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Lived Experiences of Black Girls in the City of Richmond, VA

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Richmond, Virginia

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VCU

Research Institute for Social Equity

L. Douglas Wilder School of
Government and Public Affairs



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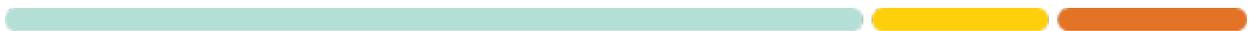




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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My favorite thing about myself is everything.
(“Ariana,” age 17, Focus Group #7)

This report was prepared by the Virginia Commonwealth University L. Douglas Wilder School Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE) in partnership with Girls For A Change (GFAC), a nonprofit youth development organization in Richmond, VA. The report offers a comprehensive understanding of the lives of Black girls in Virginia’s capital city.

The report encompasses two-and-a-half years of gathering and analyzing both secondary and primary research. Importantly, Black girls helped shape the research with input on both methods and questions. The research team worked closely with hundreds of Black girls and their communities, including their guardians/parents and Black emerging adult women.

This report complements the emerging field of Black Girlhood Studies (BGS) that showcases the full humanity of Black girls and girlhood. Previous works have highlighted the challenges faced by Black girls through a negative, deficit narrative. This study adopts an asset-based approach, focusing on discovering and mobilizing the skills, strengths, and resources of individuals within their communities rather than solely on their struggles and deficits.

Secondary research included examination of more than a dozen journal articles and comprehensive research reports about Black girls including a 2017 study in Philadelphia, a 2019 study done in Chicago, a 2020 study in Columbus, Ohio, and the 2021 Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls 2021 report on the state of Black women and girls. Primary research included an online survey, focus groups, and interviews with over 250 Black girls, 21 Black emerging adult women, and 11 parents and guardians.

Project Goals and Guiding Questions

The research team used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to gather rich data on the lived experiences of Black adolescent girls. After preliminary research, the team developed three guiding questions:

1. How do Black girls experience daily life in the City of Richmond?
2. What individual strengths and community assets are available to Black girls as they navigate day-to-day life in the city?
3. What community support can be expanded to further enhance the experiences of Black girls in the City of Richmond?



Report Organization

The report that follows is divided into five sections:

- Historical Context
- Methodology
- Profile of Participants
- Findings and Insights
- Implications and Recommendations

Historical Context

The City of Richmond, Virginia is a place with a rich and layered history that reflects both the nation's struggles and its ongoing pursuit of justice. As Virginia's capital, Richmond serves as Virginia's seat of state government and politics. Established in 1737, the city's history is deeply intertwined with the resilience and creativity of its Black communities. Legacies of segregation, redlining, and systematic exclusion have profoundly shaped the city's neighborhoods and opportunities; yet, these same conditions have also given rise to strong traditions within the Black community of organizing, entrepreneurship, education, and cultural expression.

In 2025, Richmond ranks among the top ten localities in Virginia for the proportion of Black girls within the youth population and has the largest Black girls population (in terms of numbers) among these localities (see Table 1 and Figure 2, p. 20)

Methodology

Rather than taking a traditional deficit approach, focusing on deficiencies, problems, and needs of the population, this study used an asset-based framework emphasizing the discovery and mobilization of existing assets and resources to empower the population.

Involving Black girls in the development and deployment of the research was a critical component. At the start of the study, RISE staff participated in two City of Richmond youth events: the Black Girl Rally and the Teen Summit. The research team hosted an exhibition booth at both events and created two activities to gain a deeper understanding of how Black girls perceive themselves and their individual strengths, and how they utilize existing community resources. Additionally, RISE developed a Youth Advisory Action Board (YAAB), a group of five Black adolescent girls from Richmond who were compensated for their time and expertise. The YAAB played a central role in shaping the study's survey design and participant recruitment efforts.

Data collection methods included an online survey for girls aged 12 to 17 with 250 responses, 7 focus groups with a total of 34 participants, as well as 32 interviews with parents, guardians, and emerging adult women aged 18-22.



Profile of Participants

Participants were representative of a cross-section of neighborhoods and experiences within the city. Nearly all respondents were currently enrolled in school; the majority of girls come from families in the United States and live with at least one parent; and many reported family finances of modest means.

The majority of the 21 emerging adult women interviewed resided in the City of Richmond. Regarding their current life circumstances, nearly 43% of participants identified as college students who were also employed. Parents and guardians interviewed all resided in Richmond and represented a variety of educational attainments and household incomes.

Findings and Insights

Results from the survey, focus groups and interviews are divided into five sections to reflect the distribution of assets: Identity, Health and Well-Being, Home and Family, School and Learning, and Community.

Identity

The Black girls in Richmond resonated with a variety of identities, characteristics, and strengths, leading to their diverse definitions of self. Figure 29 (page 52) identifies the percentage of respondents who agree with statements such as

- ❖ *“I learned about my ethnicity by doing things such as searching the internet or keeping up with current events” (63.6%)*
- ❖ *“I have read books, magazines, newspapers, or other materials that have taught me about my ethnicity (62.4%) and*
- ❖ *“I have participated in activities that taught me about my ethnicity” (58%)*

Additional insights from girls, parents, and caregivers can be found on pages 52-57.

Health and Well-Being

The survey participants were asked about both their physical and mental health as well as their sense of well-being. More than 90% of participants reported being healthy and believed their health was excellent (Figure 36 on page 61). Fifty percent of participants say it is very likely or likely that they will speak to a mental health professional (Figure 39 on page 64). Participants were also asked who they were comfortable seeking help or getting advice from, with friends and parents ranking the highest (See Figure 41 on page 65).

Home and Family

The majority of participants live at home with at least one parent. They describe a generally positive home life and family relationships. Both girls and their parents or guardians state that



family members provide a wide range of support, including nurturing, emotional support, and encouragement. Family members also help cultivate their interests, career development, and in-school and extracurricular activities.

School and Learning

Results from the focus groups, interviews, and survey revealed how important schools are in the lives of young Black girls, particularly the important role that teachers play in terms of guidance, encouragement, and support.

Community

Through focus groups and surveys, we learned that a strong sense of safety and belonging plays a vital role in the mental and emotional well-being of the girls it serves. The majority of girls described their communities as safe places where they could be themselves and enjoy outdoor activities. The findings highlight the importance of community belonging as a protective factor in young girls' well-being.

Implications and Recommendations

This study explored the lived experiences of Black girls in the City of Richmond and the assets and strengths that they and their communities possess. From the insights obtained, we outline a comprehensive list of recommendations for community nonprofits, government agencies, and schools, and provide toolkits and resources for the communities.

The recommendations fall into four categories.

Acknowledging Black Girls' Voices. The report outlines several recommendations regarding the importance of acknowledging and centering Black girls' voices in initiatives designed for them, including research, programs, services, and support.

Access and Investment in Community Supports. Although dozens of opportunities facilitated by government and nonprofit organizations exist, more explicit programming to cultivate interest, support mental health, and education and career goals for Black girls is needed.



Box 1. Recommendations for Community Nonprofits and Government Agencies

Expand and Communicate Youth Programming

- Increase funding for summer and afterschool programs;
- Improve communication with families through multiple channels (mail, email, social media, flyers);

Broaden Access to Creative and Novel Opportunities

- Partner with surrounding counties to expose youth to activities not available in Richmond (e.g., horseback riding, archery);
- Support spaces for Black girls to form community groups, identify needs, and lead local initiatives;

Provide more targeted funding for Black girls' mental health services

- Embed mental health training and resources in schools and youth-serving organizations;
- Host annual forums for Black girls to express experiences, challenges, and solutions;

Expand career and education programs specifically for Black girls

- Create mentorship and networking opportunities with Black professional women;
- Provide workshops on entrepreneurship, college resources, and scholarships.

Leveraging Black Girls' Strengths to Inform School Practices. The assets and strengths identified by Black girls and their parents, along with the desired services they highlighted, provide valuable guidance for schools to adapt teaching strategies and school activities in ways that leverage these strengths, address their needs, and respond to their concerns.

Box 2. Recommendations for Schools

Provide Black girls with role models

- Incorporate course materials and role models that reflect Black girls' identities and experiences;
- Have more teachers who share their identities;
- Invite Black women to speak about their successful career journeys in classrooms.

Support and leverage Black girls' strengths

- Support them in leadership roles across different settings;
- Celebrate their accomplishments both inside and outside the classroom.
- Co-create after-school programs and extracurricular activities with girls and their parents;
- Integrate mental health, identity, and cultural pride into the curriculum.

Building Positive Digital Habits for Black Girls. Since social media and technology are deeply integrated into daily life, girls and their parents must be empowered to navigate these media in healthy ways with an understanding of potential adverse effects and with consideration of how not all screen time is going to have the same effect on the girls.



Deliverables and Toolkits for Communities

This project produced two important toolkits for communities interested in supporting Black girls' individual strengths and community assets for Black girls in the City of Richmond: 1) The Asset Map produced a series of maps based on Google Map and ArcGIS Pro that captured all the important resources for Black girls in the City of Richmond, including those reported by our participants and those our researchers considered as important resources for Black girls; 2) The Story Map provides an overview of the historical context and culture where Black girls grow up and the individual strengths and community assets reported by our participants.

In the pages that follow, you will hear the experiences shared by Black girls, emerging adult women, and parents/guardians of Black girls in their local communities, which have resulted in valuable insights and recommendations along with toolkits and resources for communities.



INTRODUCTION

Research on the perspectives, experiences, and needs of girls is becoming increasingly common across the country, particularly in cities such as Los Angeles,¹ Chicago,² and Philadelphia.³ Understanding girls' experiences allows for identifying gendered experiences occurring during childhood and adolescence, all of which shape long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes.

Most existing studies on girls produce *deficit narratives* by focusing only on girls' problems, needs, and deficiencies.⁴ Even fewer focus solely on the experience of Black girls specifically.⁵ Further, most research studies have heavily focused on the experiences of either male, female, or the Black population in general, leaving out the voices and intersectional experiences of Black girls shaped by their age, gender, and race.⁶

Filling this gap, the VCU Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE) partnered with Girls For A Change (GFAC), a nonprofit youth development organization, to explore the lived experiences of Black girls in Richmond, Virginia. The report offers a comprehensive understanding of the lives of Black girls by working closely with them and their communities, including their guardians/parents and Black emerging adult women. The voices of Black girls and emerging adult Black women were heard directly through surveys and focus groups, and their parents and guardians provided further insights through interviews. This approach allows us to understand their lived experiences, individual strengths, and community assets.

This study complements the emerging field of Black Girlhood Studies (BGS) that showcases the full humanity of Black girls and girlhood.⁷ Methodologically, the study adopts an *asset-based*

¹ Chicago Foundation for Women. (2019). *2019 report on the status of Chicago's women and girls*. https://www.cfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/GenderEquity2019_Report_FINAL_edited.pdf

² Philadelphia Commission for Women. (2017). *The state of women and girls of Philadelphia*. <https://www.phila.gov/media/20170913163757/womenssummitreport2.pdf>

³ Mount Saint Mary's University. (2018). *Report on the status of women in Los Angeles County*. https://www.msmu.edu/media/website/learning-amp-research-communities/center-for-the-advancement-of-women/2018LACountyRSWG_full_101618.pdf

⁴ Harvey, M. (2014). Strengths-based approach. In D. Coghlan, M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.) *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research* (Vol. 2, pp. 733-735). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406.n322>

⁵ Commission on Black Girls. (2020). *A report on the quality of life of Black girls in Columbus, Ohio*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240129192729/https://www.columbus.gov/cobgreport/>

⁶ Crenshaw, K., & Evans-Winters, V. E. (2024). Black girls youth participatory action research & pedagogies. *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*, 3(2), 114-118. <http://doi.org/10.21423/jaawge-v3i2a165>

⁷ Apugo, D., Castro, A. J., & Dougherty, S. A. (2022). Taught in the matrix: A review of Black girls' experiences in U.S. schools. *Review of Educational Research*, 93(4), 559-593. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221125476>; Brown, R. N. (2009). *Black girlhood celebration: Toward a*



approach, focusing on discovering and mobilizing the skills, strengths, and resources of individuals within their communities rather than solely on their struggles and deficits. This is done to leverage existing assets and resources to help them thrive.⁸ The asset-based approach recognizes the capacities of people and their associations within the community, reorienting the research perspective to enable the community to recognize and combine their strengths in innovative ways, creating opportunities, resources, and new possibilities for growth, and ultimately inspiring positive changes within the community.⁹ Several types of community assets contribute to community development (Figure 1).¹⁰

hip-hop feminist pedagogy (Vol. 5). Peter Lang.; Brown, R. N. (2013). *Hear our truths: The creative potential of Black girlhood*. University of Illinois Press.

⁸ Green, G. P., & Haines, A. (2011). *Asset building & community development* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

⁹ Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. ACTA Publications.

