icing on the cake. Thank you for everything! Now **listen**, **Dr. Matt Witenstein**, I was so lucky to be in your class the first term. I loved both classes you taught us and greatly learned from you. Getting to know you through our travels and writing has been great. The opportunity to work with you, Chantelle, and NatiD were instrumental in setting the stage for how I conducted my research and collected data. Thank you for taking me under your tutelage and being so kind. You are amazing!

Dr. Lauren Mims, thank you for agreeing to meet with me. When I read your article, I shared it with my whole family. The first time we spoke, I was nervous. You were so kind and helpful. Your piece was instrumental in the path I took with my research. I was ecstatic when you agreed to serve as my content specialist. The feedback you provided me with not only made me think but provided me with other scholars studying a similar topic. Thank you for being a part of my dissertation journey.

To my Ghana family, **Mom, Ernest, Emmanuel, Irene, Sally, Kwadwo, Ama, and Fred**, I love you so much! Thank you for all of your prayers and kind words. While in Ghana, I was so grateful for everyone's help watching the kids, taking them off my hands for a few hours while I was reading or writing, bringing food to the house, and encouraging me to take breaks. I thought I would fall behind, but I was able to balance everything with your support and assistance. I am eternally grateful. Domestically, a few

folks helped me along the way: **<u>Shane</u>**, for always encouraging me to do hard things; **<u>Dr. Rhonda Hylton Writes of Rhonda Hylton Writes, LLC</u>**, for your expertise and knowledge and for being a vessel to understand the doctoral process better.

To the **<u>members of RoyalSapphires</u>**, thank you for sharing your insights with me. I looked forward to Tuesdays at 3:00 PM because I would spend time with you, observe your meetings, and learn about your experiences in the focus groups and interviews. When I walked into the room for our meetings, it made everything before that moment disappear. I was so happy to spend the next 1.5 hours with you. To the **<u>staff at Regal Academy</u>**, I am in awe of the work you do for your students and through RoyalSapphires. When you shared your desire to find a curriculum for the population of students that you serve, I told you I was ready for the job! I cannot wait to share the next part of my journey with you.

I would not be here if not for the great women I have known who instilled in me their stories and shared their journeys with me. Pictures are in front of my desk and behind me in my home office that remind me of where I started this doctoral journey. When I look at the many photos, I see them in me and have the foresight to see the remarkable work I will do due to this educational experience. I leave you with the inspiring words of the late great, Toni Morrison and Fannie Lou Hamer:
 "When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else, then your job is to empower somebody else." **<u>~Toni Morrison</u>**
 "Never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried you over." **<u>~Fannie Lou Hamer</u>**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Topic

Growing research explains how some adults perceive Black girls in ways that negatively influence their educational experiences and contribute to inequitable involvement in academic life and, as a result, the judicial system (Epstein & Blake, 2017). This study provides a snapshot of the safe space in which Black girls experience care, leadership development, and growth opportunities in school. It focuses on the experiences of Black girls participating in the RoyalSapphires afterschool program at Regal Academy (program and school names are pseudonyms). It illuminates how safe spaces where Black girls thrive and grow can inform and expand RoyalSapphires' current programming.

Problem of Practice

Black girls are suffering from adultification bias (Morris, 2019). Adultification bias occurs when adults view and treat Black girls as older than their age and damage their school experience. As Black girls enter and transition through early to middle adolescence, adults may view them as older, limiting the care and concern vital for their growth and development (Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez, 2017). As a result, the schooling experience may become a hostile learning environment for them. This study assesses how the RoyalSapphires afterschool program seeks to cultivate educational spaces where Black girls can learn and thrive.

Justification of the Problem

Throughout my work in education, I have observed situations in which White girls thrive in school. I witnessed school administrators and teachers support White girls

by creating a safe space for advocacy and care, challenging them academically, and investing in their leadership development. I recently watched a college student panel of White girls discuss their experiences in school. They repeatedly reported making mistakes, getting angry with teachers, and receiving encouragement and support from administrators and educators to continue working hard, despite not getting the desired results. Likewise, they discussed being selected for experiences or having school administrators nominate them for awards that changed their lives (First Tee, personal communication, November 4, 2021).

I desire for Black girls to have similar school experiences. My hope for my daughter and all Black girls is that when they reflect on their schooling experiences, they know educational administrators supported and challenged them to work toward optimal success. Sadly, many school administrators and teachers who make decisions for Black girls believe they should be treated as more mature and resilient than most girls their age. As a result, Black girls are not protected and are generally penalized based on one infraction (Epstein, Black, & Gonzalez, 2017). I want Black girls to flourish and thrive and, more importantly, feel that the adults in their school understand and value what is best for them. This study, in partnership with members of the RoyalSapphires afterschool program, was an opportunity to learn from students about their experiences in this setting. Members of RoyalSapphires shed light on their experiences and provided feedback that coordinators, administrators, and parents may use to improve the program and experiences of future members.

A report developed by Epstein and Black (2017) provided data comparing and outlining the school experience of Black girls with their White peers at the same age. The

report findings assert that adults believe Black girls need less care, are more independent, and require less nurturing (Epstein & Black, 2017). These views by adults in schools may lead to Black girls' limited exposure to care, support, and exclusion from potential leadership opportunities. This study provided an avenue for members of RoyalSapphires to share their feelings about the program and potentially share ways to improve it. This opportunity for Black girls at Regal Academy to narrate their lived experiences may be a step in the right direction for members' autonomy and validation.

RoyalSapphires seeks to provide members with the necessary support and guidance to perform at optimal levels without barriers. It is vital that educators are trained to understand that what they believe about and how they treat Black girls directly affects how they perceive themselves in educational environments.

Organizational Context

Regal Academy is a tuition-free charter school in the Midwest, home to 464 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Regal Academy's student population is 51% female and 49% male, with 100% qualifying for free or reduced lunch (Elementary Schools, 2021). The ethnicity breakdown of students is 87% Black, six percent two or more races, four percent White, three percent Hispanic, one percent Asian, and one percent American Indian (Elementary Schools, 2021). Considering the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, there is an assumption that students are from a higher level of poverty (Elementary Schools, 2021). The school was on the verge of closing due to various factors, including abysmal academic performance on the state-required test, with a ranking of well below expectations in elementary reading and math performance and in preparing students for high school (Annual Report, 2020). Regal

Academy ranks bottom 50% of the state in Math and Reading/Language Arts testing (Public School Review, 2021).

In 2016, RoyalSapphires was created by the middle school Language Arts teacher as a way for girls between fourth and eighth grades to connect within a safe environment. The teachers at Regal Academy observed the absence of a Health class. The girls needed strategies to communicate when disagreements occurred and help with their hygiene. RoyalSapphires aims to teach female students "life skills, such as self-care, respect, discipline, and independence" (Public School Academy, 2018). This program has successfully allowed students to get to know each other and build relationships with peers. Recently, members of RoyalSapphires have focused on identifying healthy relationships, conflict resolution, fitting in, and leadership development.

The current coordinator of RoyalSapphires observed positive changes in members with the reduction of infractions from members for fighting; and when students were in crisis, they would seek out a member of the RoyalSapphires team. She recalled a few instances where teachers asked her not to allow RoyalSapphires members to attend the afterschool program because they received a disciplinary infraction, were sent to the office or received an unfavorable offense during the school day. She explained that RoyalSapphires is an outlet for the girls and should not penalize them when they are having a rough time at school. She began to work with members of RoyalSapphires and encouraged them to be leaders, develop a healthy self-image (how each girl thinks and feels about herself), and be intentional about how they lead. By amplifying and listening to the experiences of Black girls participating in the RoyalSapphires afterschool program, this study aimed to strengthen understanding among school administrators and educators

at Regal Academy. My goal is to create an afterschool model similar to RoyalSapphires in other schools serving a large population of Black girls.

Deficiencies in the Organizational Knowledge Record

Through their research, Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) identified limited scholarship that outlines a comprehensive view of the experiences and processes that Black girls encounter in school environments. Their study adds to the narrow scholarship regarding educational settings where Black girls can exhibit and expand their leadership development skills. According to Epstein and Blake (2017), Black girls' advocacy in the classroom is perceived as aggressive rather than assertive. My analysis allows school leaders to hear directly from Black girls about their experiences and lead educators to identify safe, educational environments for them.

Currently, feminist frameworks in education have traditionally focused on the experiences of White girls and women (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Crenshaw (1995) describes that if we consider Black girls experiences through the limited scope of feminism, there may be a gap of understanding as they do not experience sexism through the same lens of white women and they do not experience racism the same as Black boys. Feminism alone cannot be the standard to assess the challenges that Black girls experience in educational settings (Ladner, 1987). Carby (2004) believes that the feminist theory is a premise of the power White women have as the oppressors of Black girls and women. Thus, the idea of feminism compromises forms of solidarity between Black girls and women (Carby, 2004).

Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) argued that Critical Race Feminism (CRF) allows an examination of Black girls' educational environment based on their

intersectionality. Intersectionality considers how race, class, gender, and other personal qualities coincide with defining the experiences of black girls (Crenshaw, 1989). Yet, frameworks grounded by race focus on Black boys and their disparities in school settings (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Additionally, Hill (2016) considered the framework of Black Girlhood as an opportunity to dispel the myths associated with Black girls through the adultification bias and normalize Black girls' experiences. These frameworks are grounded in research that identifies the realities Black girls experience in the classroom, but more scholarship is needed in identifying the many attributes Black girls possess. Black girls' experiences and leadership opportunities are not researched in detail. Generally, the focal point of scholarship is White girls or Black boys and their school perspectives and circumstances.

Audience

Different audiences benefit from this study. In partnership with Regal Academy and the RoyalSapphires' afterschool program, RoyalSapphires had the opportunity to learn more about its programming and benefits directly from students. The goal was for Regal Academy administrators to utilize the study's findings to develop strategies and best practices for supporting Black girls through RoyalSapphires. Administrators could also use feedback from members to identify strategies ensuring educational environments are inclusive for Black girls. Specifically, I hoped administrators and staff at Regal Academy could utilize the findings to learn more about their students and listen to the voices of Black girls at the school. This study aimed to emphasize the academic and personal strengths of Black girls at Regal Academy and adjust programming based on the needs of the members of RoyalSapphires.

Broadly, educational and judicial administrators, parents, community organization leaders, educators in urban and rural school districts, and policy administrators will benefit from learning about their decisions' impact on Black girls. Therefore, it is crucial for school and law officials to participate in training, which includes identifying the signs of adultification bias in these settings (Epstein & Blake, 2017). In addition to including parents as vital audience members, this study allows parents to understand the experiences that may impact their children and prompt them to partner with the school. When Black girls are supported by caring adults, this creates an environment prepared to assist them to prospering academically and socially (Morris, 2019). Finally, the study provides a resource for higher education administrators and teacher education programs to utilize when working with Black girls in school settings.

Overview of Theoretical Framework/Methods/Research Questions

This study explores how Black girls make sense of their experiences in an educational setting while being provided support through an afterschool program, RoyalSapphires. To combat the concern that contributes to Black girls' erasure and their experiences, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) provides a framework from an asset-based perspective that explores the skills and attributes that Black girls receive from their family and community of supporters. CCW draws on critical race theory (CRT) to confront inadequate views of Black girls (Yosso, 2005). CRT challenges the traditional notion of cultural capital from a deficient perception to an assets-based perspective (Yosso, 2005). By using CRT and CCW, Black girls are celebrated in this study and valued for the many cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities they possess (Yosso, 2005). This study utilized the experimental action research (EAR) method

through interviews with administrators, coordinators, and members of RoyalSapphires; focus groups with members of RoyalSapphires; and observation of RoyalSapphires meetings.

EAR supports the findings of Popper (1945), who stated that all social research is an experiment. Kurt Lewin, known as the creator of action research, conceived the process in the form of social experiments (Trist, 1976). This study analyzed the identity and agency of Black girls in their words and reality while gaining insight from administrators from Regal Academy and coordinators of RoyalSapphires (McClellan, 2020). EAR intends not to understand cause and effect better, but to establish actions that lead to positive change (Gray, 2004). This is the hallmark of action research that improves conditions for those studied through a collaborative framework. Thus, the study focused on how Black girls envision a space in which they are supported and guided by positive, caring adults. These elements provided insight into strategies that could better support members of RoyalSapphires and administrators at Regal Academy and begin to create a sustainable plan that could have a lasting impact on Black girls to thrive and flourish within educational environments.

Through EAR, I interviewed administrators at Regal Academy and coordinators of RoyalSapphires to learn more about the afterschool program, what worked well, and areas for improvement. The second step included semi-structured interviews and a focus group with members of RoyalSapphires to understand how participating in this experience enhanced their growth and leadership development. Finally, I observed RoyalSapphires meetings to record the interactions between members and coordinators of the program.

The research questions for this study were:

1. How does the afterschool program RoyalSapphires build on the Community Cultural Wealth tenets members already possess?

2. In what ways do members of RoyalSapphires benefit from participating in this afterschool program from the perspective of Regal Academy administrators and program coordinators?

3. What do Black girls in RoyalSapphires at Regal Academy need their teachers and school administrators to know to support better and develop their leadership skills (within and beyond the RoyalSapphires program)?

Limitations

My research was an opportunity to showcase and highlight the experiences of Black girls at Regal Academy in fourth to eighth grades. Before the pandemic, there were 38 members represented in RoyalSapphires in fourth through eighth grades. Administrators suspended afterschool programs when Regal Academy returned to in-person learning during the 2021-2022 school year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the group returned to in-person meetings, the RoyalSapphires members attending meetings fluctuated from 20-25 girls each meeting during the 2022-2023 school year.

Through convenience sampling, I invited members of RoyalSapphires who were present to participate in a series of ongoing meetings and contribute their input to my research study. Convenience sampling is participants in a study that falls into three categories. Participants are available during the study, those with knowledge about the topic and those willing to participate (Hesse-Biber, 2017). RoyalSapphires members and

teachers at Regal Academy engaged in semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and meeting observations (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Through this study, I interviewed 6 members of RoyalSapphires, represented by members from fourth through eighth grades.

Inviting members from each stage ensured there was representation from each grade, though there was uncertainty how many students would return to the group in the fall. Additionally, parents and guardians were not asked to provide feedback during the study. Gaining information from coordinators and members of RoyalSapphires as well as administrators of Regal Academy was more feasible to access. Future research may include parent and guardian feedback.

Review of Related Research

Framework Informing the Study

Yosso's (2005) CCW framework, which provides a progressive method with a foundation in critical race theory (CRT), was used for this study. CRT is a tool to dismantle the impact of racial injustices and the treatment of underrepresented people through the educational and judicial system (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's (2005) CCW framework celebrates the six tenets that people of color (POC) showcase to the world as their strength in the face of injustices. The six tenets are: aspirational capital; familial capital; social capital; navigational capital; resistant capital; and linguistic capital. I used these tenets to consider the many assets Black girls are armed with and identified how RoyalSapphires assist Black girls with navigating educational spaces at Regal Academy.

My study showcased the experiences of Black girls at Regal Academy in fourth through eighth grades. During this period of adolescence, children develop their leadership skills (Hancock, Dyk, & Jones, 2012). Adultification bias does not help the

school environment become a place where Black girls with the necessary tools to harness their leadership skills, such as developing self-confidence, understanding leadership roles in the classroom, and advocating for themselves (Morris, 2019). Additionally, Black girls may encounter school administrators and educators with low academic standards, perpetuating the negative perceptions Black girls may believe about themselves (Morris, 2019). Ultimately, educators' behaviors matter and serve as a deterrent for Black girls to express themselves authentically (McClellan, 2020).

Most notably, Yosso (2005) asserted that the educational system manufactures a culture of insufficiency belief throughout higher education. Yosso (2005) developed CCW to showcase and identify the ability, expertise, and capabilities that underrepresented students bring to the college environment. CCW is a method used to recognize how students of color gain access to and experience college from a strengths-based framework (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's (2005) CCW provides an avenue to showcase the vast amount of social and familial support provided to students from marginalized backgrounds and how this support is demonstrated in students' lives. The framework is a way to acknowledge, recognize, and celebrate the cultural gifts students bring to educational settings.

Many educational institutions have viewed students from marginalized backgrounds as lacking essential skills to succeed in school (Valenzuela, 1999). CCW stems from the lens of Bourdieu's (1977) framework of hierarchical society and how it reproduces itself. People of color are regarded as lacking because they do not come from a white middle to upper-class background (Yosso, 2005). Instead, CCW challenges higher education professionals to consider the many assets that students bring to

educational settings. This study used CCW to address the gap in knowledge in an innovative manner through a K-12 educational environment.

Studies utilizing Yosso (2005) CCW are grounded in learning about the experiences of students of color through higher education. Perez's (2017) study focused on the affairs of 21 Latino male students and how their academic fortitude was fostered and maintained by CCW at a selective institution. Through his research, Perez (2017) described how Latino males are often known for being underrepresented on college campuses, not returning for the second year of college, and having dismal graduation rates. Perez (2017) utilized CCW to showcase the skills, knowledge, and resources Latino male students use to create a positive transition through higher education. Samuelson and Litzler (2015) engaged CCW as a method for students of color to persist through an engineering program. Samuelson and Litzler (2015) identified the engineering program as an educational system developed to advance White male students, which of the different types of capital students use to persist through this system.

However, there is limited research on Yosso's (2005) CCW applied to students' experiences in the K-12 educational system and, more importantly, how it was used to study adolescent Black girls. Many different frameworks are grounded in identifying Black girls' experiences in the classroom but fall short of identifying the many attributes Black girls possess. Feminist and racial methodologies typically center on the education of White women/girls and educational barriers for Black boys (Evan-Winters & Esposito, 2010). These methodologies effectively allow Black girls' academic and schooling experiences to become a non-issue (Evans-Winters, 2005). Additionally, frameworks grounded by race highlight Black boys and their disparities in school settings (Evans-

Winters & Esposito, 2010). My goal throughout this study was to use Yosso's (2005) framework to celebrate members of RoyalSapphires through the six tenets of CCW and to highlight the assets Black girls use to face injustices in the world. Grounding this study in CCW allowed Black girls to share their experiences and create a framework for educational leaders and caring adults to develop safe spaces to support learning for them.

Black girls deal with biased perceptions from educators and harsher penalties for school infractions (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). From the research on Black girls regarding the adultification bias, three critical themes convey where we find ourselves now. In the following sections, the research findings will describe the themes: historical information regarding erasure of Black girls from the data; how Black girls suffer from the misconceptions of Black women; and the school-to-prison pipeline that seems to target Black girls. I build on these themes by exploring how members of RoyalSapphires' experiences reflect the six tenets of Yosso's (2005) CCW.

Erasure of Black Girls' Experiences in Schools

Most school focus on discipline has centered on Black boys (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). The critical initiatives that former President Barack Obama created in 2014 for Black boys allowed opportunities for additional support through mentors, educational resources, occupational funding, and higher education aid (Lane-Steele, 2020). These initiatives and several hundred others established programs exclusively for Black boys to address barriers in education, professions, and the legal system barriers experienced by young boys and men (Lane-Steele, 2020). Consequently, Black girls have been excluded from the conversation.

Despite dealing with the same or more severe experiences and punishments as Black boys, Black girls have suffered through adversities with limited financial resources intended to change their lives (Lane-Steele, 2020). The 2016 United States Department of Education Report stated that Black girls account for 14 percent of suspensions but denote eight percent of school registration. The Baltimore City School District recorded Black girls as the only girls arrested for infractions included excessive force (McClellan, 2018). The erasure of Black girls' experiences is a problem and further perpetuates their unfair treatment.

Yosso's ideal of aspirational capital refers to the hopes and dreams of Black girls exploring and learning through harsh educational systems (2005). Building on findings from their initial report, Epstein and Blake (2017) conducted focus groups to support their initial discoveries on the adultification bias by asking participants to provide examples of their experiences in the classroom and school environments. Yosso's navigational capital describes how Black girls negotiate with their teachers and peers in educational settings (2005). Participants described how administrators and educators created school environments where Black girls should be less seen and exhibit fewer vocal behaviors (Epstein & Blake, 2017).

Resistant capital refers to how Black girls advocate for themselves in school settings. In school, Black girls shared sentiments that highlighted ways they feel they should be nonexistent, soft-spoken, have a lighter complexion, and be cute, making them often feel like they do not belong and are not enough (Epstein & Blake, 2017). Similarly, girls in Oakland, California, described experiences where none of the teachers would hear them, so they adapted behaviors that allowed them to be visible in class (Ohlson &

Bedrossian, 2016). This sentiment expressed by Black girls in California highlights the aspirational capital they bring to situations and acknowledges their presence in classroom spaces.

Adultification Bias

Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez (2017) conducted a study that, for the first time, expressed that some adults perceived Black girls as not needing protection and being more advanced for their age compared with their White female peers between the ages of five through 14. As a result of these negative perceptions by adults, the treatment of Black girls as young as five years old was considered more mature and similar to that of Black women. These findings provide a rationale for the unnecessary treatment and discipline of Black girls in school. In 2014, Goff and his colleagues studied the treatment of Black boys starting at the age of 10. They discovered that compared to their White peers, Black boys were perceived as older, guilty when suspected of a crime, and, if accused, would face police violence (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017).

Yosso's (2005) familial capital asserts that Black girls believe schools exists on the premise of providing a pathway to educational success. Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez (2017) expanded on this idea by bringing to the attention of educators, legislators, social workers, members of the juvenile judicial system, and those that influence children, the importance of developing training and creating efforts to respond to this bias against Black girls. The voices of Black girls must persist at the forefront of this work. It has become clear that efforts to help all girls, or all Black youth, are not specifically beneficial or motivating to Black girls (Bromley, 2017).

The report by Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez (2017) described three stereotypes of Black women: the Jezebel, who is oversexualized and promiscuous; the Mamie, as motherly and domestic, usually associated with slavery and working in the master's house; and the Angry Black Woman (ABW), which characterizes Black women as argumentative, boisterous, and unhappy, laying the foundation for the idea that Black girls' actions are menacing and rude (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). Through focus groups conducted by Blake and Epstein (2017), many respondents felt that these negative attitudes were synonymous with only Black girls. Consequently, advocating for oneself looked differently for Black girls versus White girls. This treatment frequently led to Black girls feeling like they could not have a difference in thought. The views expressed through the focus group responses and research indicate that some adults' limited perceptions of Black girls in schools may lead to limited exposure to offered leadership opportunities and infrequent academic favor.

Linguistic capital is a form of CCW that reflects the premise that Black girls enter educational environments prepared to communicate, lead and advocate for themselves using various mediums instilled through family or social support systems. Through Epstein and Blake's (2017) research, Black girls reported that their leadership and advocacy diminished or renounced in educational settings due to the perception of being rude or insubordinate. In a study conducted by the Girl Scouts (2008), Black girls ages 13-17 indicated favorably to be a leader, with significantly higher engagement than White and Asian girls. Considering the societal influences of racism, gender biases, and economic disparities, Black girls are more likely to be shunned and silenced in schools (Morris, 2019). Black girls who discerned social capital were encouraged to be

inquisitive (Yosso, 2005). According to Morris, educators label Black girls as loud or angry when challenging their teachers (2019). Through the adultification bias, there is a belief that Black girls are older, and thus when speaking against a teacher, Black girls are viewed as more senior and not respected for their communication style (Morris, 2019).

When Black girls are perceived by White administrators (or teachers) to be older, they may face harsher punishments, and minor infractions will result in immediate negative ramifications. In some respects, the idea is that educational administrators' interactions with Black girls are less likely to be based on care and concern. Educators should seek training opportunities that will allow them to develop relationships with Black girls based on their age and maturity, thus leading educators to guide Black girls appropriately. Linguistic capital affords Black girls freedom in the classroom that, when paired with caring educational professions, may celebrate the leadership and advocacy sentiments expressed by Black girls in educational environments.

School to Prison Pipeline

Through the adultification bias, there is a belief that Black girls know more about sex and, as a result, are participating in sexual activity (Morris, 2019). Respondents in the Epstein & Blake study (2017) described school officials who assumed and asked if Black girls were sexually active or implied that they were in front of parents and peers. Black girls felt administrators would not ask their White peers about their sexuality and other sensitive matters. Black girls often felt pushed toward promiscuity when not contemplating it (Epstein & Blake, 2017). According to Morris and Perry (2017), this negative belief by educators and school officials creates an atmosphere where Black girls are notoriously punished for subjective matters related to their behavior, dress, and

experiences in the classroom. Black girls have stated that dress codes are one way a school can specifically penalize them while providing negative responses to the composition of their bodies (McClellan, 2018).

A 1975 Children's Defense Fund report highlighted the disparities in school suspensions and discipline for Black students (Children's Defense, 1975). The discrepancies in school discipline have almost doubled since the report was published. Black students today are three times more likely than their White peers to receive a school suspension (Losen et al., 2015). Morris and Perry (2017) asserted Black girls are penalized more harshly than other girls for subjective school rules; these punishment gaps are more expansive than other girls and boys of any race. Black girls are not being treated and seen as their age. As a result, Black girls suffer from increased punishment in school, leading to Black girls feeling excluded and receiving a lack of care from adults, resulting in their perceived behaviors leading to early involvement in the legal system.

Summary

As shown through the experiences of Black girls, this study provided an opportunity to understand the adversity members of RoyalSapphires encounter and how they were supported at Regal Academy. The report by Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez (2017) provided data from adults who believe Black girls ages 5-14 are older and thus treated as adults through punishment and consequences, leading to fewer leadership opportunities. Using the three themes highlighted in this paper adds a better understanding of the relationship between Black girls and adults in charge of their care and concern. Currently, there are limited studies that include the experiences of Black girls. Even fewer studies have employed Yosso's (2005) CCW framework to highlight the inherent resources Black

girls possess and use to navigate educational spaces. Using Yosso's (2005) CCW framework, this study offered an opportunity for Black girls to share how they thrive, explore, receive support, and develop leadership in school environments.

<div align="center">Action Research Design and Methods</div>

Positioning as an Action Research Study

This study was grounded in action research which allows a small group to define the problem, act to solve the problem, evaluate how effective the actions are, and repeat steps if the problem is not solved (Bozkus & Bayrak, 2019). I used action research to facilitate and develop data collection tools (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun). Through interviews, observations, and a focus group, I partnered with administrators of Regal Academy and members of RoyalSapphires to understand how members experience the program, highlight the skills members bring to the program, and what skills the program enhances. Members of RoyalSapphires were the experts in this study, and their knowledge was essential to developing programming centered on meeting their needs, improving academic capabilities, and developing leadership skills (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016).

Using EAR, I sought to provide school administrators, parents, and community members with information directly from adolescent girls (Mertler, 2020). By providing this information to crucial stakeholders, I hoped to understand how members of RoyalSapphires benefit from participation in this afterschool program. Additionally, I encouraged a dialogue between Black girls and school administrators and coordinators and included their feedback in future programming through this program. Members of RoyalSapphires shared their experience and knowledge which is vital when developing a

program centered on enhancing their growth and leadership development (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016).