¹⁰ Flora, C. B., & Bregendahl, C. (2012). Collaborative community-supported agriculture: Balancing community capitals for producers and consumers. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 19(3), 329-346. <https://doi.org/10.48416/ijisaf.v19i3.208>



Figure 1. Community Assets

Note. Seven types of assets have been identified as essential for community development: human assets (e.g., individual skills, knowledge, and abilities), social assets (e.g., networks and organizations), political assets (e.g., a group’s ability to influence resource distribution), financial assets (e.g., money and investments), cultural assets (e.g., history and values), built assets (e.g., housing, schools, roads, and community centers), and natural assets (e.g., landscape, water, and soil).¹¹

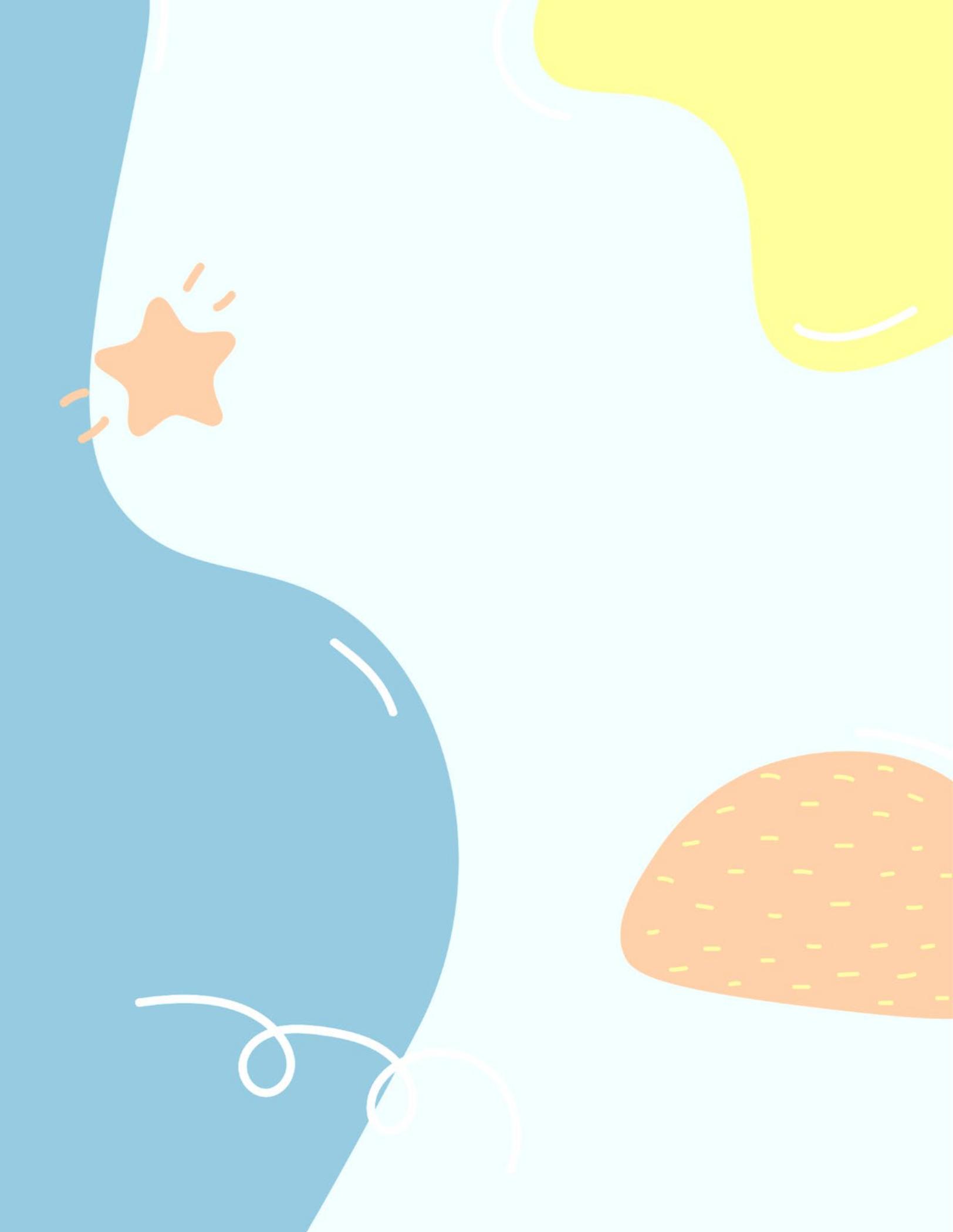
In this study, we focused on how the following four assets from the overall seven identified by Flora and Bregendahl (2012, Figure 1)¹² support the growth and development of Black girls:

- human (e.g., individual skills, knowledge, and abilities)
- social (e.g., networks and organizations)
- cultural (e.g., history and values), and
- built assets (e.g., housing, schools, roads, and community centers).

In doing so, we develop a positive, empowering narrative about Black girls, leveraging their individual strengths and community resources to support them.

¹¹ Flora, C. B., & Bregendahl, C. (2012). Collaborative community-supported agriculture: Balancing community capitals for producers and consumers. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 19(3), 329-346. <https://doi.org/10.48416/ij saf.v19i3.208>

¹² Flora, C. B., & Bregendahl, C. (2012). Collaborative community-supported agriculture: Balancing community capitals for producers and consumers. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 19(3), 329-346. <https://doi.org/10.48416/ij saf.v19i3.208>



BUILDING ON PRIOR RESEARCH

Prior research has identified protective factors, such as family and peer support as well as community programs, that have been shown to reduce the negative consequences associated with such adversity.¹³ Below summarizes the protective factors for Black girls when facing challenges and provides an overview of the current status report related to Black females or girls.

Protective Factors that Support Black Girls

Previous works have highlighted the challenges faced by Black girls through a negative, deficit narrative. However, scholars are challenging these deficit narratives by emphasizing the individual strengths, Black culture, and community assets, while also acknowledging Black girls' multiple social identities (e.g., race, gender, age, class).¹⁴ These studies seek to support Black girls' motivation, aspirations, academic performance, and occupational attainment.¹⁵ The asset-based approach challenges the hyper focus on systemic inequalities due to racist and gendered biases by centering the constructive assets available to Black girls.¹⁶ Resilience, ethnic identity, after-school programs, family, and peer support are found in prior studies as the strengths and assets that could improve Black girls' academic performance and personal development.

¹³ Archer-Banks, D. A. M. & Behar-Horenstein, L. S. (2012). Ogbu revisited: Unpacking high-achieving African American girls' high school experiences. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 198-223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911427739>; Harper, E. A., James, A. G., Curtis, C., & Ramey, D. (2019). Using the participatory culture-specific intervention model to improve a positive youth development program for African American adolescent girls. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 31(1), 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2019.1652618>; Honora D. T. (2002). The relationship of gender and achievement to future outlook among African American adolescents. *Adolescence*, 37(146), 301-316.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A89942833/AONE?u=viva_vcu&sid=googleScholar&xid=ddbfcadab

¹⁴ Archer-Banks, D. A. M. & Behar-Horenstein, L. S. (2012). Ogbu revisited: Unpacking high-achieving African American girls' high school experiences. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 198-223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911427739>; Harper, E. A., James, A. G., Curtis, C., & Ramey, D. (2019). Using the participatory culture-specific intervention model to improve a positive youth development program for African American adolescent girls. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 31(1), 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2019.1652618>; Honora D. T. (2002). The relationship of gender and achievement to future outlook among African American adolescents. *Adolescence*, 37(146), 301-316.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A89942833/AONE?u=viva_vcu&sid=googleScholar&xid=ddbfcadab

¹⁵ Archer-Banks, D. A. M. & Behar-Horenstein, L. S. (2012). Ogbu revisited: Unpacking high-achieving African American girls' high school experiences. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 198-223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911427739>; Honora D. T. (2002). The relationship of gender and achievement to future outlook among African American adolescents. *Adolescence*, 37(146), 301-316.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A89942833/AONE?u=viva_vcu&sid=googleScholar&xid=ddbfcadab

¹⁶ Agger, C. A., Roby, R. S., Nicolai, K. D., Koenka, A. C., & Miles, M. L. (2022). Taking a critical look at adolescent research on Black girls and women: A systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 39(2), 413-460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584221076054>; Ireland, D. T., Freeman, K. E., Winston-Proctor, C. E., DeLaine, K. D., McDonald Lowe, S., & Woodson, K. M. (2018). (Un)Hidden figures: A synthesis of research examining the intersectional experiences of Black women and girls in STEM education. *Review of Research in Education*, 42(1), 226-254. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18759072>



When facing tough challenges in educational settings, Black girls draw on resilience, which enables them to successfully navigate discrimination at school. This allows them to reap the benefits of school, such as better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and increased college acceptance.¹⁷ Ethnic identity is also associated with better academic outcomes in schools and higher future educational aspirations.¹⁸ After-school programs that incorporate and emphasize cultural assets have been shown to combat the negative effects of racism, sexism, and ageism, informing Black girls' future development.¹⁹

Family and peer support have been found to empower Black girls.²⁰ Family support plays an especially important role in shaping Black girls' future aspirations.²¹ Strong and deliberate encouragement from their mothers is associated with Black girls excelling in school.²² Peer support is an asset that helps them maintain their academic commitment and make informed choices and decisions, such as those regarding school and dating.²³

¹⁷ Evans-Winters, V. E. (2011). *Teaching Black girls: Resiliency in urban classrooms* (2nd ed.). Peter Lang Inc.; O'Connor, C. (1999). Race, class, and gender in America: Narratives of opportunity among low-income African American youths. *Sociology of Education*, 72(3), 137–157. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2673226>

¹⁸ Adelabu, D. H. (2008). Future time perspective, hope, and ethnic identity among African American adolescents. *Urban Education*, 43(3), 347–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085907311806>; Oyserman, D., Bybee, D., & Terry, K. (2003). Gendered racial identity and involvement with school. *Self and Identity*, 2(4), 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714050250>

¹⁹ Harper, E. A., James, A. G., Curtis, C., & Ramey, D. (2019). Using the participatory culture-specific intervention model to improve a positive youth development program for African American adolescent girls. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 31(1), 61–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2019.1652618>; Jacobs, C. E. (2016). Developing the “oppositional gaze”: Using critical media pedagogy and Black feminist thought to promote Black girls' identity development. *Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.3.0225>; Thomas, O., Davidson, W., & McAdoo, H. (2008). An evaluation study of the Young Empowered Sisters (YES!) Program: Promoting cultural assets among African American adolescent girls through a culturally relevant school-based intervention. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 34(3), 281–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798408314136>

²⁰ Evans-Winters, V. E. (2011). *Teaching Black girls: Resiliency in urban classrooms* (2nd ed.). Peter Lang Inc.; Jacobs, C. E. (2016). Developing the “oppositional gaze”: Using critical media pedagogy and Black feminist thought to promote Black girls' identity development. *Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.3.0225>

²¹ Archer-Banks, D. A. M. & Behar-Horenstein, L. S. (2012). Ogbu revisited: Unpacking high-achieving African American girls' high school experiences. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 198–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911427739>; Honora D. T. (2002). The relationship of gender and achievement to future outlook among African American adolescents. *Adolescence*, 37(146), 301–316. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A89942833/AONE?u=viva_vcu&sid=googleScholar&xid=ddbfcadab

²² Archer-Banks, D. A. M. & Behar-Horenstein, L. S. (2012). Ogbu revisited: Unpacking high-achieving African American girls' high school experiences. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 198–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911427739>

²³ Hubbard, L. (1999). College aspirations among low-income African American high school students: Gendered strategies for success. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 363–383. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3196026>; Hubbard, L. (2005). The role of gender in academic achievement. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 18(5), 605–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390500224887>; Jacobs, C. E. (2016). Developing the “oppositional gaze”:

Status Reports and Black Girls

The unique experiences of women and girls have been the subject of comprehensive research and status reports created by researchers (e.g., governments, think tanks, nonprofit organizations, and scholars, etc.) in cities and states across the US. These reports focus on women and girls' experiences in mental and physical health, economic empowerment, leadership, civic engagement, education, and housing, among other areas.²⁴ Negative outcomes were highlighted in these reports regarding their experiences. Black women and girls' experiences and outcomes are often overlooked by policymakers, unless within the context of the Black family more broadly and reproductive justice.²⁵ Therefore, it is unsurprising that few of these reports highlight their often daily intersectional experiences shaped by racism, sexism, and ageism.²⁶

However, in 2020, a report on Black girls' quality of life, produced in Columbus, Ohio by the Commission on Black Girls, took a unique, asset-based approach that focused on their individual strengths and assets to address the community's needs appropriately. The Columbus report captured contextual factors (e.g., parental involvement, housing stability, academic history, and social support) that contribute to the Black girls' quality of life in Columbus, Ohio.²⁷ The findings informed the Commission on Black Girls at the City of Columbus in their commitment to collaborate with local communities to create holistic approaches to maximize the quality of life of Black girls in Columbus.

Moreover, U.S. Congresswomen Yvette Clarke (NY-09), Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12), and Robin L. Kelly (IL-02) initiated the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls (CCBWG)

Using critical media pedagogy and Black feminist thought to promote Black girls' identity development. *Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.3.0225>

²⁴ Chicago Foundation for Women. (2019). *2019 Report on the Status of Chicago's Women and Girls*. https://www.cfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/GenderEquity2019_Report_FINAL_edited.pdf; Mount Saint Mary's University. (2018). *Report on the status of women in Los Angeles County*. https://www.msmu.edu/media/website/learning-amp-research-communities/center-for-the-advancement-of-women/2018LACountyRSWG_full_101618.pdf; Philadelphia Commission for Women. (2017). *The state of women and girls of Philadelphia*. <https://www.phila.gov/media/20170913163757/womenssummitreport2.pdf>

²⁵ In Our Own Voice. (2024). *The lives and voices of Black families in 2024*. https://blackrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/In-Our-Own-Voice_Lives-Voices-of-Black-Families-2024.pdf; Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda. (2025). *Policy as power: Providing a path toward Black reproductive justice*. https://blackrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-Black-Reproductive-Justice-Policy-Agenda_In-Our-Own-Voice-2025.pdf

²⁶ Commission on Black Girls. (2020). *A report on the quality of life of Black girls in Columbus, Ohio*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240129192729/https://www.columbus.gov/cobgreport/>; Crenshaw, K. W., Ocen, P., & Nanda, J. (2015). *Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced, and underprotected*. Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, & African American Policy Forum. https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter_Report.pdf; Painia, B. A. (2018). *State of Black girls & women in Baton Rouge*. MetroMorphosis. https://metromorphosis.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-State-of-Black-Girls-and-Women_compressed.pdf

²⁷ Commission on Black Girls. (2020). *A report on the quality of life of Black girls in Columbus, Ohio*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240129192729/https://www.columbus.gov/cobgreport/>



in 2016 to “empower and elevate the voices of Black women and girls throughout the country and advance legislation important to their welfare”.²⁸ The CCBWG published its first report on the state of Black women and girls in 2021. Although this report highlights the challenges Black women and girls face in the US, it also outlines the opportunities that exist and can be created to improve their circumstances. This report covers several policy areas (health, finance, education, justice) from an explicitly intersectional lens. This lens enables the report to provide robust policy recommendations and legislative initiatives to remove barriers and support and empower Black women and girls.

The current CCBWG report seeks to make similar asset-based contributions by recognizing Black girls' unique, intersectional experiences in the City of Richmond. The report employs an asset-based approach, acknowledging the individual and community strengths that contribute to Black girls' success. Consistent with these reports, this report is a “*who we are and how we do it*” narrative from participating Black girls and their guardians in the City of Richmond, Virginia.²⁹ The current report promotes culturally relevant narratives that prioritize the full humanity of Black girls and address issues deemed important to participants in this study.

²⁸ Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls. (2021). *State of Black women and girls in 21st century America: An analysis of challenges and opportunities*.

<https://coalchicago.com/Images/2021/04/CCBWG-Report-Final.pdf>

²⁹ Brown, R. N. (2013). *Hear our truths: The creative potential of black girlhood*. University of Illinois Press (p.6).