Utilizing the EAR approach in this study allowed the participants to provide insight into their beliefs about leadership and safe spaces for growth and development in school. I involved members through member checking by sharing the feedback received and ensured that I accurately captured their feedback. There is minimal research on Black youth and their leadership development (Mims & Kaler-Jones, 2020). Some studies on youth leadership have been grounded in adults' definitions of leadership or centered on the outcomes of youth programs (Mims & Kaler-Jones, 2020). Historically, Black girls have had limited opportunities to share their experiences, and when they do, they feel devalued because of biases impacting their school experiences (Edwards et al., 2016).

Site or Population Selection

Regal Academy is a tuition-free charter school in an urban Midwest city. Regal Academy is considered a charter school that functions similarly to public schools. Regal Academy is a student-centered school with dedicated and goal-oriented teachers. Teachers at Regal Academy seek to hold students to appropriate standards while focusing on a curriculum grounded in a moral focus. The principles of ethical emphasis are the curriculum's hallmark. They articulate a commitment to high academic and social values grounded in a comprehensive college preparedness pathway that will aid students to succeed in any vocational and academic path they choose.

The academic experience for children at Regal Academy centers on nine character-building monthly virtues. According to the school's parent and student handbook, the nine virtues are wisdom; respect; gratitude; self-control; perseverance;

courage; encouragement; compassion; and integrity. Students celebrate each virtue through recognition related to the moral of each month during a school assembly; students create a class contract outlining expectations with a teacher, other students, and themselves. The student-teacher ratio is 23:1, higher than the state average of 18:1 (Public School Review, 2021). Consequently, Regal Academy ranks bottom 50% in Math and Reading/Language Arts testing (Public School Review, 2021).

Before the arrival of the new principal at Regal Academy, the school was on the verge of closing due to various factors, including unsatisfactory academic performance (Department of Education, 2020). Once a new principal was selected, the focus of Regal Academy turned to teachers and enhancing opportunities for professional support for educators and staff (Department of Education, 2020). Now the school concentrates on replacing ineffective teachers and improving students' academic achievement (Annual Report, 2020). Over 75% of Regal Academy teachers have three or more years of experience, and 100% of the teachers are state-certified (Great Schools, 2020).

RoyalSapphires is an afterschool program developed by a middle school language arts teacher to provide a safe and secure environment for Black girls between fourth and eighth grade. The program began during the 2016 school year. At the time, members of RoyalSapphires met with the teacher coordinator, an English Learning Specialist, and the School Social Worker for the afterschool program. The group met bi-monthly; more than 30 students from Regal Academy consistently attended the afterschool program. The RoyalSapphires administrative team identified Black girls in fourth through eighth grades and invited them to join the meetings after school. Additionally, they shared announcements and sent information home to share with families about the program with

upcoming meeting dates. The program coordinator and adult volunteers created an environment through RoyalSapphires where girls could get to know each other and build relationships with their peers through various activities.

Researcher Role and Positionality

As the researcher, I had a limited relationship with the organization and participants. My neighbor works at Regal Academy as the Dean of Intervention. I spoke with her about my research interest, and she encouraged me to work with an afterschool program at her school called RoyalSapphires. I negotiated access to members of RoyalSapphires by attending the afterschool program and meeting with the group's advisor. Establishing a solid relationship with the coordinators allowed me to gain access to members. To conduct my study, I met with the principal to discuss my study topic and intentions with my research. After our meeting, I received approval to access the school and participants and collect data for my study.

The stakeholders for this study are members of RoyalSapphires, their parents or guardians, teacher coordinators of RoyalSapphires, and administrators at Regal Academy. As the researcher, I observed RoyalSapphires meetings and interactions between members and coordinators. In addition to these observations, the teachers identified a few members from each grade to interview. As the interviewer, I collected reliable, high-quality information from members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires and administrators of Regal Academy. In this role, I engaged in conversations and asked probing questions to ensure that I understood the experiences and motivations of those involved. The interviews allowed a few members from each grade to provide a varied view of their experiences and the program's impact on learning about Black women

leaders and leadership. The gatekeepers were the school administrators and board members. To combat potential issues, I worked with the coordinators of RoyalSapphires and the administrative team at Regal Academy. By intentionally keeping stakeholders knowledgeable about the research process, I hoped administrators and board members would be more agreeable to learning more about the experiences of members of RoyalSapphires.

I had limited influence over the organization and participants. I partnered with members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires for this study; I was accessible and supportive during the afterschool program. I intended to continue a relationship with members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires after data collection ended and to return for meetings as a volunteer for the program.

As the researcher, I was a nonparticipant observer, meaning I observed participants during meetings but did not actively participate in discussions. I regularly visited the school, built trust with school administrators, faculty, and students, and empathized with participants while maintaining objectivity. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described the nonparticipant observer as the optimal role for a researcher unfamiliar with the school site and research participants. As a nonparticipant, I was stationed in an optimal meeting space to observe, see, and hear members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) outlined ten critical observation steps to which I adhered to throughout this study.

I utilized the James Spradley three-stage observation funnel (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). I started with a descriptive observation of the setting, then moved to a narrower observation (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). As the researcher, I did not use the narrower

observation to focus on specific activities during the meetings. Finally, during observations, I concentrated on member reactions, interactions between coordinators and members, and commentary throughout the discussions (Liu & Maitlis, 2010).

I have a vast amount of personal and professional experience working with youth. Professionally, I serve as the team leader for outreach programs at an urban, large public institution in the Midwest. In this role, I create opportunities to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to consider higher education after graduation. I am the parent of an adolescent Black girl. As a parent and researcher, I am interested in understanding and learning about adolescent Black girls' educational experiences and strategies that create avenues for them to prosper and blossom at Regal Academy.

Ethical and Political Considerations

I communicated the intention of the study to focus on the experiences of members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires. There was no intended risk associated with this study. During this study, I shared and outlined an informed consent process for participants and parent(s) or guardian(s) to remain in the research and noted who to contact if they decide to discontinue their participation. If this happened, participants and their parent(s) or guardian(s) needed to communicate in writing if they were no longer interested in participating in the study.

Additionally, for members of RoyalSapphires to participate in this study, their parent(s) or guardian(s) were asked to sign a parental consent form. The initial meeting with members of RoyalSapphires allowed me to discuss the research topic, outline research goals, and answer questions from them. A signed copy of the parent consent form was required for protected participants to join the study. I ensured that all

participants were protected and safe throughout this study by keeping observation notes, interview recordings, and transcripts in a password-protected file, which will be saved on my personal computer and stored in a locked drawer in my home office.

I mitigated the unequal balance of power by motivating and encouraging participants to be authentic and honest. I identified ways to minimize unequal balance by utilizing member checking to assist with this effort. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), member checking allows the researcher to share through an interview with a few participants that the study's finding is an accurate and true depiction of their statements and feelings. Providing this option to research participants offered some level of assurance that members develop critical awareness of RoyalSapphires, they can identify issues, and they can advocate for change.

Data Collection Methods

I acted as a nonparticipant observer, ensuring adequate time for three iterations of observation by utilizing a broad to narrow perspective when taking notes. Before each meeting, I had a recorder, extra batteries, and writing materials. Throughout the study, I outlined information that would be helpful to collect during each session through the data collection process. I observed RoyalSapphires meetings, student-to-student interactions, group interaction with the coordinator, guest speaker, and student interactions. I collected field notes using descriptive and reflective methods. Finally, I shared the collected data with participants and school officials after my data collection was complete.

Along with observations, I interviewed members in the fourth through eighth grades (totaling 6 interviews with members of RoyalSapphires). One-on-one interviews for data collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) allowed research participants to

respond in a smaller setting. These responses were helpful when the researcher cannot observe a participant (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019).

Research participants engaged in open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This type of interview created an environment in which research participants could respond to questions and discuss information valuable to the researcher. It also focused on the individual experience and allows the participant to share important information regarding their perspective of RoyalSapphires. My study utilized open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured interviews will enable participants to share experiences in a smaller environment (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Two methods were employed as I prepared to interview research participants. First, I created an interview guide (Hesse-Biber, 2017) to highlight the following essential topics: members' length of involvement in the program, experience facilitating or participating in the program, and perceived impact based on participation (Weiss, 1994). It explored practical issues and considered my questions during the interview. I delved into a topic deemed to be exploratory in practice. According to Hesse-Biber (2017), exploratory research is an opportunity to consider a subject with limited research; thus, creating an interview guide is a valuable tool for this study.

Second, I used in-depth interviews to eliminate power imbalances with the research participants (Hesse-Biber, 2017). In-depth interviews allowed research participants to share their stories and anecdotes, thus encouraging an environment where members of RoyalSapphires see themselves as experts in their perspectives, experiences, and feelings. To facilitate the comfort of research participants, I was an active listener and created a supportive and safe atmosphere at Regal Academy (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

The interviews with research participants were approximately 30 minutes and focused on the experiences of members of RoyalSapphires (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Data Analysis Procedures

There is a multi-step data analysis process for EAR. Transcription was the first step in coding and making meaning from the observations, focus group sessions, and semi-structured interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2017). First, I read through the transcription and familiarized myself with the data. Stuckey (2015) highlights the critical nature of creating a storyline. Then, I reviewed the transcription and used my research questions to guide my storyline. Additionally, I utilized Otter.ai's transcription program, Otter.ai (Otter for Individuals, 2022). Next, after transcribing interviews, I reviewed and cleaned up the transcript. I also kept notes and wrote down my reactions or understandings of the data as analytic memos (Stuckey, 2015).

Coding is a multi-step repetitive process to identify the top themes in an interview. The coding process allows the researcher to segment and organize vital pieces present through observations and interviews (Agar, 1980). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) organized these steps to make sense of the data. Coding can occur through a combination of "a priori" or emergent (Stuckey, 2015). Stuckey (2015) outlined the first step similar to emic coding, where the categories are derived from the CCW tenets. The CCW tenants served as the priori codes to analyze the data. Once I completed the coding process, the final step was to identify the top themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Finally, I used an iterative memoing process (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Memoing allows the researcher to process what has occurred thus far in the data analysis process. I aimed to collate the sentiments expressed by participants through the memoing process.

After each interaction with participants, I recorded a voice memo to make sense of and describe my assessment of the exchange and consider things that happen during the iteration.

Procedures to Address Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability

I utilized three criteria for this qualitative study to establish its effectiveness: trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability. First, for a study to be considered trustworthy, researchers need to ensure that the findings will be helpful, contribute to the knowledge known on the topic, be trusted and be conducted ethically (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I employed member checking as an opportunity to provide data and limited information regarding interpretation to research participants by periodically meeting with students before meetings (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Member checking gave research participants opportunities to support, disagree with, or add additional context to the original statement and my interpretations. Additionally, I maintained in-depth notes and kept electronic copies of the interview transcripts through a reflective process. This thoughtful approach provided a more personal and insightful description of what I observed and emphasizes ideas, hunches, and impressions (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Second, credibility is an essential criterion of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on their participation in the RoyalSapphires afterschool program. Members of RoyalSapphires were invited to participate in focus groups and provided information regarding the study and purpose before confirming participation. Credibility challenged me to ensure that the findings are relevant and trustworthy. Using EAR for this study allowed for in-depth inquiry about participants' experiences through the

program and at Regal Academy. I observed meetings, focus group sessions, and semi-structured interviews to let participants share their experiences centered around the value and impact of joining RoyalSapphires.

Lastly, transferability is the ability of researchers to comprehensively study a topic and transfer knowledge learned and apply it to another context. Transferability is optimal in qualitative research (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To ensure the transferability of findings, the presentation of results will include detailed, thick descriptions (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). By asking descriptive questions in focus groups and interviews, conducting sustained observation, and compiling detailed reports that describe members' experiences, readers can determine how findings may be relevant to their current situation.

CHAPTER TWO: RESULTS OF RESEARCH

Summary of Analysis

As I arrived at Regal Academy, numerous cars were waiting to pick up their students. As I drove around the vehicles, I parked in a visitor parking spot and walked to the building. There were two entrances: one the staff used for afternoon dismissal and the other for visitors. Eventually, the front desk staff would recognize me and buzz me right into the building. There were eight chairs in the waiting area, but during my many visits, I realized it would be better for me to find a place to stand as those seats were for waiting students.

Afternoon dismissal at Regal Academy was busy but organized. Students fell into two categories in the waiting area (the main office): those whose parents notified the school that they would be late picking up their student or those whose parents shared with the school not to put their child on the bus. I arrived during afternoon dismissal to ensure I was there for the start of RoyalSapphires programming. As a visitor, I waited in the office for an escort to my location. Being present and observing the school through the eyes of the participants and staff allowed me time to dedicate myself to this moment.

The 4th and 5th graders met in a classroom, and the 6-8th graders were either in the gym or a classroom. As I walked through the hallways, schoolchildren sat on the floor, chatting with their neighbors and eating a snack while waiting for their late bus to arrive. The hallways had a lot of energy; it was a welcome treat to see children in their school element. Some of the students would wave or smile as I walked past them on the way to my RoyalSapphires meeting location. Once I entered the room where the meetings were taking place, I found a quiet room where the girls were working together on a

worksheet or by themselves. Some girls would enter the room with me as many of them learned that their families/guardians were aware they were staying after school.

The teachers talked with team members to ensure that the girls who wanted to be included in the afterschool program were present. There were also a few teachers organizing snacks. As I learned through observing, the teachers intentionally served healthy snacks for members. They wanted the program to provide the girls with snacks that were good for them but also sustain them if they did not get enough to eat later or did not have enough to eat throughout the school day. The teachers also talked to each other, ensuring they had enough supplies for the day's activity.