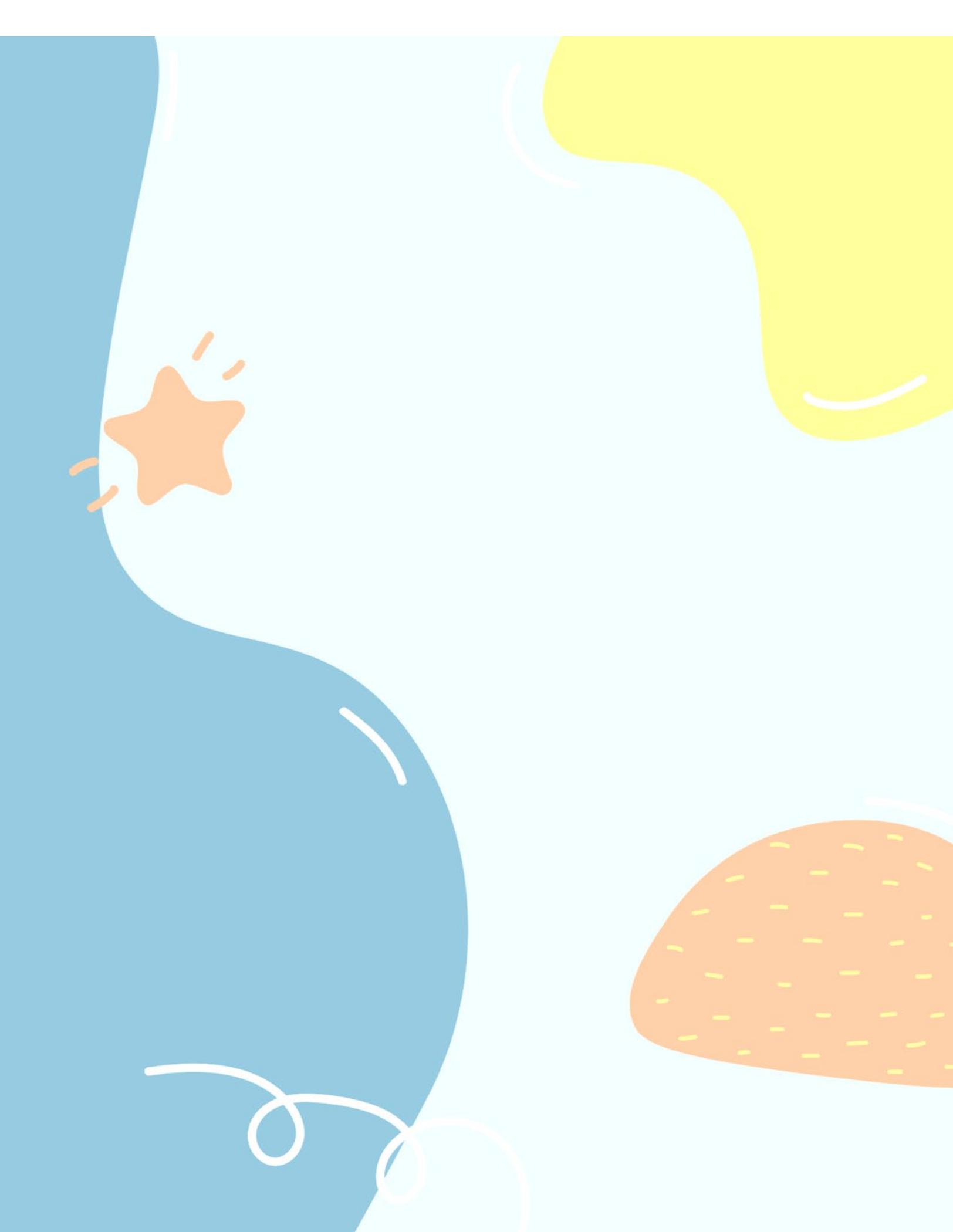


PROJECT GOALS AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

Building on community assets, this report employs an asset-based approach to explore the strengths of Black girls living in the City of Richmond, Virginia. The report uses both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to gather rich data on the life experiences of Black adolescent girls, aged 12-17, including their individual strengths and assets. In this project, we focus on Black girls aged 12-17, excluding girls aged 0-11, because their experiences and cognitive development will enable them to provide a more in-depth understanding of the quality of life they've experienced while living in the City of Richmond. This report will contribute to a broader narrative about the unique lived experiences of Black girls in the City of Richmond. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do Black girls experience daily life in the City of Richmond?
- 2) What individual strengths and community assets are available to Black girls as they navigate day-to-day life in the city?
- 3) What community support can be expanded to further enhance the experiences of Black girls in the City of Richmond?

As Black girls navigate the intersections of race, gender, and age within their social and political environments, a multifaceted understanding of the findings and their implications is necessary.





NAVIGATING THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT AS A BLACK GIRL

The lived experiences of Black girls have been historically overlooked and undervalued in society and general research. Often excluded from studies alongside their peers regarding gender and race, they have been left to rely on inherited ways of navigating the unique challenges of their girlhood. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins emphasizes and establishes self-definition as a critical component of Black feminist theory and practice.³⁰ Too often, Black girls are denied the benefit of self-definition and narration of their own stories that only they are truly able to capture, with the hope of them being amplified. As a result, many have learned to self-advocate, maintain discipline, and defend their sense of self in systems that often fail to recognize or acknowledge their experiences.

Black girlhood today is markedly different from that of earlier generations. Black girls are no longer insulated from the broader social and political challenges that shape the world around them. Instead, they are learning to cope with and make sense of a global environment that directly influences their daily lives. The evolution of technology as a vehicle for global media and culture has added to the intricacies of Black girlhood. Social media movements like #BlackGirlMagic and organizations like Black Girls Rock® (#BlackGirlsRock) that center the voices of Black girls and women also exist in a time when Black girls are depicted less in traditional media. Black girls and women also have to come into contact with digital misogyny.³¹ The benefits of social media as a connection builder and community expander are undercut by the pervasive nature of racism present in digital spaces. Black girls continue to face the unique task of navigating a world that devalues their racial and gender identities while expecting their strength and perseverance.³² Older generations recall a world that, while marked by racial and gender boundaries, was often more easily defined and less complex to navigate. In today's contracts, Black girls navigate a far more complex, socially influenced landscape, shaped not only by their immediate environments but the expansive reach of global media, technology, and culture.³³

³⁰ Collins, P.H. (2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://negrasoulblog.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/patricia-hill-collins-black-feminist-thought.pdf>

³¹ Bailey, M. (2021). *Misogynoir transformed: Black women's digital resistance* (Vol. 18). NYU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv27ftv0s>

³² Hooks, B., Wallace, M., Hacker, A., Taylor, J., Bell, D., Reed, I., Hare, N., Williams, R., Caruso, C., Nightingale, C. H., Sleeper, J., Washington, E. B., Webster, Y., Tollett, K. S., & Brown, C. (1995). The crisis of African American gender relations. *Transition*, 66, 91–175. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935286>; Bailey, M. (2021). *Misogynoir transformed: Black women's digital resistance* (Vol. 18). NYU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv27ftv0s>

³³ Bailey, M. (2021). *Misogynoir transformed: Black women's digital resistance* (Vol. 18). NYU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv27ftv0s>



As Bentley-Edwards et. al. (2022) advances, Black girlhood extends beyond the block; it is global in scope and influence.³⁴ Black girls are shaped by the world around them, and actively shaping it through their creativity, visibility, and voice. They see more images of themselves than ever before due largely to the rise of non-traditional meetings, some affirming and empowering, others still rooted in limiting stereotypes. Black girls continue to foster “resistance, joy, camaraderie, and innovation.”³⁵ As trendsetters, cultural producers, and social change agents, they are redefining what it means to take up space. Their presence and influence highlight both the evolving nature of Black girlhood and its lasting strength. Managing both virtual and in-person relationships require emotional awareness and resilience, especially amid the rise of online victimization that can affect their well-being.

Black Girl Identity

Assets. Identity formation is central to understanding the experiences of Black girls in the United States. From a young age, they navigate the complex realities of race, gender, and culture that shape their confidence, sense of belonging, and self-expression.³⁶ Research shows that Black girls perceive their identities and experiences through the intersection of gender and race (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1990; Payne).³⁷ In turn, they learn to see themselves and interpret how the world sees them through these intersecting identities. Positive ethnic-racial identities foster positive self-beliefs and functioning.³⁸ They have created strong coping mechanisms and self-determination strategies to resist negative stereotypes.³⁹ As a result, Black girls demonstrate high levels of resilience, adaptability, and pride in their racial and gender identities, which can serve

³⁴ Bentley-Edwards, K. L., & Adams, V. N. (2024). I am not (your) superwoman, Black girl magic, or beautiful struggle: Rethinking the resilience of Black women and girls. *The American psychologist, 79*(8), 1036–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001304>

³⁵ Bentley-Edwards, K. L., & Adams, V. N. (2024). I am not (your) superwoman, Black girl magic, or beautiful struggle: Rethinking the resilience of Black women and girls. *The American psychologist, 79*(8), 1036–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001304>

³⁶ Brown, T., & Sagna, S. (2025). Girls of Color navigating oppression, identity, and belonging through insights from a social justice educational programme. *Gender and Education, 37*(5), 578–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2025.2506354>

³⁷ Payne, A. N. (2022). Hip Hop, identity, & Black girlhood: How Black girls (re)construct racial and gender identity through Hip Hop. *Journal of Youth Studies, 27*(2), 252–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2119837>

³⁸ Hughes, D. L., Watford, J. A., & Del Toro, J. (2016). A transactional/ecological perspective on ethnic-racial identity, socialization, and discrimination. *Advances in Child Development and Behavior, 51*, 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.acdb.2016.05.001>

³⁹ Thomas, A. J., Hacker, J. D., & Hoxha, D. (2011). Gendered Racial Identity of Black Young Women. *Sex Roles, 64*(7–8), 530–542. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9939-y>



as protective factors against bias.⁴⁰ When supported by affirming spaces and cultural networks, Black girls thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.⁴¹

Peer groups, aesthetics, and community culture influence Black girl identities.⁴² Through creative expression, peer relationships, and cultural affirmations, many develop a resilient sense of self that counters deficit narratives and embraces potential. Racial and gender pride leads to higher self-esteem and increased academic motivation among Black girls, even in the face of bias or exclusion. Parents are especially influential in this process as conversations with them about race-related concerns can promote positive racial and gender identities. When parents provide high levels of ethnic-racial socialization, it positively impacts various aspects of Black girls' lives, including self-efficacy and self-concept.⁴³ These discussions include strategies that support Black girls in developing a healthy, positive self-image.

Barriers. The policing of Black girls' bodies often involves making judgments about their conduct and attitude. They frequently face misrecognition and adultification⁴⁴ bias, which perceives them as more mature and accountable for their actions, charges usually reserved for adults.⁴⁵ The Georgetown study found that Black girls are seen as more independent and less in need of nurture and protection (p. 14).⁴⁶ Their intersectional identity increases the likelihood of being perceived as adults compared to their White peers, leading to harsher discipline and increased vulnerability to discretionary authority and encounters. Other research finds that adultification bias holds Black girls responsible for their own sexualization and exploitation, reduces the protection they receive during adolescence, and limits their access to treatment for sexual violence.⁴⁷ These barriers

⁴⁰ Wang, M. T., & Huguley, J. P. (2012). Parental racial socialization as a moderator of the effects of racial discrimination on educational success among African American adolescents. *Child Development*, 83(5), 1716–1731. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01808.x>

⁴¹ Burnett, M., McBride, M., Green, M. N., & Cooper, S. M. (2022). "When I think of Black girls, I think of opportunities": Black girls' identity development and the protective role of parental socialization in educational settings. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 933476. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.933476>

⁴² Brown, C. M. (2018). *Strong and confident: How Black adolescent girls define their identities using a multiple case study approach* [Doctoral dissertation, California Institute of Integral Studies]. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2054007165?sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>

⁴³ Banerjee, M., Byrd, C., & Rowley, S. (2018). The relationships of school-based discrimination and ethnic-racial socialization to African American adolescents' achievement outcomes. *Social Sciences*, 7(10), 208. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100208>

⁴⁴ According to Crooks et al. (2023, p.137), "Adultification refers to the contextual, social, and developmental processes that prematurely, and often inappropriately expose girls to adult knowledge and assume extensive adult roles and responsibilities". Crooks, N., King, B., Donenberg, G., & Sales, J. M. (2023). Growing up too "fast": Black girls' sexual development. *Sex Roles*, 89(3), 135-154. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-023-01390-w>

⁴⁵ Hood, A. N. (2023). Dual status and adultification: Black girls' lives in context. *Journal of Family Strengths*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.58464/2168-670x.1472>

⁴⁶ Epstein, R., Blake, J. J., González, T. (2017). *Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood*. Georgetown Law. <https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>

⁴⁷ Dagbovie-Mullins, S. A. (2013). Pigtailed, ponytailed, and getting tail: The infantilization and hypersexualization of African American females in popular culture. *Journal of Popular Culture (Boston)*, 46(4), 745–774. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12047>



often stem from racial stereotypes that shape how Black girls and women are perceived. Common stereotypes used to adultify or vilify Black girls include Sapphire, or Angry Black Woman, and the Strong Black Woman.⁴⁸ The “strong Black Woman” stereotype begins to emerge during adolescence as a budding response to lifelong expectations that Black girls should excel or outperform their peers throughout their lives. Although its origins date back to the early to mid-20th century, these stereotypes still influence contemporary perceptions.

Black Girl Health and Well-Being

Assets. The health and well-being of Black girls encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychosocial aspects. Black girls demonstrate strong resilience rooted in community support, cultural knowledge, and advocacy. Their ability to thrive despite deficient circumstances highlights the importance of conducting strengths-based research.⁴⁹ Black women have developed effective coping strategies. In environments that support Black Girls, they foster a community that serves as a tool to enhance knowledge and a sense of belonging.⁵⁰ According to Jones & Adair (2025), over time, Black girls have created effective strategies for maintaining mental and physical wellness. Across generations, Black women have nurtured their bodies and minds through shared wisdom, prayer, movement, and creative expression. These caring practices persist amid ongoing health disparities, illustrating the tension between survival and self-preservation.