During the observations, I learned the teachers were also responsible for younger siblings. The teachers rotated which group welcomed the younger siblings. When the teachers paired the younger siblings with the 4th and 5th-grade groups, they could do an activity on the class iPad. The 6th through 8th-grade group met in the gym, allowing the younger siblings to run around and play with some gym resources.

In my initial meetings with coordinators and staff at Regal Academy, I communicated my desire to be a non-participant observer. They shared with the girls who I was and what I was doing as a part of my research before I arrived. I appreciated the staff sharing my intentions with the members, and it made for a smooth transition upon my arrival at the meeting location. I walked in, and the girls anticipated my attendance; they went about their everyday activities. I would set up my location just a few desks away from them and begin my written sketch of the meeting activities and interactions while recording the meeting using a digital voice recorder. Later, when I conducted my

focus group meetings with each group (group 1: 4th and 5th grade & group 2: 6th-8th grade), the girls asked me questions about my schooling and writing papers.

Table 1: Participants

Number of Attendees	Topic	Activity	Date
11	RoyalSapphires Observation 4 & 5th graders	Worksheet: T-shirt Design Contest	September 2022
20	RoyalSapphires Observation 6 – 8th graders	Worksheet: Who am I?	October 2022
8	RoyalSapphires Meeting with 4 & 5th graders	Focus Group	November 2022
11	RoyalSapphires Meeting with 6 – 8th graders Meetings	Focus Group	November 2022
5	RoyalSapphires Staff	Interviews	November 2022
6	4 – 8th grade	One-on-One Interviews	December 2022

Stakeholders

Stakeholders play an integral part in the programming and outreach to members of RoyalSapphires. The first three stakeholders include Regal Academy staff and administrators, RoyalSapphires members, and parents. These groups are considered primary stakeholders with a sustainable relationship with Regal Academy and RoyalSapphires (Lyon, 2018). The community and school board are secondary stakeholders. These secondary stakeholders are valuable members with whom to share information about the experiences of members of RoyalSapphires and Regal Academy (Lyon, 2018). The results of this study may provide community members and school board representatives with insight into strategies that best support girls within their community.

Analysis and Validity

My approach of using focus groups was critical in learning from participants about their views regarding the RoyalSapphires afterschool program, members' experiences, and feedback from staff regarding their interest in creating this opportunity for Black girls at Regal Academy (Hayashi, Abib & Hoppen 2019). Similarly, using interviews in qualitative research seeks to explore participants' inner thinking and position (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Wisher (2001) suggested using interviews for three unique categories: interest in emotions, learning more about sensitive matters, and discovering private discernments. By using focus groups and interviews for this study, I was able to grasp participants' assessments while valuing their lived experiences, which added immensely to the limited research on this topic (Kvalue, 1996).

For my study, I used three critical types of validity that Maxwell (1992) identified as necessary for qualitative studies: descriptive truth, interpretative validity, and theoretical validity. Descriptive truth requires me, through my research, to ensure that I provide direct quotes and content from participants. Maxwell (1992) outlined that researchers must report and give understanding to the data they collect. Interpretative validity ensures consideration of the information participants share with me and operate through a space of consciousness. Finally, theoretical validity outlines my intentions to use CCW as a framework to describe the attributes that members of RoyalSapphires bring to their educational and afterschool environments. Additionally, CCW, paired with EAR, frames the model I am using to understand better the experiences of RoyalSapphires and administrative staff members at Regal Academy. CCW and EAR

outline how the theory works within the framework through conducting data for my study.

When coding data, there are two methods to consider: computer or hand analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I used Otter, a computer-based analysis that stored and transcribed my interviews and focus groups' audio recordings while allowing me to sort the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). After completing my first observation, I analyzed that experience. As I looked over my notes, I wrote in the margins a few comments such as, "members are talking amongst themselves and working on activity" or, "coordinator is walking around the room encouraging and celebrating members in their small group activity." I used a similar practice once I began conducting interviews and focus groups as I listened to the audio recordings.

As I listened to the focus groups and interview recordings, I considered my research questions and Yosso's (2005) CCW tenets of aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital. I quickly learned that a safe space for RoyalSapphires members was their comfort with the school staff volunteering with the afterschool program. Additionally, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described when coding, it is a best practice to start identifying themes and sentiments repeatedly expressed by participants. My themes were based on my meeting observations, information expressed through focus groups, and experiences from my one-on-one interviews with participants.

My process as outlined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) showcased my first step with engaging with my data through coding and how this process yielded rich and thick descriptions of the members of RoyalSapphires and the school team volunteering

with the afterschool program. I used the responses and observations gathered from

participants as a framework for their lived experiences. My findings are a compilation of

my audio memos (recorded after every meeting with RoyalSapphires), research

conducted through my literature review, and strategies implemented to ensure the validity

and authenticity of participants. To arrive at my findings, I used labels to describe

sentiments and responses from participants similar to text segment codes (Creswell &

Guetterman, 2019). This process, outline in Table 2 below provides a snapshot of how I

used the views communicated through the CCW (2005) lens when coding the audio

recordings, voice memos, and observation notes.

Table 2: Coding, Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Quotes

Themes & Sub Themes	Illustrative Quotes
Theme(s): I like getting to know the girls RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment	Familial capital: A place to connect with other girls (M) Do not feel like an outcast (M) Fun and feel comfortable (M) Members have a great deal of responsibility outside of school (taking care of siblings/household chores) through RoyalSapphires they have the leeway to be a child (T)
Theme(s): I like getting to know the girls RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment	Social capital: Learning from the girls, I was able to strengthen my advocacy skills which led to stronger advocacy for RoyalSapphires members (T) RoyalSapphires is a place to belong (M) Place just for girls (M) Environment to learn through the moment (T)
Theme(s): Safe space = safe person Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment	Navigational capital: Empower members so that they know its ok to do things a different way (T) I speak up more in RoyalSapphires, and now I am not afraid to speak up in class (M)

	RoyalSapphires coordinators listen to members' likes and dislikes (M) RoyalSaaphires help with attitude and making good decisions (M)
Theme(s): RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place I like getting to know the girls Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment	Resistant capital: Debunk respectability politics (T) I am encouraged to go for it – chase my dreams (M) Free to talk about anything (M) A place to find better friends (M)
Theme(s): RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment	Linguistic capital: Being vulnerable in a safe space (T) A place to boost confidence (M) Can speak your mind (M) A happy place to be (M)
Theme(s): RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment	Aspirational capital: Tools learned here extend to the classroom (T) Do not have to be best friends to get along with the other girls (M) A place to work on controlling self (M) Better person in this environment (M)

M = Member of RoyalSapphires
T = Teacher Volunteers/Coordinators of RoyalSapphires

Data Collection

For the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, I used open-ended questions to get feedback from members and staff based on their lived experiences. Appendix F lists the protocols and questions for the focus group with members and staff, and Appendix G provides the protocol and questions for interviews all participants. All interviews and focus groups took place at Regal Academy. During each interaction, I used a digital voice recorder. I used the Otter application to transcribe and assist with coding for analysis.

Throughout my data collection process, members of RoyalSapphires and administrators shared their experiences with the afterschool program and the intentionality surrounding creating and participating in it. The curriculum themes ranged

from self-reflection to healthy friendships vs. frenemies. As I observed the meetings, the topics helped to craft the session, but the dialogue among members and administrators was a meaningful way to share similarities. Watching the exchange between administrators and members led me to consider creating a curriculum that could be distributed and given to help adult leaders identify themes with activities for afterschool programming.

The administrators admitted to researching curriculums that helped identify ideas to cover during the RoyalSapphires meeting but struggled to find relevant topics to discuss that would meet the needs of students at Regal Academy. My afterschool curriculum, based on my research, may fill this gap for teachers; it serves as the basis for my action plan. The creation of my action plan will be instrumental in developing a curriculum that adult leaders can use for afterschool programming that supports and embraces adolescent Black girls' growth and leadership development. Before starting my research, I knew many afterschool curriculums do not focus on relevant experiences that adolescent Black girls deal with, let alone how to develop the best strategies to capitalize on the assets they bring to these experiences.

Three major themes and a sub theme emerged from the participants during observations, focus groups, and interviews with members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires:

1. My safe space was based on identifying my safe person

2. I like getting to know the girls

3. RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place

    a. Sub theme: Anti-adultification Bias Environment

Findings and Results

I used an experimental action research (EAR) lens to explore the identity of Black

girls in their words and recognize their reality while gaining insight from school

administrators and coordinators (McClellan, 2020). Additionally, I used the CCW

(Yosso, 2015) tenets to showcase the attributes that Black girls bring to the

RoyalSapphires program in partnership with the staff moderating the program. In the

following sections, the research findings provide insight into how school staff creates a

safe space for all members of RoyalSapphires; share direct quotes from members on the

impact of the all-girl environment; and consider how members feel this afterschool

program serves as their happy place and how the teachers have created a safe space for

them through the RoyalSapphires program.

My safe space was based on identifying my safe person

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, there was a consistent theme among

members regarding their feelings for the staff coordinating the afterschool program.

Agger (2022) describes that during adolescence through adulthood, Black girls benefit

from supportive environments in which they can see others that look like them. Often,

members stated how the school staff created a space to share experiences and thoughts.

This sentiment supports the sub-theme in which members of RoyalSapphires could

identify allies who embraced them based on the assets they brought to the school

environment.

> Amethyst, age: 13, grade: 8th: When I came to RoyalSapphires, I knew it was
>
> going to be great because of Ms. Emerald. I had Ms. Emerald as a teacher. Her
>
> class was fun. She would help me when I would get upset and not yell at me and

help calm me down. To think about my actions. That is really the reason I keep

coming to RoyalSapphires is because I like Mrs. Emerald and I like how she

treats me.

Amethyst shared her sentiments on getting the coordinators' validation and

support, which led her to joining RoyalSapphires. She mentioned she had some hesitation

in joining an afterschool program. Still, learning that Ms. Emerald was involved in the

program solidified her participation and excitement to connect with her again. She

credited how Mrs. Emerald supported her when she was in crisis and made her calm

down and take a moment to be more entuned to how she was feeling. She felt that Mrs.

Emerald allowed her to share her feelings and served as a trusted representative to go to

when she needed additional support without judgment or repercussions.

Onyx, age: 9, grade: 4th: So, I've been able to learn that. I've been able to learn

that it's okay not to like certain things and all the teachers when they give our

snacks, they asked us if we want it or not. We be able to tell them, and they just

don't pick it for us. The RoyalSapphires teachers they tell us it's okay not to like

this and it's okay not to think that way and they are always so nice. I love

RoyalSapphires and the teachers.

Onyx provided a few examples of the critical sentiments shared by

many members of RoyalSapphires. She illustrated the sub-theme of an anti-adultification

bias environment, where school staff model to students an opportunity to advocate for

themselves without their actions being interpreted negatively or assuming that the girls

should be grateful for whatever they receive. Based on this opportunity for Onyx to share

her feelings, she felt joy (her sentiments of loving being a part of this afterschool

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program). Onyx mentioned at no other time does she get to tell an adult at school what she likes and does not like.

In late November, I interviewed the coordinators of RoyalSapphires. In our conversation, coordinators expressed their intentionality around the programming for RoyalSapphires as an opportunity to see students outside of a classroom setting to promote a space to trust and be vulnerable.

Ms. Sparkle, 3rd & 4th Grade Coordinator, RoyalSapphires: Afterschool programming helps students to get to know teachers and trust teachers. Also, for students to get to know themselves and get to trust themselves. It's really fun to see the girls outside of a classroom setting where they don't feel like they are automatically being set up to fail. If they don't understand the task or if they don't understand what is expected of them to do in school, it goes into behaviors like instantly clockwork. In RoyalSapphires, we are able to do things that keep them engaged, excited, make them feel valued, and they can participate in it regardless of the activity.

The essence of Ms. Sparkle's quote highlights why the girls return bi-weekly for this valuable time with RoyalSapphires. Every girl I interviewed expressed that RoyalSapphires was a time to be free from judgment and rules. One student summed up her experience with RoyalSapphires, similar to what was shared through meeting observations and focus groups. Jewel, who is a 7th grader and 13 years old, described RoyalSapphires as a "drama-free, calm atmosphere, a place where she communicates better, where she is able to meet with and be with all girls.' She goes on to further say

RoyalSapphires "reminds me of my happy place where I can express myself and have fun."

> Ms. Ruby, 6th – 8th Grade Coordinator, RoyalSapphires: When the girls came to check in to ensure I was attending the meeting, I made it clear to them that I would be there with them. I reassured them that I had cleared my schedule to ensure I would not leave early or miss any other meetings. I would be available to meet with them during RoyalSapphires.

> Ms. Ruby, 6th – 8th Grade Coordinator, RoyalSapphires, mentioned how she had

to leave early during a few of the RoyalSapphires meetings. When the group met last week, they checked in with her to ensure she would be in attendance for the whole session. By Regal Academy creating this anti-adultification bias environment, members of RoyalSapphires identified coordinators of RoyalSapphires as someone they want to connect with and share their experiences with at school (Morris, 2019). Morris identified that schools should ensure that Black girls have a "safe person," similar to a mentor or advocate, someone they can speak to when they are losing control or someone to talk on their behalf and recommend them for unique opportunities (Morris, 2019).

The thoughts expressed by teachers and members of RoyalSapphires demonstrate the need for this program at Regal Academy. The program allows members to learn from each other in a space free from judgment and condemnation. Many of the feelings expressed by members underline a need for support, gentleness when dealing with their uniqueness, and guidance for understanding their experiences. My research is well situated to illustrate how Black girls experience and flourish in an educational environment devoid of racism and sexism (Aggar et al., 2022).