Barriers. Despite these strengths, structural inequities continue to undermine the health access and outcomes of Black girls. Economic disadvantage, limited access to quality healthcare, and racial bias in medical systems contribute to persistent disparities.⁵¹ Black girls face elevated risks for chronic health conditions influenced by structural factors. Conditions such as obesity, STIs, asthma, diabetes, and hypertension, often emerge during adolescence and reflect the cumulative effects of environmental and social factors rather than individual behavior.⁵² Black girls

Epstein, R., Blake, J., & González, T. (2017). Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls’ childhood. Available at SSRN 3000695. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>

⁴⁸ Smithsonian. (2018). *Popular and pervasive stereotypes of African Americans*. National Museum of African American History & Culture. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-african-americans>

⁴⁹ Jones, N. N., & Adair, J. K. (2024). Black girl joy (un)interrupted: Recognizing and nurturing Black girls’ community-building capabilities in the early grades. *Urban Education*, 60(7), 1974-2015. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859241258174>

⁵⁰ Jones, N. N., & Adair, J. K. (2024). Black girl joy (un)interrupted: Recognizing and nurturing Black girls’ community-building capabilities in the early grades. *Urban Education*, 60(7), 1974-2015. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859241258174>

⁵¹ Never the Less, Inc. (n.d.) *Black girls and health disparities*. <https://neverthelessinc.com/black-girls-and-health-disparities/>

⁵² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *Childhood obesity facts*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood-obesity-facts/childhood-obesity-facts.html>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *HIV, STD, TB, and viral hepatitis among Black/African American people*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/health-disparities-hiv-std-tb-hepatitis/populations/black-african-american.html>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Most recent national asthma data*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/most_recent_national_asthma_data.htm



experience food and nutrition insecurity, racial residential segregation, environmental exposures, educational disparities, and community violence create conditions that affect health and opportunity. Together, these conditions limit access to healthy environments, increasing the likelihood of chronic illness and reinforcing cycles of health disadvantage.⁵³ The absence of culturally relevant health interventions further limits opportunities for Black girls to make informed and sustainable life choices.⁵⁴

The challenges of health and well-being extend beyond the clinical and physical. When Black girls navigate educational or social spaces, in which they are the racial minority, they often encounter stereotypes, microaggressions, and feelings of isolation.⁵⁵ These experiences can take their toll on mental and emotional wellness, leading to decreased self-esteem, exhaustion, mistrust of peers, staff, and institutions, and a diminished sense of belonging.⁵⁶ Over time, such stressors may reduce engagement, increase drop-out risks, and negatively impact both academic and personal development.

Black Girl Home & Family

Assets. Home and family are the first, most enduring sources of support for Black girls. Black girls' identity is shaped by their home and school environments.⁵⁷ Home and family life provide an essential foundation of love and learning. Home has traditionally been a source of strength and stability for Black girls, with stories, rituals, and relationships transmitting lessons of faith, perseverance, and love within families.⁵⁸ Family members, especially mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, play a role in shaping Black girls' self-perception and aspirations.⁵⁹ The methods Black families use to socialize girls influence their educational and career prospects.⁶⁰ Additionally,

⁵³Never the Less, Inc. (n.d.) *Black girls and health disparities*. <https://neverthelessinc.com/black-girls-and-health-disparities/>

⁵⁴ Williams-Butler, A., Dorsey, M., Lateef, H., Howard, T., Amoako, E. O., & Nortey, P. (2022). Black girl well-being: A scoping review of culturally and gender responsive interventions. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 34(1), 54-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315221147531>

⁵⁵ Brown, F. T. (2023). *For Black girls, by Black girls: Examining the experiences of Black women in historically white learning spaces and reimagining spaces with our needs in mind*. (Publication No. 1419685789). [Doctoral dissertations, Georgia Southern University]. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/2664>

⁵⁶ The University of Edinburgh.(2023, March 6). *Health Disparities in Black or African American People*. <https://equality-diversity.ed.ac.uk/students/microaggressions/effects-of-microaggressions>

⁵⁷ Burnett, M., McBride, M., Green, M. N., & Cooper, S. M. (2022). "When I think of Black girls, I think of opportunities": Black girls' identity development and the protective role of parental socialization in educational settings. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 933476. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.933476>

⁵⁸ Bryant, L. S., Leath, S., Billingsley, J., & Moseley, S. (2024). "She has a village": The intergenerational benefits of social support networks for Black mothers and daughters. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 48(3), 390-410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843241233289>

⁵⁹ Hooks, B. (1990). Homeplace (a site of resistance). In B. Hooks (Ed.). *Yearning: Race, gender, and culture politics* (pp.41-49). South End Press..

⁶⁰ Chavous, T., & Cogburn. C.D. (2007). Superinvisible women: Black girls and women in education. *Black Women, Gender + Families*, 1(2), 24–51. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/blacwomengendfami.1.2.0024>



Black families instill a sense of racial and personal pride in their daughters, which helps build resilience against obstacles. Studies show that strong peer bonds reinforce the emotional regulation and social skills first modeled within families.⁶¹ These relationships often provide safe spaces for self-expression and support during adolescence when belonging becomes central to well-being.

Barriers. Black home and family life also face significant barriers that impede full flourishing due to the weight of structural inequities. For example, structural racism, wealth and homeownership gaps and neighborhood divestment mean that even when Black families secure home ownership, the value of that home and surrounding neighborhood resources are often less than other families. Researchers also document that for Black families, the translation of socioeconomic status into health or other outcomes is weak due to persistent discrimination and structural constraints.

Black Girl Schooling

Assets. Research shows that Black girls participate more actively when supported by affirming, inclusive educational environments.⁶² Edwards & King (2023) emphasize that after-school programs should support offering safe spaces for self-visualization and confidence for middle school Black girls.⁶³ Their research showed that Black girls demonstrate high academic motivation, social awareness, and perseverance. Many Black girls find strength in relationships with teachers and mentors who affirm their identities and create opportunities for arts, activism, and academic engagement.⁶⁴ The presence of Black women teachers cultivates a sense of belonging among girl participants. Additionally, schools where Black girls can connect with same-race/ethnic peers often provide a stronger sense of belonging, higher grades, and fewer behavioral problems.⁶⁵ Culturally responsive pedagogy has been found to enhance engagement and belonging for Black girls.⁶⁶ In supportive school climates, Black girls are more likely to feel

⁶¹ Plybon, L. E., Edwards, L., Butler, D., Belgrave, F. Z., & Allison, K. W. (2003). Examining the link between neighborhood cohesion and school outcomes: The role of support coping among African American adolescent girls. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 29(4), 393–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798403256892>

⁶² Walters, D.G. (2023). *Affirming Black girls: Creating and sustaining affirming and more inclusive learning environments for Black girls through professional learning* [Doctoral dissertation, Sacred Heart University]. <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/edd/40/>

⁶³ Edwards, E. B. & King, N. S. (2023). “Girls hold all the power in the world”: Cultivating sisterhood and a counterspace to support STEM learning with Black girls. *Education Sciences*, 13(7), 698. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070698>

⁶⁴ Lane, M. (2022). Toward a politicized ethic of care about Black women and girls in education. In L.D. Patton, V. Evans-Winters, & C. Jacobs (Eds.), *Investing in the educational success of Black women and girls* (pp. 241-257). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003445449>

⁶⁵ Carter, R., Leath, S., Butler-Barnes, S. T., Byrd, C. M., Chavous, T. M., Caldwell, C. H., & Jackson, J. S. (2017). Comparing associations between perceived puberty, same-race friends and same-race Peers, and psychosocial outcomes among African American and Caribbean Black girls. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 43(8), 836-862. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798417711024>

⁶⁶ Bailes, J. (2021). *Adultification and criminalization of young Black girls: Using culturally responsive education to empower adolescent girls in urban schools* [Honor’s thesis, University of Dayton]. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses/307/



empowered and often emerge as peer leaders and advocates. Gender systems in many Black communities provide Black girls with a unique set of resources that are important for generating interest and success in school.⁶⁷

Barriers. Black girls continually navigate educational systems that often overlook or undervalue their full humanity. Biased disciplinary practices and the underrepresentation of culturally competent educators undermine their academic success.⁶⁸ Studies show, teacher bias, school discipline, and available school resources significantly influence college expectations.⁶⁹ Akom (2003) highlights that teacher biases and stereotypes frequently lead to focusing on Black girls' attitudes and behaviors rather than their academic success.⁷⁰ Research indicates that infractions by Black girls tend to be more minor and subjective in nature, such as inappropriate dress or using profanity, unlike more serious misconduct like carrying weapons.⁷¹ Many Black girls find school environments to be traumatizing and misaligned with their values and worldview. A lack of supportive relationships at school affects their academic achievement.⁷² Additionally, exposure to racial and gender stereotypes within schools can cause internalized stress and reduce their sense of belonging⁷³. Though Black girls represent less than 20% of the school population nationally, they account for 31% of girls referred to law enforcement by school officials and 43% of those arrested on school grounds. The higher suspension rates increase the risk of incarceration.⁷⁴ Educational disparities in childhood often lead to socioeconomic gaps in adulthood.

⁶⁷ Chavous, T., & Cogburn, C.D. (2007). Superinvisible women: Black girls and women in Education. *Black Women, Gender + Families*, 1(2), 24–51. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/blacwomegendfami.1.2.0024>

⁶⁸ DeJohn, D. (2024). *A culturally responsive approach to understanding how high performing teachers realize inclusive practices to prevent disproportionate discipline to African American students* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Houston]. <https://hdl.handle.net/10657/17706>; Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. *Sociology of Education*, 90(2), 127-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040717694876>

⁶⁹ Kalu, S. R. (2021). Exploring the impact of school factors on expectations to complete post secondary education among Black girls. *Education and Urban Society*, 54(9), 1052-1071. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245211048429>

⁷⁰ Akom, A. A. (2003). Reexamining resistance as oppositional behavior: The nation of Islam and the creation of a Black achievement ideology. *Sociology of Education*, 76(4), 305–325. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519868>

⁷¹ Annamma, S. A., Anyon, Y., Joseph, N. M., Farrar, J., Greer, E., Downing, B., & Simmons, J. (2019). Black girls and school discipline: The complexities of being overrepresented and understudied. *Urban Education*, 54(2), 211-242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916646610>

⁷² Akom, A. A. (2003). Reexamining resistance as oppositional behavior: The nation of Islam and the creation of a Black achievement ideology. *Sociology of Education*, 76(4), 305–325. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519868>

⁷³ Jones, M. S., Womack, V., Jérémie-Brink, G., & Dickens, D. D. (2021). Gendered Racism and Mental Health among Young Adult U.S. Black Women: The Moderating Roles of Gendered Racial Identity Centrality and Identity Shifting. *Sex Roles*, 85(3), 221–231. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01214-1>

⁷⁴ Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. *New directions for youth development*, (99), 9–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.51>



Black Girl Community

Assets. Historically, a wide network of organizations, churches, nonprofits, and businesses has supported Black girls in their communities. Community spaces serve as vital ecosystems of belonging and affirmation that foster self-efficacy and cultural pride by connecting girls with positive role models who reflect their experiences and ambitions. Neighborhood networks, churches, youth programs, and local groups offer opportunities for mentorship and collective care. Community-based programs that center Black Girlhood provide safe spaces for expression and skill development. Friendships formed in these environments build connections and confidence, giving girls space to express themselves freely and practice collaboration. Faith-based and civic organizations have proven to strengthen social responsibility by grounding girls in traditions of service and mutual aid.⁷⁵ Through these networks, Black girls learn lessons of solidarity, activism, and collective uplift—values that build on the nurturing foundation of home and complement school learning. Together, these community assets foster purpose, leadership, and social awareness, enhancing individual and community well-being.

Barriers. Despite these assets, many black girls grow up in communities burdened by structural inequities and historical divestment. Racial residential segregation, underfunded public services, and limited youth programming restrict access to safe spaces and quality resources for development. Exposure to community violence, environmental hazards, and policing disparities can also compromise physical safety and emotional security.⁷⁶ These stresses often coexist with economic hardship, inadequate transportation, and lack of mental health support, further limiting participation in enriching Community activities. At the same time, broader economic and structural conditions determine how well communities can support Black girls. Limited access to safe recreational spaces, quality youth programs, and reliable transportation can reduce opportunities for enrichment. In many neighborhoods, underinvestment in public infrastructure, such as libraries, parks, and after-school programs, creates uneven access to developmental supports. Exposure to community violence or environmental stressors further undermines safety and stability. Moreover, informal networks of care and grassroots programming can be difficult to sustain without institutional investment and long-term support.

⁷⁵ Mohamed, B., Cox, K., Diamant, J., & Gecewicz, C. (2021). *A brief overview of Black religious history in the U.S.* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/a-brief-overview-of-black-religious-history-in-the-u-s/>

⁷⁶ Foell, A., Pitzer, K. A., Nebbitt, V., Lombe, M., Yu, M., Villodas, M. L., & Newransky, C. (2021). Exposure to community violence and depressive symptoms: Examining community, family, and peer effects among public housing youth. *Health & Place*, 69, 102579. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102579>



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The City of Richmond, Virginia, is a place with a rich and layered history that reflects both the nation's struggles and its ongoing pursuit of justice. As Virginia's capital, Richmond serves as Virginia's seat of state government and politics. Established in 1737, the city's history is deeply intertwined with the resilience and creativity of its Black communities. Legacies of segregation, redlining, and systematic exclusion have profoundly shaped the city's neighborhoods and opportunities; yet, these same conditions have also given rise to strong traditions of community organizing, entrepreneurship, education, and cultural expression. Throughout its history, Black residents have built thriving neighborhoods, sustained businesses, created financial institutions, and contributed to a rich artistic and intellectual tradition. These legacies reflect not only survival in the face of systemic barriers but also the cultivation of spaces where Black life could flourish on its own terms.

This historical backdrop provides critical context for understanding Black girlhood in Richmond today. The lives of Black girls are shaped by an inheritance of perseverance and innovation, which influence how they navigate opportunities and challenges. Recognizing this history deepens our understanding of their lived experiences and emphasizes their resilience. For Black girls in particular, this historical context provides both challenges and sources of strength, grounding their lives in the history of struggle and creativity while also opening possibilities for new forms of belonging, empowerment, and leadership.