I like getting to know the girls: An all-girls environment is valuable.

Frequently, members of RoyalSapphires describe feeling free and open to be themselves because boys were not around. Many girls shared their sentiments on activities that they participated in that led to connections with other girls, and it made them feel powerful. Pearl highlighted below how she can have freedom through RoyalSapphires that may be missing from the traditional school day. Here are a few sentiments from members that represent what it means to be a part of RoyalSapphires and how it has changed them.

Pearl, age: 10, grade: 5th: Yeah, I know I am still in school but it's like, when I'm around RoyalSapphires. I feel like I'm open. I don't have to act like I'm in school, like acting like, I have to say yes ma'am and all of that. I have manners but I don't feel like it's so rigid and I can be a bit more free. When we did an activity we watched a video about girls, it was how women can be better and powerful. It just really helped me understand that even though I feel like I can't do something, I can because I should not ever doubt myself. Even if feel like it's too hard, I should never give up. I should just keep on trying until I get it.

Pearl described how RoyalSapphires afterschool program affirms her and gives her freedom from judgment and condemnation. This sentiment by Pearl indicates a sub-theme by RoyalSapphires, devoid of the gaze of teachers having power and privilege over students. Administrators at Regal Academy created RoyalSapphires as a platform for girls to communicate with each other. Pearl and many other members shared that RoyalSapphires created a space to be honest with classmates and to create new friendships.

Turquoise, age 8, grade: 4th: We have been able to talk about how we want to communicate with girls and other people in RoyalSapphires. We've been able to talk about our favorite things in RoyalSapphires. We have been able to know all the other girls and know what they like and what they don't. And two of the girls don't like people looking at them while they talk. And some of them do. We follow what they want.

According to Denner and Griffin's (2003) research on adolescent girls, they wrestle with the courage to speak up for themselves, struggle to believe and rationalize their thoughts, and find authentic relationships. The coordinators of RoyalSapphires have created an environment that encourages girls to support girls. Mclaughlin, Irby, and Langman (1994) study manifested how adult leaders play a valuable role in shaping adolescent girls that participate in programming opportunities. In these environments, adult leaders can provide teenage girls with the proper support, creating a stable but challenging environment. Youth programs like RoyalSapphires may strengthen girls' interest in leadership by cultivating a space where girls can be heard and thrive (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005).

Muno (2014), co-founder of Powerful Voices, championed girl-specific programming to support "girl-to-girl" relationships. The coordinators of RoyalSapphires demonstrated the benefit of learning in single-sex environments by modeling trust and vulnerability with each other and the members. In their initial meeting this fall, coordinators and members of RoyalSapphires outlined norms for communication, which led to creating an environment that allowed every member to be involved and feel included in the group. Opal, who is 10 years old and in the 5th grade, shared that

RoyalSapphires helped her to be a better person by understanding herself (before she was a bit of a troublemaker). The value of second chances, realizing everyone makes mistakes, exploring more by chasing her dreams (just go for it), and helping other girls. As a result, RoyalSapphires members discovered new concepts based on their lived experience and used that as a focal point, creating awareness and insight for all those involved in the program (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

Single-sex learning environments have also catalyzed the building of leadership skills for Black girls (Muno, 2014). In 2021, the New York Times published an article by Gupta that confirmed the boardroom is still exclusively white and male (Gupta, 2021). According to Gupta (2021), women comprise about one-fifth of all board seats, while women of color (Black, Hispanic, and Asian) represent the smallest percentage. Programs similar to RoyalSapphires may be instrumental in creating more opportunities for girls to be vulnerable in sharing their insights and thoughts, be open and willing to challenge others, and have their interests taken seriously (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005). Pairing inclusive relationships between girls and adult leaders may form to increase the representation of girls and women in leadership roles (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005).

RoyalSapphires = My Happy Place

Many members described in great detail how RoyalSapphires is their happy place. They expressed their happy place as a place that prevents them from getting disciplined, where they are valued and loved in school and are free to be a family with school members:

Topaz, age: 14, grade: 7th: RoyalSapphires helps me to not be mad and angry because it's just a happy place to be okay. When you're in a happy place you can't

be mad. RoyalSapphires is my happy place because I get to hang out with girls in the program (which is a different group of girls that she hangs out with during the school day). Sometimes I will get into an argument or something. Then I just need to calm down. Then I will just think about RoyalSapphires as my happy place.

Onyx described more deeply what a happy place means to her and how it impacts how she interacts with others and makes her feel. Often members highlighted that this afterschool program was the only place they felt this happiness in school.

Onyx, age: 9, grade 4th: It makes me feel comfortable and happy. RoyalSapphires is my happy place where it makes me feel safe and comfortable around people that loves you. Onyx highlights that RoyalSapphires is her only happy place in school.

Turquoise, age: 8, grade 4th: RoyalSapphires makes me feel good and happy because people really like my responses, and they listen when I speak. RoyalSapphires helped me to learn stuff and be comfortable around people.

During my one-on-one interview, almost every member mentioned RoyalSapphires being their happy place, which is a direct quote from them. While conducting interviews, a few other adults were in the room, and they all commented on how each girl would describe the program in this manner without hearing the other interviews. When members would go into describing RoyalSapphires as their happy place, they would get such a big smile, and their faces would light up telling the impact this program has had on them and their life in and out of school.

Qualitative Findings

Throughout my research, I observed members of RoyalSapphires existing in a safe space designed for them to operate without limits. Rogers and Butler-Barnes (2021) describe this as "Black girl space," which by design is an environment that centers them and works to distinguish the single story typically associated with Black girls. RoyalSapphires established an area for Black girls who were not grounded in being treated as insignificant, powerless, or victims; they invited them to be pulled into a place to develop freely. During the bi-weekly, one-hour meetings, members practiced a theme or worksheet, working collectively on identifying similarities and providing opportunities to learn from each other. This engagement process, at the core, was an attempt for members to get to know each other, which may result in members learning more about themselves (Price-Dennis et al., 2017).

The adultification bias and other factors catalyze the understanding that Black girls experience school differently. Neal-Jackson (2018) assessed over 30 qualitative studies on the Black girl schooling experience and identified three themes. Black girls deal with educators who have limited to low expectations for them, which is worth noting as the reason many girls are disciplined and not selected for academic opportunities in school. Black girls are burdened with the negative connotations usually associated with Black women (Mamie, Jezebel, and angry). Finally, Black girls experience subjective discipline based on the shape of their body or hair, nonexistent growth, and leadership opportunities. They are penalized at a greater rate than their White peers. My research on RoyalSapphires adds to the limited scholarship on school settings that focus on the

growth and development of Black girls and supports their intersectionality as a basis of examination (Butler-Barners et al., 2021).

RoyalSapphires is a space that affirms members. Creating such spaces is critical to studying Black girl development and the knowledge needed for research (Rogers & Butler-Barnes, 2021). Areas that allow girls to come together, make connections, and support each other are critical to the growth and development of Black girls. Little information is known about all Black girl environments as much of the research on single-sex settings favors White girls in private schools, and when considering race, most of the information is related to Black or Hispanic boys (Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016; Ross, 2018; Terry et al., 2014). A few community organizations, such as Coalition for Urban Girls; Saving Our Lives, Hearing our Truth (SOLHOT); and distinctlyme.org; are designed to support Black girls through their adolescent years. There is a need for a more unrestricted approach and curriculum geared at creating programming for Black girls across the country.

To better understand members' experience with the program, I encouraged participants to describe the worst part about joining RoyalSapphires. Across the board, members took a long pause as they struggled to think about this question. Many students could not come up with an answer to that question and would often explain further how much they enjoyed participating in the program. Turquoise, who is eight years old and in the 4th grade, was one of the only members that answered this question. She mentioned that she wished that for this program when they walk in the room, it is no longer a classroom with desks and boards but transforms into a space with bean bags, comfy chairs, and feels like they are doing activities in an outdoor space. She described the area

she wished they could meet in as a mystical place with many colors. Overall, the girls overwhelmingly focused on how much they valued and appreciated this afterschool program.

Furthermore, I found that the impact of safe spaces was that many women of color, when allowed to experience spaces deemed safe, highlighted feelings of acceptance and positive reinforcement (Hernandez Rivera, 2020). During their interview, the coordinators of RoyalSapphires spoke of the intentionality in creating a safe place that was not strict and focused on rules. Ms. Sparkle, 4th and 5th Grade Coordinator, stated, "there is an old saying that goes, be the teacher you needed when you were a kid. For me that was not a structured teacher, for me it was a teacher that was a safe space. RoyalSapphires is a bit unstructured and chaotic and it allows girls that likes those environments an opportunity to thrive.

Ms. Ruby, 6th – 8th Grade Coordinator, stated her intentions to create a safe space because of the many responsibilities the members indicated they had when they are at home. All of the other coordinators agreed with this sentiment and added more context to share around this response.

> Ms. Ruby, 6th – 8th Grade Coordinator: RoyalSapphires is a place that gives
> members a way out of their duties at home and to be a child and student and not
> an adult and feel relief. Many of the members discussed having to take care of
> younger siblings, ensure dinner and the house was clean. At the end of a hard day
> of school, you come into RoyalSapphires just to relieve yourself, talk about what
> you been doing, how you been doing, update us on your situation, we work on
> this activity together, how can this activity bring everyone together.

Summary of Findings

   RoyalSapphires started as a mentoring group for girls to teach them about etiquette. In the interviews with administrators, they recounted numerous behavior challenges (name-calling and fighting) amongst girls at Regal Academy as the girls appeared to need more support with tools to assist with communication. Eventually, the team met and changed the direction of RoyalSapphires. Teachers wanted the afterschool program to provide more avenues for members to develop strategies to handle conflict and communication challenges. The efforts of RoyalSapphires reflected strategies for redirecting students to do things differently and encouraging members to focus on being leaders. Additional topics supported by the afterschool program were developing creative ways to express how members feel and think about themselves through healthy self-images. My research questions are grounded in learning more about the tools and experiences Black girls bring to RoyalSapphires and understanding how participating in this afterschool program has enhanced their growth and development.

   Research Question 1. How does the afterschool program RoyalSapphires build upon the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) tenets members already possess? The six CCW tenets are aspirational, familial, social, resistant, linguistic, and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital provides an avenue for members to look beyond their current realities. RoyalSapphires allows members to feel braver, enjoy being around other girls, and feel more confident than when they were not involved in the program. Frequently members believe they are at school to learn. Through RoyalSapphires, members get more exposure to various teachers and opportunities to connect and interact with other students at the school and develop their shared experiences.

Social capital was instrumental in the design of RoyalSapphires, where the teachers intentionally created a space for members that supports them through peer-to-peer networks and from teacher-student. Many members mentioned how surprised they were about the benefits of being with other girls and how they enjoyed meeting new friends through the afterschool program. Members attending the afterschool program were able to form and develop relationships with teachers who they may not have known. Building relationships with teachers provided members with navigational capital that could lead to lasting relationships with future teachers. Members outlined the expectations for them during the regular school day. RoyalSapphires used resistant capital to ensure that members knew that meeting time was a time to be free from judgment. They could tell teachers when something was bothering them, or they wanted to consider something another way.

Linguistic capital refers to members' opportunities to express themselves through fine art. Many members described their desire to stay after school to escape the responsibilities of caring for younger siblings or other household chores. RoyalSapphires provided an outlet for members to write, draw, and build upon qualities utilized in their household more robustly. Finally, familial capital refers to the opportunity for members to create bonds with those different from their immediate family members. In the initial meeting for members, administrators described how RoyalSapphires is a family that sticks together. Members are free to talk and express themselves to each other. There is a known clause amongst the group that stipulates that ideas and topics shared during RoyalShappires, stay with RoyalSapphires. These ground rules set the expectations for how members interacted and behaved during the program.

Research Question 2. In what ways will members of RoyalSapphires benefit from participating in this afterschool program from the perspective of Regal Academy administrators and program coordinators? Members will develop a different outlook on life grounded in establishing healthy boundaries, being vulnerable in a safe environment, and providing helpful tools outside the classroom. Administrators outlined rules for participation when seeking staff volunteers to assist with RoyalSapphires. RoyalSapphires does not represent the school day, and expectations and consequences would look different from the school day. Staff agreed that RoyalSapphires could not be taken away from members or used as a punishment. RoyalSapphires is designed to celebrate, uplift, and allow members to be authentic. Finally, what happens in RoyalSapphires stays within the program. Many members highlighted ways they are vulnerable and share themselves with this program, and the staff was adamant that they were not to discuss topics with others not affiliated or gossip with staff members.

Research Question 3. What do members of RoyalSapphires at Regal Academy need their teachers and school administrators to know to support better and develop their leadership skills (within and beyond the RoyalSapphires program)? This program helps students process what is happening in school, provides opportunities to make mistakes, and institutes strategies that assist students with redirecting challenging behaviors. Members feel safe and are excited to participate in this program. The members value the staff that participates in the program. Finally, setting expectations and norms was instrumental in how members showed up at every meeting, and it is appreciated.

I aim to develop a curriculum, modeled on the findings from research with RoyalSapphires, for adolescent Black girls in any school interested in programming to

enhance and support their leadership and personal development. Through this program, adolescent Black girls will be more engaged and groomed for academic and career leadership positions. The anticipated outcome will be for Black girls to share sentiments and perspectives ingrained in the literature on leadership and personal development during adolescence.