BLACK GIRLS IN THE CITY OF RICHMOND

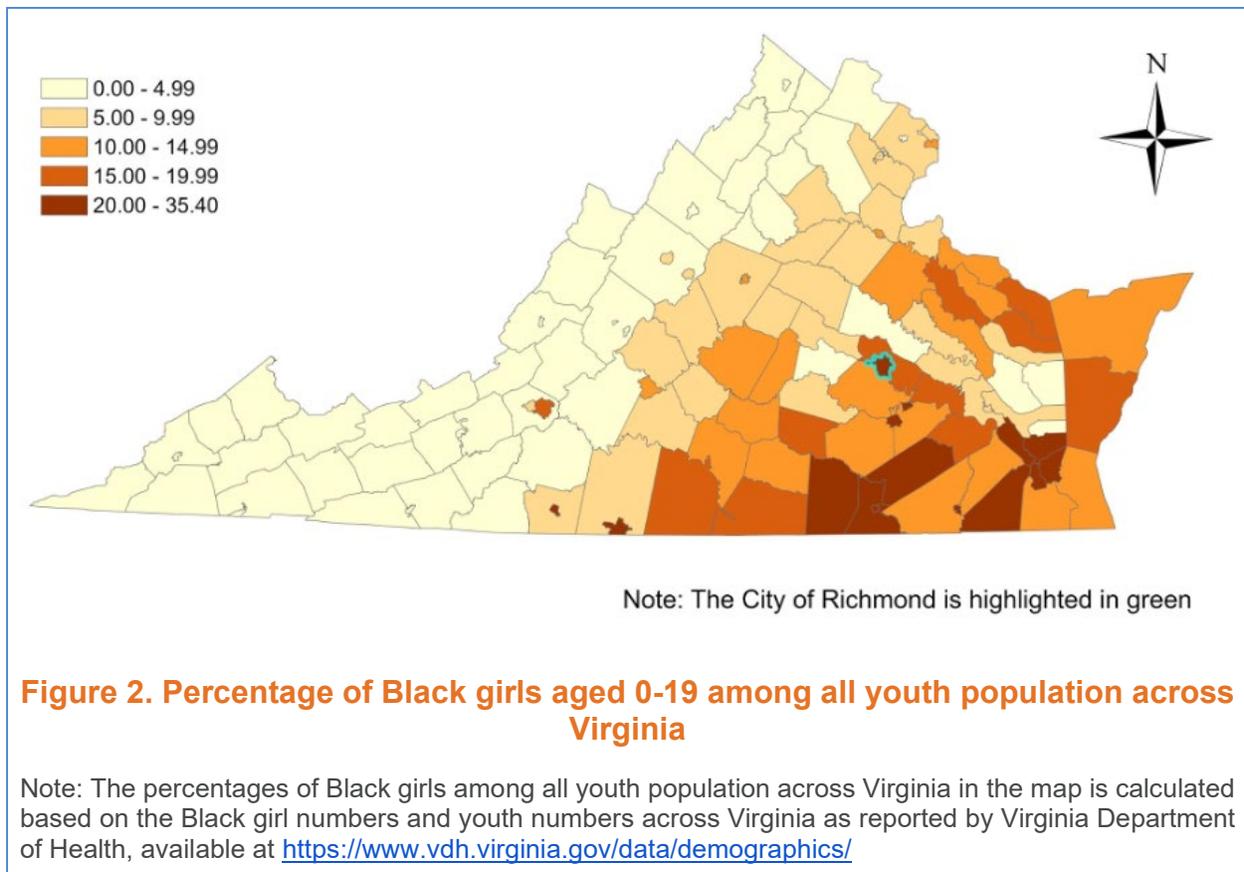
Black girls, those under 18 years old, make up a large portion of the youth population in Virginia and in the City of Richmond. According to the Virginia Department of Health, about 205,510 Black girls aged 0-19 live in Virginia, representing roughly 20.0% of all girls in that age group and 9.7% of the state's youth population aged 0-19. The City of Richmond has 11,661 Black girls, representing about half the girls aged 0-19 and about a quarter of the total youth population aged 0-19. Richmond ranks among the top ten localities in Virginia for the proportion of Black girls within the youth population and has the largest Black girls population among these localities (see Table 1 and Figure 2 below).⁷⁷ The presence of a substantial Black girl population in the City of Richmond makes it a particularly valuable context for examining their lived experiences.

⁷⁷ Virginia Department of Health. (2025, March 11). *Demographics*. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/data/demographics/>

Table 1. Youth and Black girls aged 0-19 in selected locations in Virginia

Location	Youth Population (aged 0-19)	Black Girls (aged 0-19)	
		Number	% of all youth
Virginia	2,111,029	205,510	9.7%
City of Richmond	47,666	11,661	24.5%
Petersburg City	8,883	3,145	35.4%
Emporia City	1,546	494	32.0%
Franklin City	2,529	743	29.3%
Danville City	10,504	3,041	29.0%
Portsmouth City	24,257	6,968	28.7%
Greensville	2,011	573	28.5%
Brunswick	2,782	751	27.0%
Hampton City	33,411	8,911	26.7%
Hopewell City	6,313	1,574	24.9%

Source: Virginia Department of Health. (2025, March 11). *Demographics*.
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/data/demographics/>



City of Richmond Snapshot

The City of Richmond is the state capital of Virginia. It had a total of 229,247 population in 2023, ranking tenth most populous among 133 counties and cities across the state.⁷⁸ It has a very diverse population (Table 2) in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and education levels. The employment rate of the city is about 63.5%, a little higher compared to the state average.⁷⁹ The median household income is about \$59,000 with about 17% living below the poverty line.⁸⁰ Richmond provides a unique context for understanding Black girls' lived experiences in an urban setting.

Table 2. City of Richmond Snapshot

Population¹	229,247	
Ranking	Ninth most populous among 133 counties and cities in Virginia	
Racial/Ethnic Composition (2024)	White: 43.12%	
	Black: 40.32%	
	Latino: 11.45%	
	Asian or Pacific Islander: 2.54%	
	Two or More Races: 2.32%	
Gender (2024)	Female: 52.79%	
	Male: 47.21%	
K-12 Education²	<p>Nearly 90% of Black students in Richmond Public Schools (RPS) are economically disadvantaged. This income disadvantage leads to unequal educational outcomes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased literacy rates • Increased dropout rates • Lower success rates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics • Lower likelihood to pursue higher education 	
	Public School Demographics	Black Percentage of Richmond Public Schools (RPS) Student Body: 56.8%
		White Percentage of RPS: 11.5%
		Hispanic Percentage of RPS: 27.4%

⁷⁸ U.S. Census Bureau (2023). *American Community Survey 1-year estimates*. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Richmond, VA <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5167000-richmond-va/>

⁷⁹ City of Richmond. (2025). *Demographic profile for Richmond City and Richmond metropolitan statistical area (MSA)*. <https://www.rva.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/Demographic%20Fact%20Sheet%20with%20Cover.pdf>

⁸⁰ Neilsburg (2023). *Richmond, VA Income*. Retrieved from <https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/topic/richmond-va-income/>; U.S. Census Bureau (2023). *American Community Survey 1-year estimates*. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Richmond, VA <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5167000-richmond-va/>

	Graduation Rates	State Average for all Students: 92.9%
		All Students in RPS: 78%
		Black Students in RPS: 82.5%
		White Students in RPS: 87.5%
		Hispanic Students in RPS: 65%
	Drop Out Rates	State Average for all Students: 4.5%
		All Students in RPS: 17.8%
		Black Students in RPS: 11.8%
	Private School Demographics	Black Percentage of Richmond Private Schools: 20.4%
		White Percentage of Richmond Private Schools: 66%
Hispanic Percentage of Richmond Private Schools: 6.5%		
Higher Education³	Highest Level of Educational Attainment	High School Diploma or Equivalent: 41.5%
		Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 42.5%
	Percentage with a College Degree	Black Women: 15%
		White Women: 62.8%
	Nationwide Percentage with a College Degree	Black Women: 38%
		Black Men: 26%
		White Women: 52%
		White Men: 42%
Employment (2024)⁴	Richmond Employment Rate: 63.5%	
	Virginia Employment Rate: 61.0%	
	Top Employment Sectors	Professional and Business Services: 20%
		Education and Health Services: 18%
		State Government: 14%
	Largest Employers (Excluding Government)	VCU Health: 13,500 employees
Virginia Commonwealth University: 7,832 employees		
Dominion Energy: 5,433 employees		
Income (2023)⁵	Median Household Income: \$59,229	
	Persons below the poverty line: 17.1%	
	Median Full Time Income by Gender	Female: \$54,915
		Male: \$60,847
	Median Household Income by Age	Under 25 Years: \$29,510
		25 to 44 Years: \$71,154
		45 to 64 years: \$65,537
		65+ Years: \$48,665
	Median Household Income by Race	Black: \$40,708
		Native American: \$45,938
Two or More Races: \$53,090		
Latino: \$67,481		
Some Other Race: \$70,265		

		Asian: \$72,344
		White: \$88,029
	<p>In Virginia, Black women earn just 61 cents for every dollar earned by white men, reflecting a 39-cent wage gap that translates into lifetime losses of up to \$1,267,920.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To achieve the same career earnings of a White man, a Black woman would need work until the age of 86. <p>By comparison, White women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by White men.</p>	
Housing	House-burdened Households	City of Richmond: 40.1%
		State of Virginia: 28.2%
		Severely House-Burdened households make up 19.9% of the total city population
	Percentage Homeowners	Black Families: 48%
		White Families: 78%

Sources:

¹ Census Reporter. (n.d.). *Richmond, VA*. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5167000-richmond-va/>; Virginia Department of Health. (2025, March 11). *Demographics*. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/data/demographics/>

² Virginia Department of Education. (2025a). *2024-2025 fall membership by student group: Racial and ethnic groups* [Chart]. <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/richmond-city-public-schools#desktopTabs-3>; Virginia Department of Education. (2025b). *Diplomas and completion* [Chart]. <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/richmond-city-public-schools#desktopTabs-4>; ProPublica. (n.d.). *Private schools in Richmond City public schools*. <https://projects.propublica.org/private-school-demographics/districts/richmond-city-public-schools-5103240>

³ Statistical Atlas. (n.d.). *Educational attainment in Richmond, Virginia (city)*. <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Virginia/Richmond/Educational-Attainment>

⁴ City of Richmond. (2024). *City of Richmond economic indicators*. <https://www.rva.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/Richmond%20Economic%20Indicators%20September%202024.pdf>; Greater Richmond Partnership. (2025). *Largest employers*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250814111016/https://www.grpva.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Richmond-VA-Largest-Employers.pdf> <https://www.grpva.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Richmond-VA-Largest-Employers.pdf>

⁵ Neilsberg. (2023, December 15). *Richmond, VA income*. <https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/topic/richmond-va-income/>; Neilsberg. (2025, February 27). *Richmond, VA income by gender*. <https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/richmond-va-income-by-gender/>; Neilsberg. (2025, March 1). *Richmond, VA median household income by race*. <https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/richmond-va-median-household-income-by-race/>; HousingForward Virginia. (n.d.). *Household income*. <https://housingforwardva.org/applications/sourcebook/economics-income/>; National Women's Law Center. (2025, February 21). *The lifetime wage gap, state by state*. <https://nwlrc.org/resource/the-lifetime-wage-gap-state-by-state/>

Neighborhoods Where Black Girls Live

Historically, the City of Richmond’s Black family population was widely dispersed throughout the city. Jackson Ward, located within the downtown district, presented itself as the nucleus of Black family life in early years, and was often referred to as the “Harlem of the South.”

However, efforts to segregate Black families have created majority Black and majority White areas within the city that still persist today. In 1911, a Richmond City Council ordinance barred Black



families from moving into blocks with a majority White population. This “racial zoning” or modern-day “red-lining,” was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948. Despite that, White majority affluent neighborhoods were protected by private restrictive covenants forbidding Black families from buying these homes within these White majority neighborhoods. In the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal efforts and highway construction projects left hundreds of Black families displaced without affecting any homes owned by White families. These events exacerbated income and economic gaps between White and Black families in the City of Richmond.

The City of Richmond is split by the James River into two halves: Southside (meaning all areas south of the river) and areas north of the river (sometimes comparatively referred to as Northside). Each area contains numerous neighborhoods, some with well-defined boundaries and others with borders that are more fluid or debated. Table 3 provides an overview and approximate definitions of these areas, along with some notable neighborhoods and their geographic descriptions. Historically Black neighborhoods are marked with an asterisk. Please note that neighborhood boundaries can vary depending on context, perspective, and lived experience.

Table 3. Neighborhoods Where Black Girls Live

Area	Neighborhood	Description	Total Population
Southside: neighborhoods South of the James River	Broad Rock*	The Broad Rock neighborhood is located South of the Midlothian Turnpike, bordered by Hull Street it extends south along Broad Rock Boulevard toward Hopkins Road.	1,518
	Forest Hill	Forest Hill is located along Forest Hill Avenue and Westover Hills Boulevard. It borders the James River and Forest Hill Park.	1,384
	Jahnke	Jahnke is centered along Jahnke Road and German School Road, North of the Midlothian Turnpike, and between the Chippenham Parkway and Powhite Parkway.	3,310
	Manchester*	Manchester is a historic neighborhood directly south of the James River, anchored along Hull Street, Commerce Road, and the floodwall. It contains notable communities of Bellemeade, Blackwell, and Hillside Court.	Manchester: 669 Bellemeade: 2,600 Blackwell: 1,884 Hillside Court: 1,196
	Stratford Hills & Southampton	Stratford Hills and Southampton lie along the James River's south bluff and North of Chippenham Parkway. Southampton is the area to the west of North Huguenot Road while Stratford Hills is the area to the East.	Stratford Hills: 3,111 Southampton: 633
	Swansboro*	Swansboro is bordered by Semmes Ave and Cowardin Ave, and divided by Hull Street. It is just North of Broad Rock and the Maury & Mt Olivet Cemetery.	1,652
	Westover Hills	Split into Westover Hills and Westover Hills west by railroad tracks, these neighborhoods lie along the James River and are bordered by Westover Hills Boulevard to the East, Riverside Drive to the West, and Forest Hill Ave to the South.	Westover Hills: 1,143 Westover Hills West: 514
	Woodland Heights	Woodland Heights follows Semmes Avenue from Cowardin Ave to Forest Hill Ave. It borders Forest Hill Park and contains the Reedy Creek trail along the south bank of the James River.	2,095
	Barton Heights*	Barton Heights is a Northside neighborhood divided into North and South Sections, bordered by Chamberlayne Parkway, the Richmond-Henrico Turnpike, and Gilpin Court. Northern Barton Heights centers around Battery Park while Southern Barton Heights contains Cedarwood Cemetery	Northern Barton Heights: 2,747 Southern Barton Heights: 877

Area	Neighborhood	Description	Total Population
Northside: referring to the area east of I-95 and north and west of I-64, including a small part of the city's urban center and Bryan Park	Bellevue	Bellevue sits along Richmond's northern edge, bordered by Hermitage Road, Brook Road and Laburnum Ave.	2,433
	Brookland Park*	Located North of Brookland Park Boulevard this neighborhood stretches from Edgewood Ave to the Richmond Henrico Turnpike, bordered by Ladies Mile Road and Cliff Ave to the North.	1,846
	Gilpin*	Gilpin Court is Richmond's largest public housing community located just North of Jackson Ward across I-64 and bordered by Southern Barton Heights to the North.	2,895
	Highland Park*	Highland Park is split into three neighborhoods that border Meadowbridge Road and 2nd Ave in Northside. Highland Terrace, to the west, is bordered by the Richmond Henrico Turnpike and centers around Hotchkiss Park. North Highland Park, is located north of Meadowbridge and Dill Ave and contains Ann Hardy Plaza. South Highland Park is located south of East Brookland Park Boulevard and is bordered by 5th Ave.	Highland Terrace: 912 North Highland Park: 3,113 South Highland Park: 2,069
	Laburnum Park	Located North of the Squirrel's Stadium and across I-64, Laburnum Park is bordered by Hermitage Road, West Laburnum Ave, Brook Road, and Westwood Ave.	795
	Six Points*	Encompassing much of the same area as Highland Park, Six Points centers around the six-pointed intersection of East Brookland Park Boulevard, Meadowbridge Road, 2nd Ave, and Dill Ave.	-
East End: the area north of the James River and east of the former Virginia Central Railroad, roughly starting at Main Street Station	Church Hill	Containing the highest point in Richmond, this neighborhood sits above Shockoe Bottom, starting at the hill of 21st and Broad and including the area north of 25th street. Two parks, Libby Hill and Chimborazo, make up Church Hill's eastern border.	2,667
	Church Hill North*	The boundaries of this neighborhood are debatable, with most agreeing that Church Hill transitions to Church Hill North along 25th Street just after M Street or Cedar Street.	1,907
	Fairfield*	Located further North than Church Hill North and above Nine Mile Road, this neighborhood is bordered by I-64 and the Mechanicsville Turnpike.	1,437
	Fulton Hill	One of Richmond's eastern-most neighborhoods, Fulton Hill is east of Rocketts Landing lying between Williamsburg Road and Government Road. It spans from Stony Run Road down to the railroad tracks.	4,572

Area	Neighborhood	Description	Total Population
	Montrose Heights	Montrose Heights borders Fulton Hill on the other side of Government Road. Stretching to the intersection of Randall Ave and Williamsburg Road, it is also one of Richmond's eastern-most neighborhoods.	-
	Mosby Court*	Mosby Court is bordered by 18th Street, Fairfield Way and Coalter Street.	1,672
	Rocketts Landing	Rocketts Landing follows the James River south from the Main St/Nicholson Street intersection down to the intersection of Bickerstaff Road and the Old Osborne Turnpike. It includes the housing developments, businesses, and docks along the river.	-
	Whitcomb*	Located North of Mosby Court, Whitcomb is surrounded by I-64 and bordered by Fairfield Way and the Mechanicsville Turnpike.	2,666
Near West/West End: depending on context these terms can either refer to neighborhoods that have historically be considered part of the West End of Richmond, or only to neighborhoods past a designated point	Byrd Park	This historic district is bordered by the downtown expressway to the north, Meadow Street, to the east, and Blanton Ave to the west. It is directly north of the Maymont Estate.	1,443
	Carver*	Carver is bordered by Lombardy St to the west, Broad Street to the south, Belvidere Street to the east and I-64 to the north.	2,885
	Carytown	Carytown is an urban retail district that stretches from Arthur Ashe Boulevard. Its borders follow I-195 to the south and west. To the north, Carytown transitions to the Museum District around Ellwood or Floyd Ave, though the border is not distinct.	1,371
	The Fan	The Fan starts at Belvidere Street, where streets fan out west-ward.	13,533
	Maymont	The Maymont neighborhood forms a square between Colorado Ave to the north, Southampton Ave to the east, Hampton St to the west, and the Texas Beach/North Bank Trail area to the South. It is directly west of Riverview Cemetery.	969
	Museum District	The Museum District starts roughly around Ellwood or Floyd Ave to the south and stretches up to Broad Street to the north. It is bordered by I-195 to the west and Arthur Ashe to the east, though the use of Arthur Ashe as a hard line between Museum District and the Fan is debatable.	6,720
	Oregon Hill	Oregon Hill is bordered by the downtown expressway to the north, Belvidere Street to the east, and Oregon Hill Parkway to the south. Its western edge runs along Hollywood Cemetery.	1,179

Area	Neighborhood	Description	Total Population
	Randolph*	Located east of Meadow Street, this historic neighborhood is bordered by the downtown expressway to the north and Colorado Ave and Harrison Street to the south.	2,952
	Scott's Addition	Scott's Addition is located north of Broad Street and bordered by I-195, Arthur Ashe Boulevard, and the railroad tracks.	280
	Three Chopt	Adjacent to the University of Richmond, Three Chopt is bordered by Three Chopt Road, The Country Club of Westhampton, Libbie Ave, and Patterson Ave.	2,541
	Willow Lawn	Located just south of the Willow Lawn shopping center (which is outside of the Richmond limits), this neighborhood is bordered by Monument Ave and Patterson Ave. Other small neighborhoods in this area are sometimes referred to as Colonial Place, Malvern Gardens, and Sauer's Gardens.	Willow Lawn: 962 Colonial Place: 2,144 Malvern Gardens: 1,392 Sauer's Gardens: 1,119
Downtown: parts of the city center below I-64	Jackson Ward*	The historic Jackson Ward neighborhood is located in the northern portion of downtown Richmond bordered between Belvidere Street on the west, interstate Interstate 95 to the north, roughly 3rd Street to the east, and Broad Street to the south.	1,452
	Monroe Ward	Located just South of Jackson Ward across Broad Street, Monroe Ward spans from Belvidere Street to roughly 4th Street.	2,853
	Shockoe Bottom*	Shockoe Bottom is Richmond's lowest-lying neighborhood, beginning around 16th Street and extending east along Dock Street to Great Shiplock Park. While some refer to the E. Cary Street apartment corridor as "Tobacco Row," the entire low-lying district from E Broad to Dock Street is widely considered Shockoe Bottom.	2,360
	Shockoe Slip	Located west of I-95, Shockoe Slip is the small area from 12th street to 16th street. Bordered by Main Street to the north and the James River to the south this neighborhood includes cobblestone streets and the canal walk.	738
(*) Denotes historically Black neighborhoods.			



METHODOLOGY

RISE's mission to advance equity utilizes an asset-based framework for this study. Repeatedly, many studies on marginalized groups, like Black girls, take a deficit approach to conduct their research. The deficit approach identifies the deficiencies, problems, and needs of the population as an attempt to improve these issues *for* the population's benefit.⁸¹ Commonly, such approaches begin with external data to identify indicators of problems, barriers, and challenges, leading to a hyper focus on the negative experiences of the population. These approaches view the population as passive clients without the capacity, skills, or knowledge to address their own problems. The passive client view also positions the population as consumers of services and programs that could solve the problems *for* them. Such an approach can further marginalize already vulnerable populations.⁸²

Leveraging Black Girls' Voices Through an Asset-Based Approach

The asset-based framework guiding this study emphasizes the discovery and mobilization of existing assets and resources to empower the population. By building on the assets already held by individuals and within their community, this research aims to mobilize individuals and organizations to collaborate in realizing and developing their communal strengths.⁸³ This approach focuses on strengths by engaging communities as partners in the research process. Through qualitative methods, we center the lived experiences of Black girls as they interact with their families and communities. Our qualitative data collection offered an opportunity to listen to their voices and appreciate their perspective and culture. Participants in this study are thus co-producers of our findings. Results present their strengths and resources to support themselves, their narratives, and, in turn, how they use their communities to thrive. Under this approach, community residents are empowered as part of the solution. They play an active role in designing the changes and support they need in their community.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Harvey, M. (2014). Strengths-based approach. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research* (Vol. 2, pp. 733-735). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406.n322>

⁸² Green, G. P., & Haines, A. (2011). *Asset building & community development* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

⁸³ Green, G. P., & Haines, A. (2011). *Asset building & community development* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

⁸⁴ Green, G. P., & Haines, A. (2011). *Asset building & community development* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.



Community Engagement and Participation

To increase Black girls' autonomy and gather baseline information for the current study, RISE participated in two City of Richmond youth events: (1) Black Girl Rally and (2) Teen Summit, and developed a Youth Advisory Action Board (YAAB).

Youth Events

The Black Girl Rally is an annual community engagement event hosted by GFAC at a local Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The event brought together community members, leaders, dynamic speakers, and Black families. The goal of the event was to equip Black girls and their support networks with the tools and resources needed to create change in their neighborhoods, cities, and schools. The Rally held morning sessions, which included presentations and panel interviews curated for educators, parents, and youth-centered programs. In the afternoon, organizations hosted exhibition tables. Those involved in the event were able to network with parents of eligible girls at each table.



Seven members of RISE (two research staff and five students) attended the event, held on October 14, 2022.

Teen Summit is an annual event held in Greater Richmond's Convention Center, sponsored by The Community Foundation for Greater Richmond and Virginia Career Works. The Summit seeks to expose 9th through 12th-grade youth of all identities with resources from programs and community-based agencies while giving them a chance to explore various career and college options (e.g., scholarship opportunities, the benefits of community college, cosmetology, and first-responder careers, etc.). In addition to exposure to college and career opportunities, students at the Summit can attend sessions on topics related to mental health, safety, culture, and equity to build a pathway for positive change in their local communities.



Four research assistants at RISE attended the event held on March 22, 2025.

Engagement Activities

The Research Institute hosted an exhibition booth at both events, focusing on youth empowerment and community building. We used activities to engage with attendees at each event.

Activity 1, "You Won't Break My Soul." The participants were asked to list the three things they liked most about themselves. We aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how they perceive themselves and their individual strengths, identifying either internal qualities (e.g., bravery, friendliness, creativity, sense of humor, persistence, resilience, etc.) or external qualities (e.g., hair, face, smile, body, etc.).



Activity 2, “It’s Givin’... Back!” prompted the participants to write about the top three community resources that are beneficial to their growth and development. We wanted to learn more about their community resources. They listed individuals in the community (no identifiable information was collected), such as mentors, tutors, friends, mothers, fathers, sisters, teachers, and doctors, as well as community agencies, programs, or facilities such as Girls For A Change, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and YMCA.

The attendees enjoyed reflecting and providing feedback on what they like about their community (e.g., diversity, cookouts, the people, parks, public libraries, museums, school clubs, etc.). For both activities, the research team intentionally avoided providing prompt examples so the participants could generate their own responses with our influence. The activities overall allowed students to reflect on their self-perception, enabling both boys and girls to focus on the positive aspects of their personalities and physical attributes (e.g., their hair, smiles, intelligence, friendliness, outgoing nature, etc.).

These activities and the RISE staff’s observations at the Black Girl Rally shaped the current study’s design in various ways:

- 1.** First, most girls attending the Rally were enrolled in middle school and participated in the event with their peer groups. As a result, we decided to expand the focus group participant population to include 12- to 17-year-olds and ensure that the focus groups consisted of same-age or grade participants.
- 2.** Second, parents and caregivers were interested in their daughters’ engagement at the event. They seemed impressed by the poster activities and resources available. This observation reinforced the study’s plan to include parents’ and caregivers’ voices about Black girls’ experiences and to explore their role as assets to their children’s development and empowerment.
- 3.** Finally, the activity questions allowed us to clarify our study questions. Some attendees participating in the activity were unclear about the questions asked. As a result, we revised the study’s focus group and survey question language, instructions, and prompts.

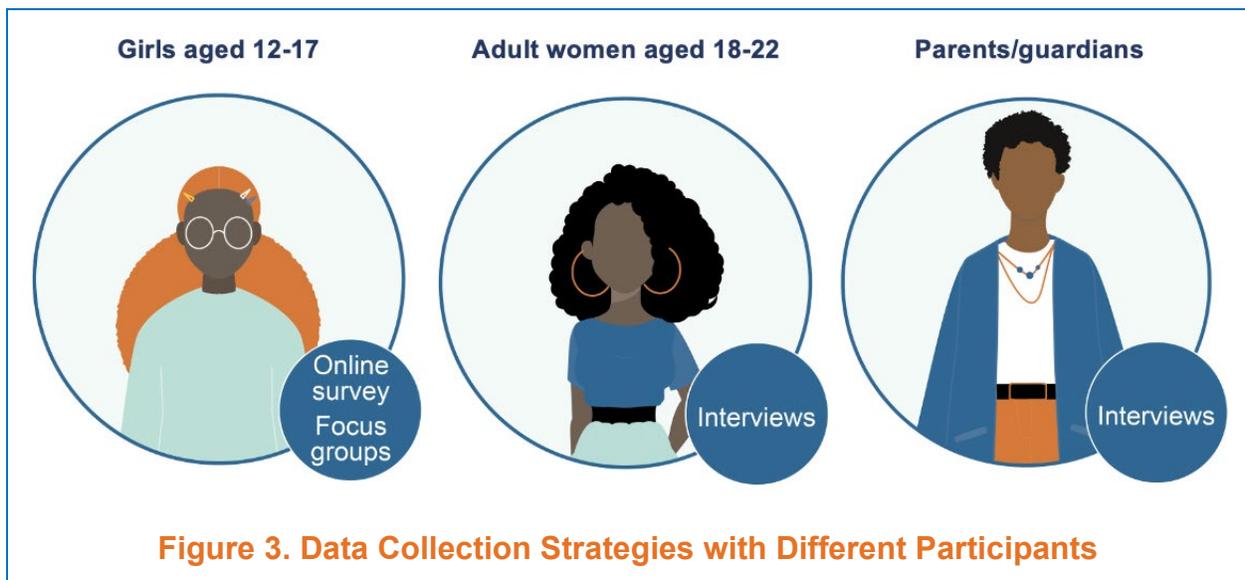
Youth Advisory Action Board (YAAB)

Girls For A Change helped the research team establish a Youth Advisory Action Board (YAAB) composed of five Black adolescent girls residing in the City of Richmond, VA. YAAB members were compensated for their time and expertise. The YAAB played a central role in shaping the study’s survey design and participant recruitment efforts.

RISE engaged with the YAAB through both in-person and through virtual meetings. The first meeting introduced the project and clarified the role of the group. YAAB members reviewed the survey to share their thoughts about its relevance, clarity, and potential improvements. Following their review, YAAB members met with the RISE team again to discuss their recommendations for reducing the number of questions, social media recruitment, and identifying community partners to recruit participants. Their insights directly influenced the project's next steps.

Data Collection Approaches

To gather data, we used several methods, each conducted separately. As shown in Figure 3 below, we carried out an online survey with Black girls aged 12 to 17 who live in the City of Richmond, as well as focus groups that included interactive drawing activities to learn about their experiences and insights. We also interviewed parents or guardians of girls in this age range, along with Black emerging adult women aged 18 to 22, to gain their perspectives. The following section provides more details about these research strategies.



Online Survey (Girls Ages 12-17)

To explore the lived experiences of Black girls in the City of Richmond, we created a self-administered online survey to address this question. The initial survey draft included questions suitable for Black adolescent girls. A survey previously validated for Black women was adapted to better capture the unique experiences of Black girls. The final survey questions were developed based on existing research, input from subject-matter experts, and feedback from the YAAB.