Once the curriculum is developed, it will be critical to share it with K-12 school administrators, university-level teacher education coordinators, parents/guardians/family members of Black girls, and youth organization coordinators. The audience members mentioned above have a vested interest and investment in the growth and development of Black girls. Mathies et al. (2020) describe the significance and value of Black girls' voices in the impact of the school environment and contribute it to their identity, desired outcomes based on their educational experience, and future goals.

By creating a curriculum for adolescent Black girl development, I aspire to create positive connotations for our society regarding Black girls. I hope to be a vessel that will acknowledge the skills and resources that Black girls bring to their environments, recognize systems that support adolescent Black girls' transition, and celebrate the many cultural gifts Black girls bring to our society and beyond. I plan to keep my research grounded in adolescent Black girls' experiences. As I tailor a curriculum, I understand that identifying ways to consider success in communication is crucial (Dumlao, 2018).

Academic staff and administrators maintain the highest level of power over school settings. They are responsible for organizing and communicating with parents and students while implementing program strategies. Eventually, I hope to include outreach to participant parents as their feedback will be instrumental in the evaluation process

through interviews, focus groups, and overall participation in the afterschool program. I will communicate with Black girls through their involvement in the afterschool program.

My tasks are grounded in the alliance with school administrators and educators. Lewis (2006) identified five essential elements of collaboration through engagement. Communication is a vital part of forming relationships with stakeholders. Second, I learned to establish relationships and trust with school staff by being relatable and not intrusive. Third, Lewis (2006) describes the collaboration process to equalize all involved to ensure engagement focuses on the expertise of participants and school leaders. The last two strategies I hope to utilize through engagement are a way for participants to focus on the process and a commitment to stay engaged with the program throughout their middle school years.

This study is grounded in action research which allows a small group to define a problem, act to solve the problem, evaluate how effective the actions are, and repeat steps if the problem is not solved (Bozkus & Bayrak, 2019). Considering all these things, I look forward to creating an action plan highlighting some valuable insight shared by members and coordinators of RoyalSapphires. RoyalSapphires is an excellent program that has been instrumental in situating girls from Regal Academy for high school and beyond.

CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION PLAN

This action plan proposes an assessable curriculum that strengthens the relationship between Black girls and school officials while empowering Black girls in a single-sex afterschool program (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005). The action plan is contingent upon creating an afterschool curriculum in collaboration with Advisory Board Members, community site leaders/middle school administrators, teacher volunteers, and participants. I will recruit board members to serve and establish the afterschool curriculum. The board members will then leverage their relationships to identify two sites to host this newly created curriculum. Participants will meet bi-weekly, and the two sites will execute the curriculum and provide assessments (built into the curriculum). The feedback gathered from both areas, and the data collection from this dissertation will result in a curriculum based on 18 topics (this includes two topics a month for nine months) and activities the board will eventually use to market to schools looking to establish an afterschool program in urban and marginalized communities.

The topics will arm participants with strategies to create boundaries, healthy relationships with family, friends, and peers, and self-reflection exercises; it will also ensure collaboration between members. The action plan (outlined in Table 2) will commence in the summer of 2023 and launch in two locations during the fall of 2024. Our short-term goals include supporting 50 students (25 at each site) as we establish and assess a curriculum for and in partnership with Black adolescent girls.

Table 3: Outline of Action Research Plan

Objectives and Outcomes (What)	Tasks (How)	Person(s) (Who)	Time (When)	Location (Where)	Resources	Funds
Objective Develop an afterschool curriculum that can be used to guide educators and youth-serving organizations with programming that will enhance and support adolescent Black girls' growth and leadership development. Outcome Adolescent Black girls will be more engaged and conditioned for high school and college leadership positions.	a. Meet with culturally competent teachers and school administrators to discuss topics for afterschool curriculum. b. Identify themes for the afterschool curriculum by grade. c. Organize topics and timelines for two topics/lessons a month for the academic school year (8 months). d. Create a variety of assessments with each topic. e. Seek volunteers to assist with afterschool program. f. Meet with parents/guardians and adolescent Black girls to join the afterschool program.	a. Create an advisory board that will assume responsibilities and provide leadership over the curriculum, advocacy, and assessments. b. Advisory board will consist of 3-5 community leaders with expertise in education, business, and leadership	a. Secure advisory board members (July 2024) b. Bi-weekly meetings with the board to discuss curriculum in July and August 2024 (1.5 hours Zoom meetings) c. Advisory Board will identify a middle school location to pilot the program. d. Pilot program in August 2024 in middle school	a. Meetings with the board will take place virtually (Zoom) b. School locations will be finalized based on interest.	a. Time commitment from the board for meetings b. Software for creating curriculum. c. Snacks for afterschool program d. Printing cost for worksheets/activities	a. $500 (will be used for snacks and printing cost)

Action Plan – Objectives & Outcomes

Way (1998) noted that adolescent girls of color are more empowered to speak out against injustices but will shy away from conflict with boys. Additionally, in the absence of peer-to-peer relationship building, teenage girls may begin to sabotage and intentionally hurt each other because they do not know how to work together. Through this action plan, the creation of a curriculum will establish a positive relationship between Black girls and impactful leaders in their educational environment while allowing teenagers to explore and discover multiple identities while calling attention to what is occurring around them (Pastor, McCormick, & Fine, 1996). In these spaces, school leaders serve as co-facilitators or guides to develop skills to increase Black girls' self-resiliency and self-esteem (Ward, 1996).

Action Plan – Tasks

Tasks for the action plan needs to be actionable and others should be able to be recreate them through a set of directions. The tasks highlight how the curriculum will be created and enacted. First, the critical responsibility of the administrators and teachers associated with the program and curriculum is the foundation of an authentic space that nurtures and champions adolescent Black girls. Second, in creating an inclusive afterschool experience, the teachers will highlight themes grounded in supporting and capitalizing on the skills the girls bring to this afterschool environment.

The following steps are critical to ensuring the topics are relevant for girls: 1) the administrative team will identify a timeline for when topics will be introduced, and 2) the team will ensure that the members can provide feedback throughout each session. These steps start with the creation of the curriculum. Brooks and Brooks (1999) note, the

intention in the initial steps is for participants to discover new concepts based on their lived experiences and use them as a focal point, creating awareness and insight for all involved in the program.

Volunteers, teachers and school leaders play a valuable role in shaping adolescent girls' participation in afterschool programs (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). Ultimately the volunteers play a critical role in establishing afterschool programs as a "hardiness zone" (Debold, Brown, Weseen, & Brookins, 1999). In the "hardiness zone," afterschool programs provide guidance and support for girls to reach their goals while receiving encouragement to have autonomy over their lives (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005). The volunteers affiliated with the program want to be there and guide students through their adolescence in a protected and inclusive environment.

The final task is communicating with parents/guardians and students about this unique opportunity to join an afterschool program geared toward creating inclusive relationships that girls and volunteers can form to increase the representation of girls in leadership. During school hours, there will be announcements shared with the student body about the afterschool program. Flyers and emails will be sent to parents/guardians with a call to action to ensure the maximum number of girls will be able to participate in programs outside of school.

Action Plan – Person (s)

The 3-5 Advisory Board members will be instrumental in developing the initial curriculum and will represent a background of civic-minded individuals with expertise in education, business, and leadership. I will share with potential board members the goal for creating this curriculum and afterschool program, identify the skills members need to

join the board and share the time commitment needed for members (Funding for Good, 2020). There are many reasons why advisory boards are an integral part of afterschool programming, including the launching of a curriculum and program (Garst et al., 2021). Members will need to share knowledge, be innovative, seek to improve experiences for adolescent Black girls and increase growth, development, and leadership opportunities for those involved in the program while also creating opportunities to hear directly from members and volunteers about their experience with the program.

Lee (2020) highlighted the role the COVID-19 pandemic had in shifting youth's routines due, in part, to virtual school, social distancing, and limited access to youth-serving opportunities. In the past, many youth-serving organizations focused on one particular issue (Arnold & Cater, 2011). The creation of an advisory board lends itself to partner with those who care about adolescent Black girls' growth and leadership development with youth who would receive a provision of care that will support them as they transition to high school and beyond (Berry & Sloper, 2021). Advisory boards have become an excellent option to financially support afterschool programming through fundraising due to experts providing real-time support and guidance and creating curriculums based on the interest of adolescent Black girls (Bamberger et al., 2006). Garst et al. (2021) discussed the value that advisory boards might create for programs such as supporting donators' interests from diverse avenues ranging from grants, foundations, and government agencies.

Action Plan – Time

This stage of the action plan secures the blueprint for creating the curriculum and securing the future via funding of this afterschool program. As outlined in the previous

section, the advisory board creation would occur during this stage. The advisory board will provide oversight and direction by meeting virtually bi-weekly to discuss and finalize meeting topics, activities, and assessments (Garst et al., 2021). Also, during this time, the board will be speak with school leaders to discuss the benefits of the curriculum and seek a school location to pilot the program during the 2024-2025 school year.

Action Plan – Location

The advisory board meetings will take place virtually and members will work collaboratively to create the curriculum. After completing this step, the program will be housed at a middle school. At the middle school site, the program will need at least two classrooms next to or close to each other. Implementing this curriculum in a safe and inclusive school space is critical. An inclusive educational environment is steeped in allowing for collaboration and the opportunity to share and provide their insight, talents, and knowledge while enhancing the learning experiences for Black girls (Mims & Kaler-Jones, 2020). Over 80% of members of RoyalSapphires highlighted how the program transported them to a space where they felt free to be whomever they wanted to be without the guise of rules and punishment. The school setting for this curriculum and program becomes a collaboration laboratory between educational leaders and Black girls.

Action Plan – Resources & Funds

The resources for this action plan are noticeable in time spent creating the curriculum by the advisory board. In creating the curriculum, the board will identify software to share and input information regarding the program. The execution of the curriculum and program will take place in an educational setting. Additionally, there should be an allotment of the budget for printing the activities and snacks to provide to

participants. A combination of these resources will be used to access students and learn more about their lived experiences through the execution of this program. The initial funds needed to execute this program and curriculum will primarily be used for printing and snacks.

Analysis of implementation change and leadership practice

After the implementation of the curriculum, there may be two positive influences taking place within the school. Teachers working with adolescent students will have more opportunities to participate in teacher training to support students through this afterschool program. Additionally, this curriculum will create a pathway for students in marginalized communities to provide additional support for girls' transition to high school and beyond. Implementing an afterschool program creates an opportunity to sustain valuable relationships between students and educators while creating a positive school environment for Black girls. The following plan will be beneficial in setting the framework to address how the advisory board, stakeholders, and adolescent Black girls make meaning of the evaluation process while deciphering anticipated results of the afterschool curriculum as a change process.

Meaning-Making/Interpretation

Advisory board members will work with school site leaders to implement a strategy to ensure that volunteers and school leaders are developing their cultural perspectives and knowledge with a desire to master a set of skills needed to enhance the learning experience for participants (NEA, 2005).

Partnership between participants and school leaders/volunteers

Teacher shortages are more pronounced in urban schools that serve low-income students (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). According to the 2012 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2013 Teacher Follow-up Survey, teacher exodus in Title 1 schools is 50% higher than in non-Title one schools, 70% higher in schools serving diverse student populations, in subject areas like math and science, the turnover rate is 70% higher in schools serving low-income students. When teachers leave schools, the profession is impacted, and the relationship with students is in jeopardy (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Consequently, for middle school students, where a great deal of transition occurs, the impact of a teacher leaving in an urban school proves to be of grave concern to administrators.

Volunteers support students through culturally competent training

The CCW (2205) theoretical framework of social capacity is a partnership between families, students, and educators in school settings. Volunteers, teachers, and administrative leaders will participate in culturally competent training and exercises by implementing this afterschool curriculum. The National Education Association (2015) defines cultural competency as a critical approach to working with and teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds that may not reflect their experiences. This afterschool program will allow teachers to participate in learning exercises with participants through cultural immersion. Nieto (2006) pointed out that the very encounter of a cultural experience for teachers would serve as an opportunity for them to learn from participants through interactions to develop positive relationships with participants and incorporate cultural knowledge in school settings. This collaboration between teachers and

participants supports the social capacity of students and may positively impact future educational endeavors for students in high school and beyond.

The afterschool program will meet twice a week throughout the school year. Yosso's (2005) navigational capital refers to resources marginalized students use when attending schools that disenfranchise students from underrepresented backgrounds. Through the support of this afterschool program, students will meet with teachers and school officials vested in their success and potentially providing insight into ways to maneuver through educational settings. Afterschool programs that consist of a commitment from parents, students, and school staff are more likely to document positive gains in academic achievement (Davis & Peltz, 2012). Through CCW (2005), aspirational capital describes how this afterschool program is developed exclusively for adolescent Black girls to invest in their future selves. The ultimate goal of this afterschool program and curriculum is to incorporate opportunities for participants to share their experiences with the program coordinators, lead activities, and create a sense of belonging that all demonstrate an investment in their educational future. Daud and Carruthers (2008) state that students who participate in and actively participate in afterschool programs document more interest in academic areas, leading to higher grades and satisfaction in school.

Anticipated Results of action/intervention/change process

This action plan will be successful due to the commitment and support received for this initiative from committee members, stakeholders, participants, and educators. The plan includes selecting a strong group of representatives from education, leadership, and business industries to serve on the advisory board. Based on the connections of the

advisory board there will be recommendations in identifying two school sites strongly

interested in investing in Black adolescent girls. This action plan culminates with

ensuring the voices and experiences of participants and volunteers are included in the

assessment of this program. To evaluate the curriculum for the afterschool program, I

will use a responsive evaluation approach as my theoretical framework. Stake (1975)

developed this approach to ensure participants and parents can provide the advisory board

with helpful program feedback (Giancola, 2021). This approach provides an avenue to

observe and maintain the program's authenticity (Giancola, 2021) and will be helpful in

evaluating programs that are in the beginning stages.