The survey included 96 questions designed to provide a comprehensive view of respondents' lives, strengths, and well-being. It asked about:

- 
- **Individual Strengths:** Experiences with race and ethnicity, resilience, and gender socialization.
 - **Life Circumstances:** School and extracurricular activities, family and housing, finances, religious involvement, and community resources and safety.
 - **Social Support:** Support from family, friends, and school networks.
 - **Health:** Mental and physical health, as well as sexual and reproductive health.
 - **Demographics:** Age, sexual orientation, education level, zip code, and socioeconomic status.

The survey was administered by a recruitment panel from Qualtrics and distributed using the online survey platform, Qualtrics, to gather self-reported data from Black girls aged 12-17 living in the City of Richmond, VA. Two hundred and fifty (250) respondents completed the survey.

Focus Groups (Girls Ages 12-17)

To learn about individual strengths and community assets for Black girls, we conducted focus groups using an activity in which adolescent participants wrote words and drew shapes to describe themselves, their neighborhood, the people, organizations, facilities, and programs important to their lives, and how these individuals and places have helped them. Throughout the activity, they were asked questions to help participants explain their choices and share their perspectives. Girls were asked to use a pseudonym during the focus groups to protect their privacy.

We partnered with GFAC to recruit Black girls for the focus groups and contacted other similar organizations, public libraries, and community centers via email, phone, and in-person visits to recruit participants. Parents provided consent for all underage participants. In total, we conducted seven focus groups with 34 girls. These sessions lasted 28 to 51 minutes, averaging 38 minutes. Each participant had the option to claim a \$20 eGift card.

Interviews (Emerging Adult Women Aged 18-22 & Parents/Guardians)

In addition to hearing from girls themselves, we also interviewed parents or guardians of girls in the same age range, as well as Black emerging adult women aged 18 to 22, to learn about their perspectives on Black girls' individual strengths and community assets. These interviews included questions similar to those asked in the focus groups. We partnered with GFAC to recruit participants from their programs and also distributed flyers with a QR code for interview sign-ups throughout the community. Flyers were posted and shared at community events, university campuses, grocery stores, bus stations, public libraries, and local coffee shops. In addition, we worked with a community navigator who had strong connections within the local community to help recruit participants.

We completed interviews with 11 parents or guardians and 21 emerging adult women. The interviews with parents lasted between 12 and 43 minutes, with an average duration of 27 minutes. The interviews with emerging adult women ranged from 10 to 62 minutes, averaging 31



minutes. Interview participants had the option to receive a \$25 e-gift card incentive after participating.

Both the focus group and interview audios were transcribed and analyzed by researchers. Transcripts of the audio were analyzed using a structured approach to ensure that key themes were identified accurately.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

In this section, we describe the profiles of girls who participated in online surveys and focus groups, and guardians/parents and emerging adult women who participated in the interviews.

Girl Participants in Online Surveys

Two hundred fifty girls, aged 12 to 17, shared their stories through an online survey, offering a glimpse into their everyday lives and experiences. Each age group was represented almost evenly, painting a balanced picture across adolescence (Figure 4). Most of the girls described themselves as healthy and able-bodied, with over 93% reporting no disabilities. Still, a few shared that they face challenges with concentration (6.4%), mobility (1.2%), vision (0.8%), or self-care tasks like dressing or bathing (0.8%) (Figure 5).

Nearly all respondents (99.6%) were currently enrolled in K-12. As shown in Figure 6, at the time of completing the survey, most had recently completed either their 9th (18.8%) or 10th grade (18.4%), followed closely by those who had completed 8th (17.6%) or 7th grade (16.4%). Smaller shares completed 6th grade (12%) or 11th grade (10.4%). Only a few had completed 5th grade (4.8%), 4th grade (1.2%), or 12th grade (0.4%).

The majority of respondents come from families in the United States (Figure 7). More than nine in ten said that both their mother and father were born in the United States. Among those with immigrant ties, 7.6% reported that their mother was born outside the U.S., approximately twice the number who reported the same of their father (3.2%).

Geographically, about three-quarters of respondents reported living on Richmond's Northside, while the remaining quarter live on the Southside (Figure 8). Together, they represent a cross-section of neighborhoods and experiences within the city. When reflecting on their family's financial situation (Figure 9), many painted a picture of modest means. Only a small share, 16.8% agreed that their family usually had enough money for things while growing up, 17.6% felt they lived in a wealthy neighborhood, and just 7.6% said that they felt somewhat wealthy compared to other kids at their school. Objective indicators of household economic status reinforce these perceptions. As shown in Figure 10, more than two-thirds of respondents reported receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

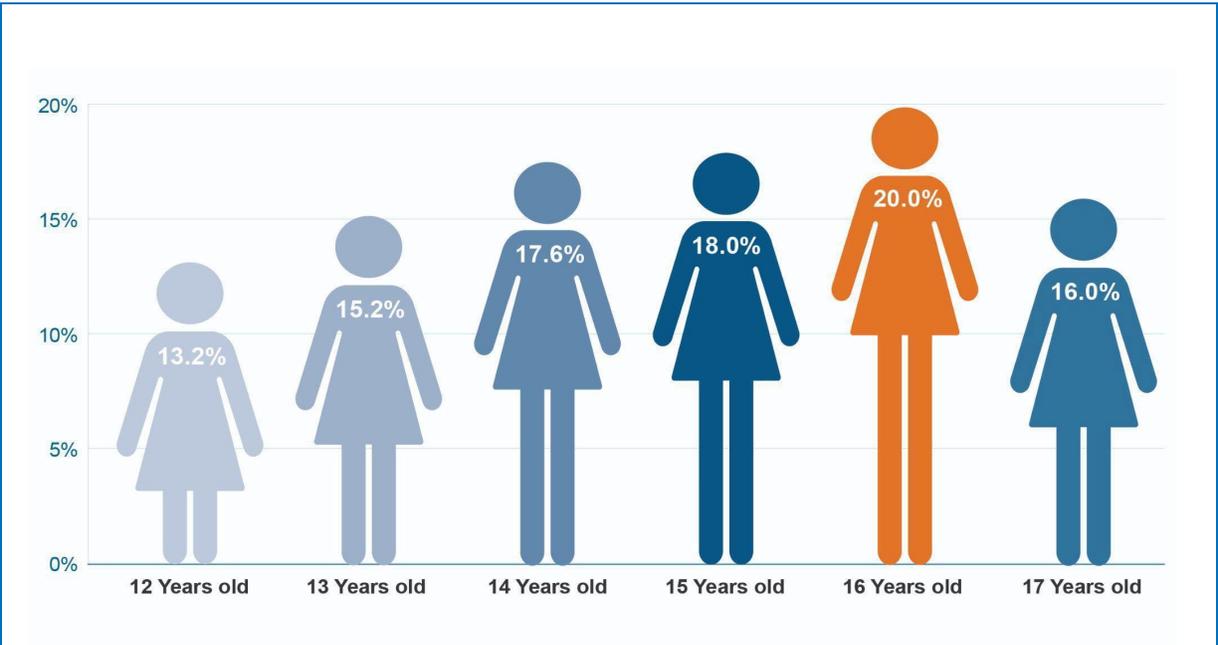


Figure 4. Age of Respondents in the Online Survey

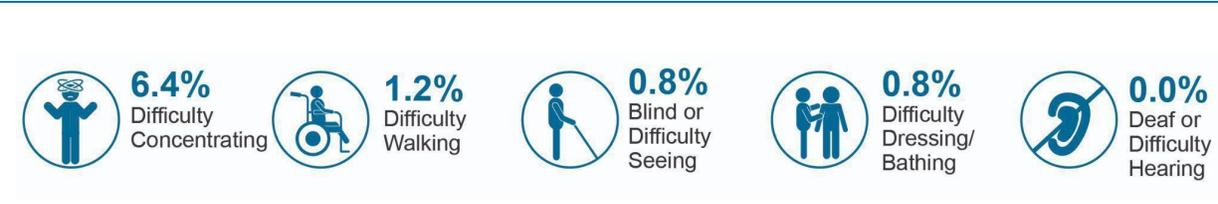


Figure 5. Disability Status of Respondents in the Online Survey



Figure 6. Participants' Highest Grade Completed at The Time of Participation

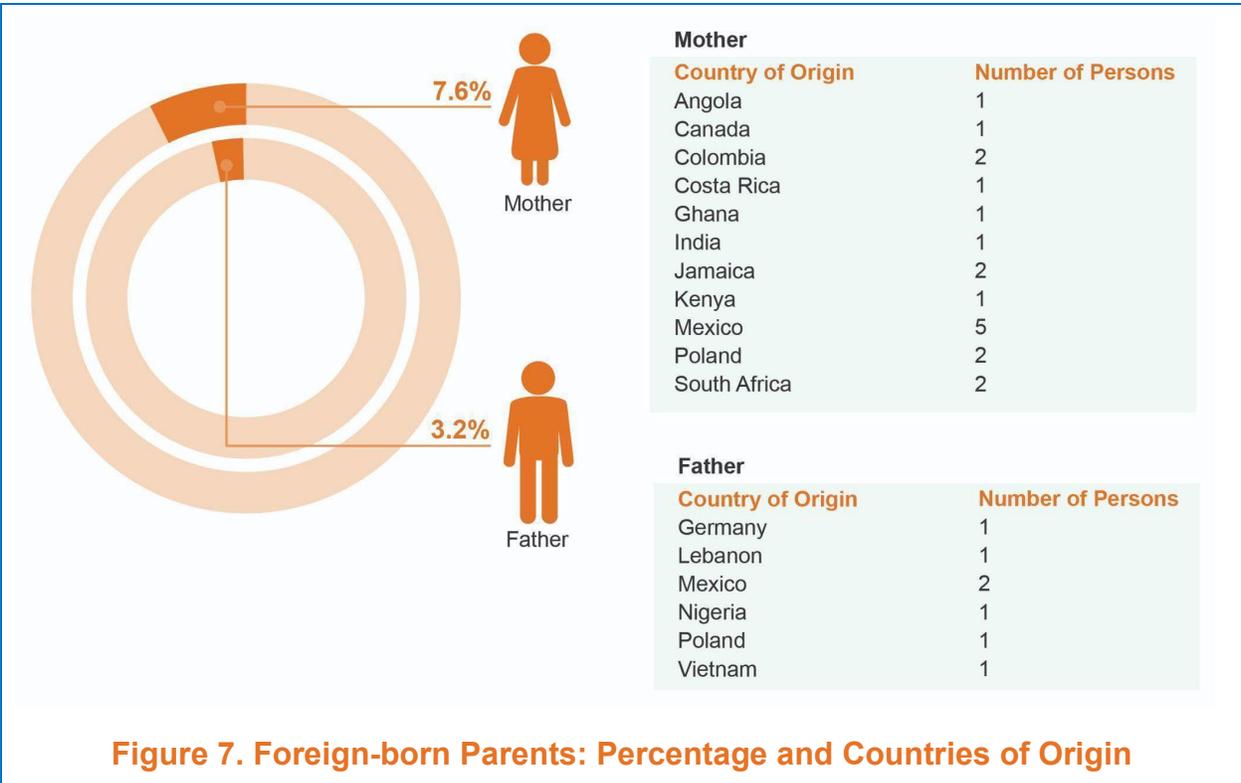
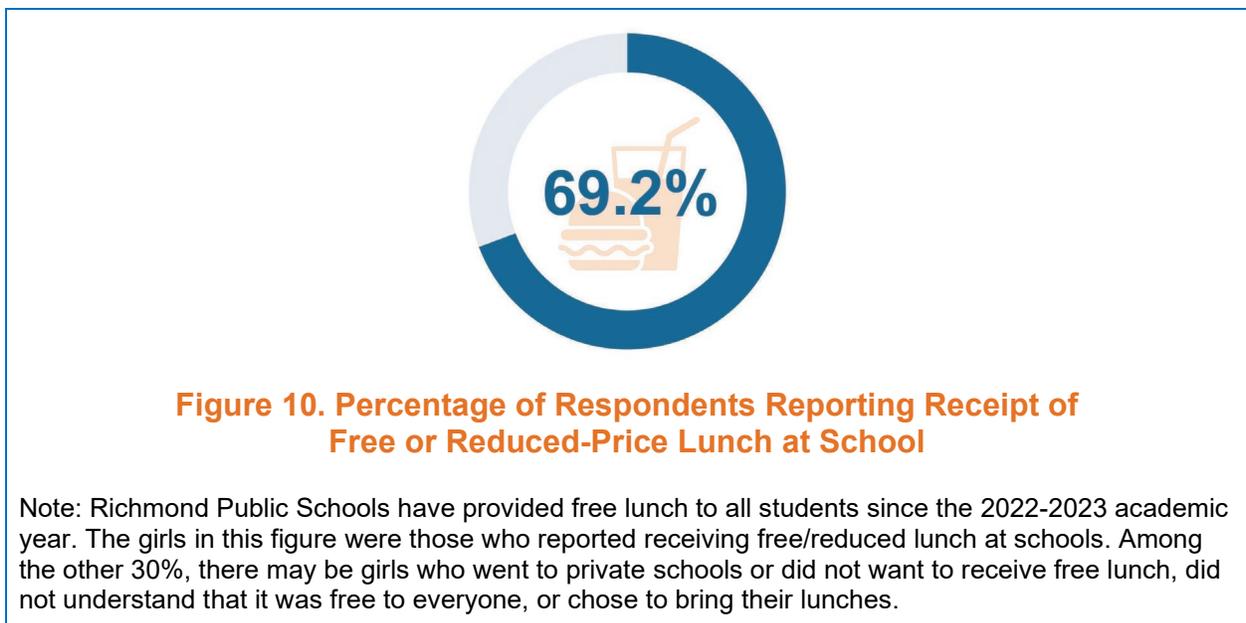
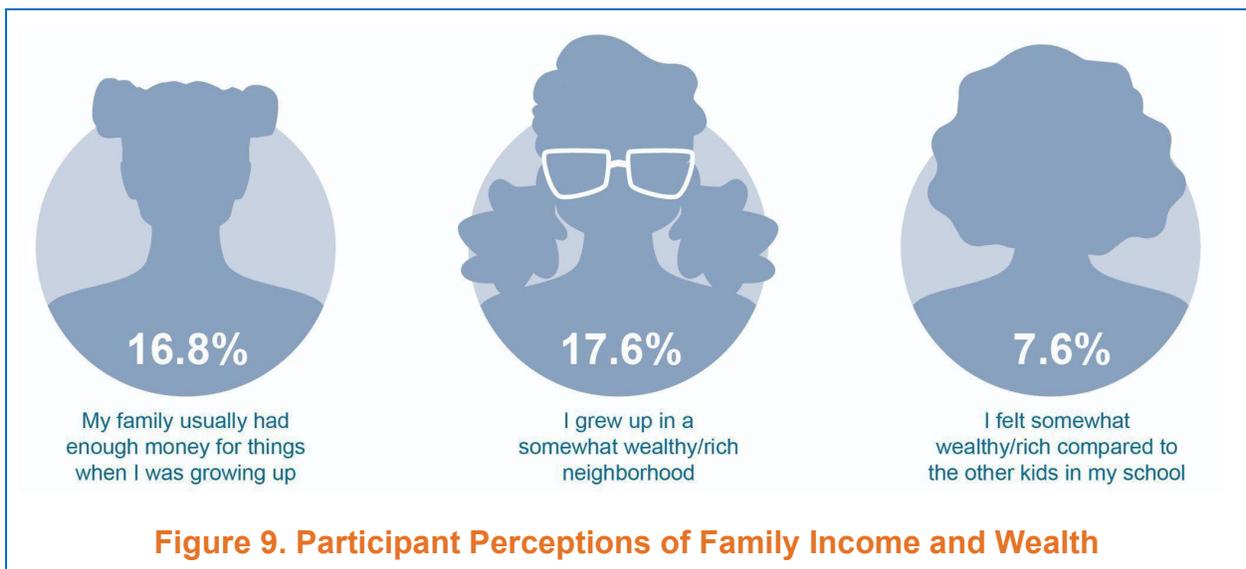


Figure 7. Foreign-born Parents: Percentage and Countries of Origin





Girl Participants in Focus Groups

A total of 34 youth participated in the focus group. Most participants (Figure 11) were 17 years old (26.5%), followed by 14-year-olds (23.5%). Fifteen- and thirteen-year-olds each represented 17.6% of the sample, while smaller proportions included 12-year-olds (8.8%) and 16-year-olds (5.9%). Participants were almost evenly distributed across Richmond, with approximately one-third (32.4%) of participants reporting that they lived in the Northside and Southside of the city (Figure 12). Slightly more than a third of participants (35.3%) indicated that they live in a part of the city they considered to be neither the Northside nor the Southside.