The responsive evaluation focuses on the program curriculum activities during the

beginning stages before establishing outcomes. The curriculum created through the action

plan was designed to provide and support adolescent Black girls with an avenue to

enhance leadership skills and capitalize on resources participants bring to the afterschool

environment. Responsive evaluations steeped in cultural competency allow the advisory

board and school leaders to respond to student needs. In addition to sharing strategies and

results with key stakeholders. Using this approach and the six tenets of CCW, the

afterschool curriculum anchors the experiences and voices of adolescent Black girls'

contribution to this process (Acree & Chouinard, 2019).

When considering using a culturally responsive evaluation framework for the

afterschool curriculum, it must be assessed through three specific lenses for evaluation

(Kirkhart, 2000). The first lens describes the substantial parts of the curriculum by

establishing the afterschool program's resources and key players supporting the program.

The second lens outlines the goals and strategies of the curriculum. The final lens

provides short- and long-range goals and expected outcomes (Kirkhart, 2000). Using a culturally responsive evaluation framework to assess the afterschool curriculum supports the notion that there are avenues to learn from adolescent Black girls while making sense of how they view leadership, learning, growth, and development. I aim to share how the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of Black girls enhances the assets they bring to an educational environment.

The anticipated results surrounding funding for this action plan may be challenging. Funding is crucial for ensuring support for the curriculum, assessment, printing, and food is assessable for the advisory board and volunteers. In the last ten years, funding and philanthropic efforts for Black girls have raised less than $1 million in funding to support the academic experiences of Black and Brown girls (Cooper, 2014). In 2012, President Obama established the "My Brother's Keeper" initiative with funding of $200 million over a five-year period to be used for the support of Black boys through the creation of mentoring opportunities and assess to academic experiences geared at changing the lives of Black boys and men (Neal-Jackson, 2018). In 2020, Ms. Foundation for Women released a report highlighting that when considering charitable donations in the United States, Black girls and women account for .5% out of $66.9 billion provided by organizations, equating to $5.48 per year (Landmark Report, 2020). Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson (2020) believe that due to the intersectionality of Black girls, their experiences in school are a catalyst for their path in academic and professional environments. The goal of an afterschool curriculum geared exclusively for Black girls may serve as the impetus for greater participation in leadership opportunities.

Based on the topics outlined, I would take a "plan B" step to seek funding opportunities by applying for grants and partnering with community agencies to provide the essential resources. Additionally, I would utilize the members of the advisory board connections for assistance with the curriculum's necessary materials, including printing, technology, and software. Because the afterschool program aims to be housed at schools, I will seek to work with educational leaders and confirm additional resources that the site coordinators can provide. Finally, the action plan's goal is to manage two afterschool programs at two different schools, but I will be willing to pilot this program at one school during the program's infancy.

Summary

An afterschool curriculum facilitated by educational leaders who can share information, work, and develop meaningful relationships with adolescent Black girls can yield various positive avenues for growth and leadership development for Black adolescent girls (Alvarez et al., 2020). Neal-Jackson (2018) highlights the contrasting views between how Black girls view themselves and how school officials perceive them in educational settings. Young (2020) identified that Black girls, through their familiar capital, are conditioned to excel in school settings. As a result, deficient culturally competent staff and administrators may view Black girls' advocacy and self-confidence as disrespectful or angry. When Neal-Jackson (2018) assessed over 30 types of literature, many school leaders viewed Black girls as disobedient and possessing a disdain toward school settings. Contrary to the view of school administrators and teachers, Black girls viewed themselves as aspirational and persistent in academic environments (Neal-

Jackson, 2018). Table 3 and 4 illustrate the afterschool program's inputs, outputs, outcomes, and intended impact.

Table 4: Inputs & Outputs

Inputs	Activities (Outputs)	Participation (Outputs)
Advisory Board Student centered site to host the after-school program Site administrators/Teachers /Staff/Volunteers Adolescent Black girls as participants Afterschool program curriculum with activities related to leadership growth and development. Assessment tool to share feedback regarding activity for participants and volunteers	Create a curriculum outlining events, activities for afterschool program. Create recruitment brochures for participants and families to sign up for afterschool program. Work collaboratively with students on topics during bi-weekly activities based on activities in the curriculum. Implement practices in bi-weekly activities to support participants in leadership, growth, and development. Perform assessments on activities and share via feedback forms.	Advisory Board Advisory Board/ Site administrators/Teachers /Staff/Volunteers Site administrators/Teachers /Staff/Volunteers/Participants Site administrators/Teachers /Staff/Volunteers /Participants Site administrators/Teachers /Staff/Volunteers /Participants

Table 5: Outcomes & Impact

	Outcomes – Impact	
Short	**Medium**	**Long**
An increase in participants during the afterschool program by 35% Increase in brochures and recruitment materials that can be distributed for the program to families at the school by 25% Utilizing a curriculum created exclusively for Black girls from a cultural perspective to increase opportunities for academic and leadership programs.	Increase the number of participants able to identify (name) a positive resource or person at the school by 50% Increase the number of participants that feel comfortable speaking up and providing insight into their educational experience by 30% Participants in partnership with peers and staff volunteers will begin to utilize lessons learned during afterschool program in	Decrease behavior infractions by participates at the school by 25% Increase the number of participants that attend the afterschool program by 20% from the first semester to the second semester Participants with support from administrators and volunteers will lead initiatives at the school.

Increase opportunities for participants to engage with peers and school leaders by 40% through attending the afterschool program	positive ways at school and home	Participates will lead multiple clubs and organizations in high school and beyond Improvements to the curriculum utilizing the assessment results from participants/staff

Analysis of organizational change and leadership practices

Organizational change analysis

As an educational leader, it is essential to create an inclusive and equitable work environment. Creating these opportunities in a work setting requires that leaders and team members understand that inclusive efforts are not pieces of training; they are an effort that requires a collaborative partnership. In Brook's (2017) article, one definition described love as showing up for oneself. This sentiment reminds me of an equitable work environment allowing all staff to show up as their authentic selves. The relationship established with stakeholders and constituents provides a blueprint for developing and maintaining relationships with members inside the organization.

As Brooks (2017) indicated through his research in creating the Critical Theory of Love (CToL), a key message in the literature highlighted the best environment for students to be successful was grounded in two settings. Those environments provided care and a deep emotional connection, making students feel safe and secure. To that end, Dillard (2021) implores organizations seeking to move toward equity in education to connect with students to understand and solve issues. Dillard (2021) challenges organizations to define equity and excellence in the quest to reach students and provide avenues for success. The opportunity for educational leaders and volunteers to meet with, listen to, and learn from adolescent Black girls creates a synergy that can build equity measures that allow more Black girls to enroll in and be a part of the out-of-school

programming. Using CToL motivates coordinators and school administrators at Regal Academy to seek relevant methods of support, guidance, and inclusion which culminates in school staff developing meaningful ways to support Black girls through their middle school years and beyond (Witenstein, Davila, Karikari, et al, 2023)

Reflection of leadership practices

The leadership practice I exhibit resembles a coaching approach. A coaching approach demonstrated by Lefebvre showcases a desire to transport adolescent Black girls from where they are, enhancing their skills and abilities and creating pathways and strategies imperative on their future path (Downey, 2011). I want to bring the best out of those I am working with while providing opportunities for them to display their strengths. As a leader, I hope to provide a level of direction and support that help those I am in partnership with evolve. One of my strengths is having a strong sense of emotional stability and conscientiousness. Whenever possible, I strive to be careful in my actions and communication by keeping a stable mind.

To successfully execute the action plan, the coaching leadership style is crucial for me to ensure that the experiences and voices of participants and volunteers are heard and acted upon (Holmes, 2003). A coaching leadership style is critical when interacting with volunteers and advisory board members to ensure I am making relevant inquiries that raise consciousness (Holmes, 2003). I want to create a manual of best practices for program development, work with site coordinators and share a curriculum that includes relevant topics Black girls are interested in learning more about or wish to explore. Hobson (2002) posits that this desire to focus on development, persevere through challenging feelings, and support innovation is grounded in the coaching leadership

philosophy. I hope to create cultural norms for academic staff members when facilitating programming to support and inspire Black girls.

As I work more closely with site leaders, volunteers, and the advisory board, I hope to inspire participants to be open and trusting through this afterschool program (Phillips, 2012). By instilling this practice, I may evolve my storytelling to include social justice (Phillips, 2012) as a storyteller and vessel for Black girls domestically and abroad. For the past five years, I have traveled to West Africa, Ghana, to speak with girls about the opportunities available if they consider attending college in the United States. I have learned much about the Ghanian Educational System through meeting with families at the USA Education Center at the American Embassy.

Through my work, I believe there is no single story for Black girls. Social justice storytelling takes each participant's experiences are restorative practices that will be shared to benefit peers and school leaders. Through this type of storytelling, I aspire to create positive connotations for our society regarding Black girls. I hope to be a research vessel that will acknowledge the skills and resources Black girls bring to their environments, recognize systems that support adolescent Black girls' transition, and celebrate the many cultural gifts Black girls bring to our society and beyond. Social justice storytelling will allow me to travel to different areas domestically and eventually abroad to learn about the best practices for after-school programs geared toward Black girls.

Implication for Practice

Prescriptive implications for practice

The research participants shared their lived experiences meaningfully and demonstrated through RoyalSapphires, a partnership between educators and adolescent Black girls. Safe became a word that was synonymous with the way the RoyalSapphires administrative team created a program to ensure that members were able to bring their authentic selves and that volunteers supported the girls through activities and thoughtful interactions. According to the research by Crenshaw, 1995; Morris, 2019; Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010; Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017; Gadson and Lewis, 2021; Mayes, Lowery, Mims, and Rodman, 2021, Black girls' educational experiences are different from their peers and, in some cases, harsher due to discipline/infraction and adultification biases. My study acknowledges the many resources that Black girls bring to educational settings, coupled with resources at school to provide a safe space for Black girls to discover and prosper.

The value of afterschool programs for adolescent Black girls

Many leaders have been documented during adolescence as being subjected to leadership development through an afterschool or out-of-school experience (Eva et al., 2021). Knowing the potential impact of afterschool activities on students, specifically adolescent Black girls, the need for a grounded curriculum focused on personal growth and leadership development increases exponentially. A familiar reality for girls which conflicts with the experience of boys, girls are indoctrinated into assuming behaviors acceptable to society and cultural preferences and opinions, which leads to them viewing themselves as less likely to be a leader (Archard, 2012; Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

Additionally, the notion of who a leader is and what they look like is heavily guided by the idea of someone white and male (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Knowing this is the leadership landscape for adolescent Black girls strengthens the critical need for an afterschool curriculum that recognizes the unique perspectives they bring to experiences. Demand for growth is vital (Eva et al., 2021).

Schools similar to the world have been researched and identified as spaces where structural racism exists and are an apparent part of the public-school structure (Kelly, 2020). Morris (2019) reminds us that schools are a breeding ground for students to understand better themselves and their existing world. As a result, it is vital to explore how adolescent Black girls make sense of these experiences while providing valuable resources throughout the day and after school. Afterschool programming may provide a critical support component for Black teen girls as these environments support youth development through activities centered on those involved in the group (Griffin & Larson, 2015).

Afterschool programs may become a source of support for Black teens through various models. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) describe these afterschool environments as providing care as participants develop skills related to self, an awareness of others' perspectives, and other socio-emotional proficiencies. Participants in afterschool activities engage in spaces where they can be vulnerable when faced with successes and challenges. Black adolescent girls may be provided with approaches to dealing with these reactions in a safe and welcoming environment (Larson, 2011; Rusk et al., 2013). Finally, as many of the members of RoyalSapphires shared throughout the focus groups and interviews, the program's coordinators played a large part in the reason they remained a

part of the program. The members said the coordinators were their "safe place" to help regulate emotions and receive guidance and support. Scholars have identified this as a process in programming in which participants will seek the consent of coordinators as mentors to assist them with sorting through programs and unknown experiences (Hirsch et al., 2000; Strobel et al., 2008).

Adolescent Black girls identifying someone they trust in school is critical

Black girls are armed with many assets they have cultivated when they enter and navigate educational settings. Yosso's CCW (2005) aspirational capital bridges Black girls' vision for themselves; conversely, social capital describes the relationship established through the many communities they navigate (Yosso, 2005). Mahoney et al. (2009) explain how afterschool programs are driven by youth learning and the risks they can take as part of their involvement in the activity. Conversely, adult leaders are prepared to share their expertise with students through activities. Still, trust becomes a critical component of the relationship for participants to receive knowledge from them (Halpern, 2005).

During the RoyalSapphires administrative team focus group, Ms. Sparkle described how activities were geared toward helping the girls know and trust themselves. Trust is magnified when participants trust adult leaders (Griffith & Larson, 2015). When trust is built between adult leaders and participants, they are more likely to listen to the advice they receive, and the advice shared is used to enhance their learning and understanding (Griffith & Larson, 2015). Trust then allows participants to be more receptive to adult leaders' feedback and encouragement, which becomes the hallmark of fostering positive relationships with school staff.

Implication for future research

Prescriptive implications for future research

This study provided RoyalSapphires and Regal Academy participants an opportunity to share their experiences through interviews and focus groups after school over four months. RoyalSapphires was canceled in the spring of 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Regal Academy canceled all in-person afterschool and club meetings for the next two years. During the spring of 2022, the group met virtually through zoom. For the past three years, the RoyalSapphires program mirrored the state of the world from cancellation to virtual. Currently, the group is meeting in person bi-weekly throughout the 2022-2023 school year. Two vital themes that may advance the scholarship for adolescent Black girls are the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their growth and development and the accessibility of afterschool programs in underserved communities.

The administrative team for RoyalSapphires mentioned the importance of meeting with the girls virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. They knew the girls were facing difficult times and would benefit from meeting to share experiences and strategies. This reasoning was the catalyst for coordinating Zoom meetings with members of RoyalSapphires during the spring of 2022. These sentiments expressed by the administrators at Regal Academy replicate the reality for children throughout the world (Schiavo, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic's impact on adolescents includes but is not limited to dealing with isolation from peers and community, death of loved ones and family members, continual coverage of police violence, and political unrest, which may lead to

higher levels of sadness and sadness social anxiety (Davis, n.d.). When we look at the experiences of Black girls, they experience a difference in age-related developments from their peers physically and psychologically (Teitelman et al., 2008). Limited scholarship is available that focuses entirely on Black girls, and the existing studies usually combine their practices with Black women and Black boy peers (Teitelman et al., 2008). Due to the many experiences of adolescent Black girls exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, it becomes essential to examine their continuing impact on their managing skills and welfare (Crooks et al., 2022).

Afterschool programs serve families by supplying a supervised environment for students and families to utilize after the end of the school day. Middle and upper-class families can take advantage of various afterschool activities, usually paid through payment from parents through tuition and fees (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Howie et al., 2010). The positive influence of afterschool programming on an adolescent child is well documented through music, leadership, athletics, and academic activities (Lareau, 2011; Vandell et al., 2015). Low-income students and families have limited access to out-of-school programming even though many parents would participate in these activities if offered to their children (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Vandell et al., 2015).

Out-of-school experiences have documented many positive gains for students in low-income areas. That Afterschool Alliance (2020) report that Black and Brown students have limited opportunities to be exposed to and involved in afterschool activities. Black students from low-income families with disproportionate access to out-of-school activities may be viewed as a civil rights issue (Afterschool Alliance, 2020; Carver & Iruka, 2006). Black families that report a lack of financial resources record

lower access to out-of-school activities, which leads to lower participation in afterschool activities (Afterschool Alliance, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2009). Knowing this is especially problematic due to the positive outcomes of supervised out-of-school experiences (Sjogren & Melton, 2021).

Access to afterschool programming is crucial in creating avenues for adolescent Black girls and their future academic, physical, and mental health success. Future research in developing pathways to ensure that students from marginalized backgrounds have accessibility to afterschool programming will ensure that students from these areas are provided with additional opportunities to influence their growth and development positively. In addition to examining the accessibility of quality out-of-school experiences, especially for adolescent Black girls ensuring that the strategies developed understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their well-being and coping strategies. This dual assessment of understanding the accessibility of afterschool programming in underserved communities while learning more about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may identify future activities that will assist Black girls from marginalized areas (Sjogren & Melton, 2021).

Conclusion

Implications for other organizations

My study provided an opportunity to learn more about the experiences of adolescent Black girls at Regal Academy who participate in the RoyalSapphires afterschool program. Members and the administrative team that led the activities for the afterschool program could describe their intentions when establishing this out-of-school program, their rationale for participating, and how the programming has impacted them.

Members realized that the RoyalSapphires program became more than a program they attended afterschool. They shared that the space was a way for them to develop connections with peers and enhance relationships with current and future teachers. Members shared that time spent with peers and teachers allowed them to be themselves and not worry about their many responsibilities. Morris (2016) describes how many Black girls may sacrifice their welfare for others. The RoyalSapphires afterschool program for participants became a place to have autonomy over their experiences and needs.

The administrative team that led the activities for RoyalSapphires shared its intentionality around the program, ensuring it was appropriate for members' needs and outlined how they shared their norms with other educators that decided not to be involved in the program. They desire a curriculum to help guide activities with Black girls from low-income communities related to their needs. Additionally, the staff highlighted that RoyalSapphires afterschool program was an opportunity for those wanting to participate, and teachers could not restrict students from participating if they encountered challenges throughout the school day. The teachers highlighted their hope that they program would impact the girls' futures and provide them with a space in which they felt comfortable attending and sharing/listening from peers.

How the study responds to the problem of practice

Before I began this study, I knew it would be vital to create a curriculum that centered the interest and support of Black girls. Black girls come to their educational setting with various skills developed and enhanced by their family unit and community. My action plan also included an opportunity for community leaders in business and

education to serve on the board in creating a curriculum for an afterschool program. The curriculum will cover various topics, including Black girl identity, mental health, and peer-to-peer support. A board comprised of leaders from the business and education sectors, the curriculum will serve as a stool for Black girls to know and learn from women leaders and assist in developing their identity. Additionally, allowing women leaders to share their personal and professional journey with Black girls provides an avenue for girls to learn from women leaders' experiences and motivate them to continue in school and leadership roles in high school and beyond.

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APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Approval University of Dayton

What Changed

████████████ updated this service request on Wed 7/13/22 9:22 AM Eastern Daylight Time.

Comments: Changed Status from **In Process** to **Approved**.

EXEMPT D-1; Approved Wed 7/13/22 9:19 AM Eastern Daylight Time

RESEARCHER: Ladreka Karikari

PROJECT TITLE: Your Voice is my Favorite Sound: Lived Experiences of RoyalSapphire Members

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the subject proposal and has found this research protocol is exempt from continuing IRB oversight as described in 45 CFR 46.104(d)(1).* Therefore, you have approval to proceed with the study.

REMINDERS TO RESEARCHERS:

· As long as there are no changes to your methods, and you do not encounter any adverse events during data collection, you need not apply for continuing approval for this study.
· The IRB must approve all changes to the protocol prior to their implementation, unless such a delay would place your participants at an increased risk of harm. In such situations, the IRB is to be informed of the changes as soon as possible.
· The IRB is also to be informed immediately of any ethical issues that arise in your study.
· You must maintain all study records, including consent documents, for three years after the study closes. These records should always be stored securely on campus.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Best of luck in your research!

Best regards,
IRB Administrator
Office for Research
University of Dayton
300 College Park
Dayton, OH 45469-7758
937-620-2550
Email: IRB@udayton.edu
Website: go.udayton.edu/irb

FWA00015321, expires 10/14/2025

*Exempt under 45CFR46.104(d)(1): Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Focus Groups and Interviews

Title: Your Voice is my Favorite Sound: Lived Experiences of RoyalSapphire Members

You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by LaDreka Karikari from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Education and Health Sciences.

The purpose of the project is: to explore how Black girls make sense of their experiences in an educational setting while being provided support through an afterschool program, RoyalSapphire.

You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the question will take about 45 minutes.
- You will not be compensated for your participation.
- All of the information you share will be confidential.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to recording, and it will be kept in a secure place.
- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:

Student Researcher
LaDreka Karikari
University of Dayton

E: karikaril1@udayton.edu

Faculty Supervisor
Aryn Baxter, Ph.D.
University of Dayton

E: abaxter1@udayton.edu

APPEXNIX C: Parental Consent for Minor to Participate in a Research Project

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Parental Consent for Minor/Child to Participate in a Research Project

Project Title:	Your Voice is my Favorite Sound: Lived Experiences of RoyalSapphire Members
Investigator(s):	LaDreka Karikari
Description of Study:	To explore how Black girls make sense of their experiences in an educational setting while being provided support through an afterschool program, RoyalSapphire.
Adverse Effects and Risks:	None
Duration of Study:	45 - 60 minutes.
Confidentiality of Data:	Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recording, and it will be kept in a secure place.
Contact Person:	Parents or guardians of participants may contact:

Student Researcher	**Faculty Supervisor**
LaDreka Karikari	Aryn Baxter, Ph.D.
University of Dayton	University of Dayton
███████████	███████████
E: karikaril1@udayton.edu	E: abaxter1@udayton.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the University of Dayton's Institutional Review Board at (937) 229-3515 or IRB@udayton.edu.

_____

Student's Full Name (please print)

_____

Parent's Full Name (please print)

_____

Parent or Guardian Signature   Date

APPENDIX D: Participant Asset Form

APPENDIX E: Covid-Related IRB Approval Form

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Human Subject Covid-19 Protection

Principle Investigator Name: LaDreka Karikari
E-mail: karikaril1@udayton.edu

Project Title: Your Voice is my Favorite Sound: Lived Experiences of RoyalSapphire Members

Date (today): July 13, 2012

Before filling out this form, please consider whether your data collection or parts of the data collection can be performed remotely through telephone contact, remote monitoring, remote data collection, or video conferencing as alternatives to conducting this research in-person.

1. According to the CDC, older adults and those with certain medical conditions are considered high-risk populations. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html

   Will you be including participants that are considered high-risk (examples: >65 y/o, immunocompromised, BMI > 30, pulmonary issues, etc.)? No

   If so, what is your reasoning and what extra precautions will you take to ensure safety?

2. Please describe any additional COVID risks related to the research and the precautions that will be used to ensure safety. This study will take place in person at Regal Academy. I will adhere to the site safety rules and regulations when conducting interviews, focus groups, and observations to ensure safety.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read and will follow current University of Dayton protocols for COVID-19, as well as any additional site-specific COVID-19 protocols if conducting research off-campus.

Primary Investigator Signature: _____
Date: _____

For research that involves direct contact with human subjects, please include this form with your application for approval prior to data collection.

APPENDIX F: Focus Group Protocol for Participants

Regal Academy Coordinators/Administrators

1. Please tell me your name and how long you have been an educator and a part of RoyalSapphire.

2. Please describe your roles within and outside of RoyalSapphires.

3. Why did you become involved in RoyalSapphires?

4. What do you think are the current needs of members of RoyalSapphires?

5. What do you think are the current needs of the program?

6. Do you feel participating in RoyalSapphires impacts Black girls at Regal Academy? If so, please explain.

7. In general, what CCW tenants (briefly describe the six tenants) do you think members possess before attending RoyalSapphires?

8. What changes did you see in members of RoyalSapphires after participating in the program? Assertiveness (including asking for help), self-esteem, teamwork, problem-solving, coping skills, and resiliency?

9. What else would you like me to know about your experiences within RoyalSapphires?

APPENDIX F CONTINUED

Focus Group Protocol for Participants

<u>RoyalSapphires members</u>

1. How long have you participated in RoyalSapphires?

2. What made you decide to participate in RoyalSapphires?

3. How do your actual RoyalSapphire experiences compare with what you thought RoyalSapphire would be like?

4. Describe what you feel are the best and the worst parts of participating in RoyalSapphires afterschool program?

5. Describe a typical RoyalSapphires meeting that you have experienced.

6. Do you think you act or do things differently since joining RoyalSapphires?

7. What do you hope to gain from participating in RoyalSapphires?

APPENDIX G: Interview Protocol for Participants

<u>RoyalSapphires members</u>

1. Tell me about yourself and why you decided to participate in RoyalSapphires?

2. Tell me what you consider is the highlight of participating in RoyalSapphire.

3. How do you think RoyalSapphires has affected your feelings and performance in school?

4. How do you think RoyalSapphire has affected your feelings and performance out of school?

5. Do you see yourself continuing to participate in RoyalSapphires in the future?

    1. How has your experience with RoyalSapphires affected that decision?

6. What leadership skills did you have before joining RoyalSapphires?

7. How did participating in RoyalSapphires help to enhance those skills?

8. Have other behaviors, thoughts, or feelings about yourself changed since joining RoyalSapphires?

    1. If there is a change, do you think that has to do with joining RoyalSapphires?

    2. Can you tell me more about that?

9. In what ways have you been supported, provided resources, and developed relationships with peers and coordinators?

REGAL ACADEMY

ROYALSAPPHIRES

Theme #1
Amethyst, 8th grade

MY SAFE SPACE WAS FOUND BY IDENTIFYING MY SAFE PERSON

When I came to RoyalSapphires, I knew it was going to be great because of Ms. Emerald. I had Ms. Emerald as a teacher. Her class was fun. She would help me when I would get upset and not yell at me and help calm me down. To think about my actions. That is really the reason I keep coming is because I like Ms. Emerald and I like how she treats me.

Theme #2
Turquoise, 4th grade

I LIKE GETTING TO KNOW THE GIRLS

We have been able to know all the other girls and know what they like and what they don't. And two of the girls don't like people looking at them while they talk. And some of them do. We follow what they want.

Theme #3
Topaz, 7th grade

ROYALSAPPHIRES = MY HAPPY PLACE

RoyalSapphires is my happy place because I get to hang out with girls in the program. Sometimes I will get into an argument or something. Then I just need to calm down. Then I will just think about RoyalSapphires as my happy place.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE REASEARCHER ...

BASED ON THE DATA COLLECTION:

- Create an advisory board
- Identify a school site to run an after-school program
- Creation of an after-school curriculum
- Assess experiences based on activity for participants and volunteers

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE/RESEARCH

The value of afterschool programs for adolescent Black girls

Knowing the potential impact of afterschool activities on students, specifically adolescent Black girls, the need for a grounded curriculum focused on growth and leadership grows exponentially.

Adolescent Black girls identifying someone they trust in school is critical

When trust is built between adult leaders and adolescent Black girls, they are more likely to listen to the advice they receive, and the advice shared is used to enhance their learning and understanding.

Studying the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on adolescent Black girls

When we look at the experiences of Black girls, they experience a difference in age-related developments from their peers physically and psychologically. Limited literature is available that focuses on Black girls, and the existing studies usually combine their practices with Black women and Black boy peers.

The accessibility of afterschool programming in underserved communities

Future research in developing pathways to ensure students from marginalized backgrounds have accessibility to afterschool programming will ensure that students from these areas are provided with additional opportunities to include their growth and development positively.