When asked about their birthplaces and those of their parents, the vast majority of participants indicated the U.S. as their birthplace (Figure 13). More than 90% of participants reported that they and their mothers were born in the U.S., while a slightly lower percentage (82.4%) reported the same for their fathers (Figure 14). About 6% of participants reported that they, their mothers, and fathers were born outside of the U.S.

In terms of education and employment, most participants (97.1%) were currently enrolled in school, while three-quarters (76.5%) were not employed (Figure 15). About 17.6% reported holding a job. The largest shares of participants had completed either 7th or 9th grade (26.5%), followed by 8th grade (14.7%) and 10th or 11th grade (11.8% each). Fewer than 10% had completed 12th grade (Figure 16).

When asked about their families' socioeconomic circumstances (Figure 17), participants generally described modest backgrounds. More than half agreed that their family usually had enough money for necessities while they were growing up, but fewer (20.6%) felt somewhat wealthy compared to their peers, and only 17.6% described their neighborhoods as affluent. This perception aligns with other indicators: a large majority (84.8%) reported receiving free or reduced-price lunch at school, underscoring that most participants came from lower- or middle-income households (Figure 18).

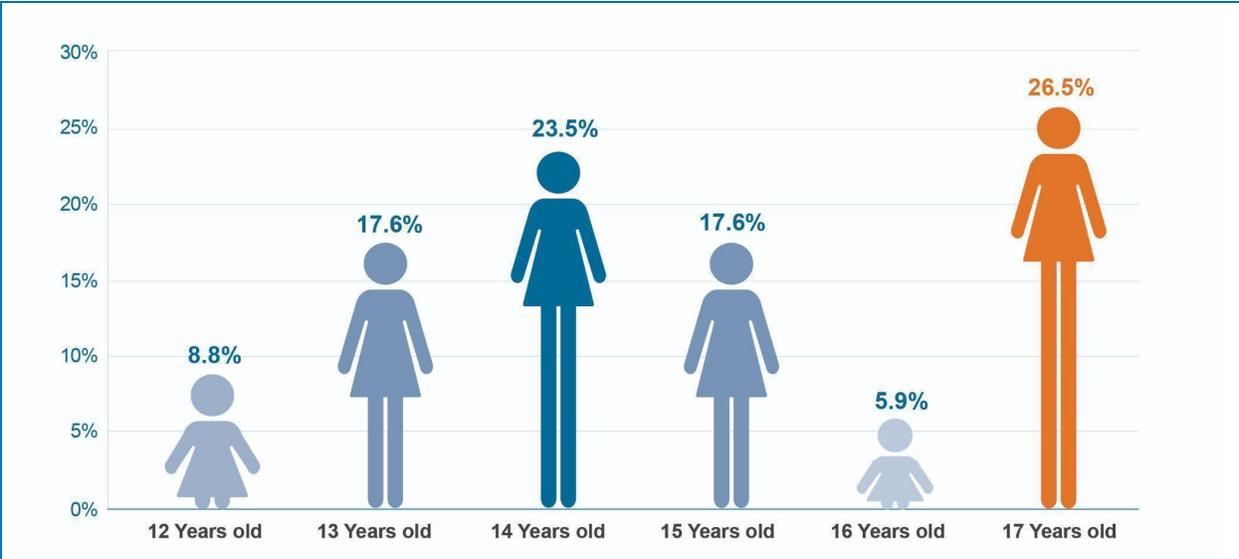
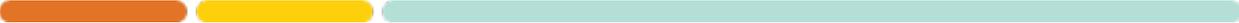


Figure 11. Age of Focus Group Participants

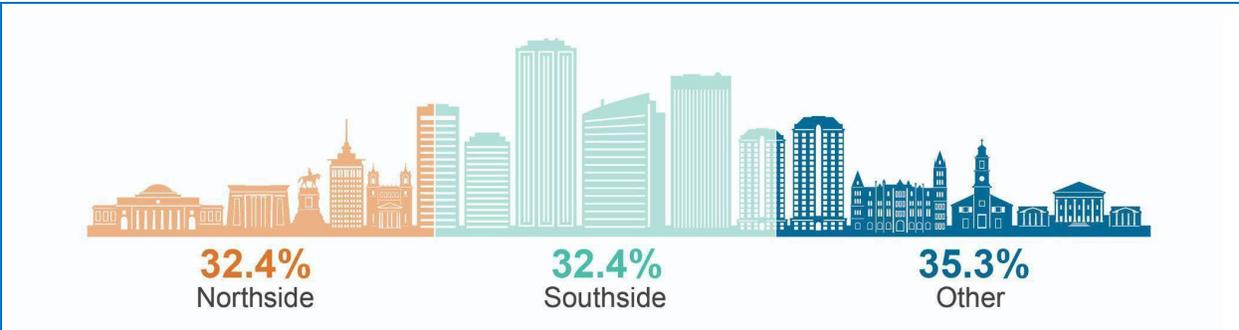
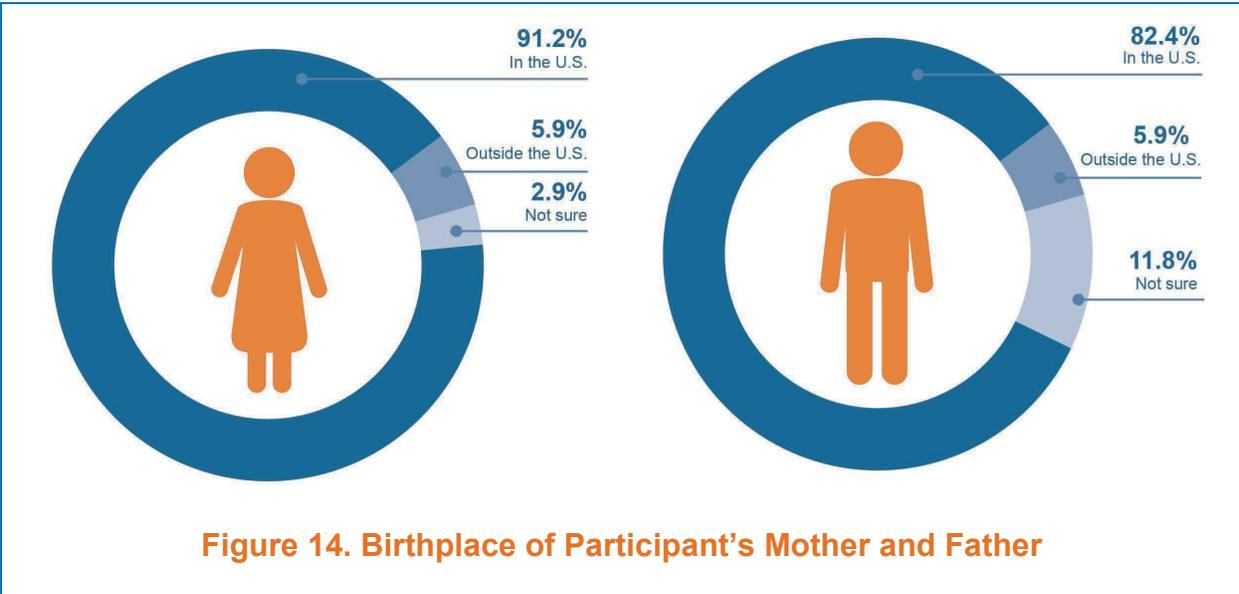
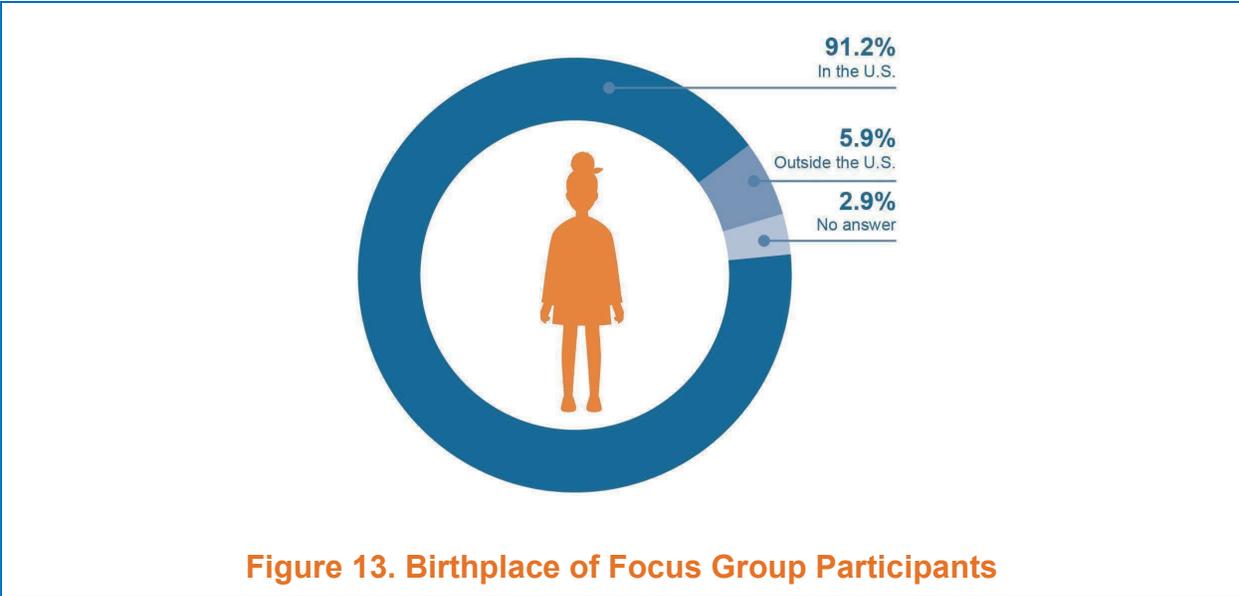
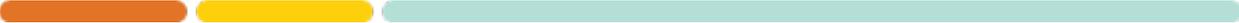


Figure 12. Location Where Focus Group Participants Reside





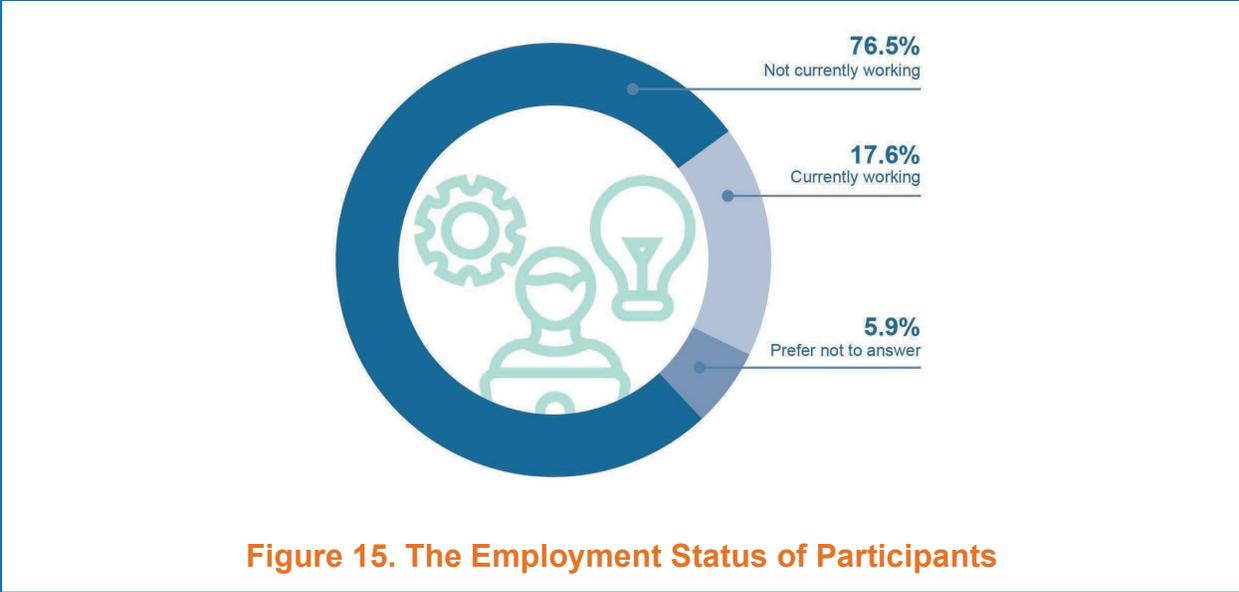
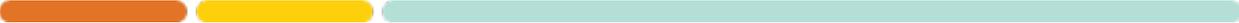


Figure 15. The Employment Status of Participants

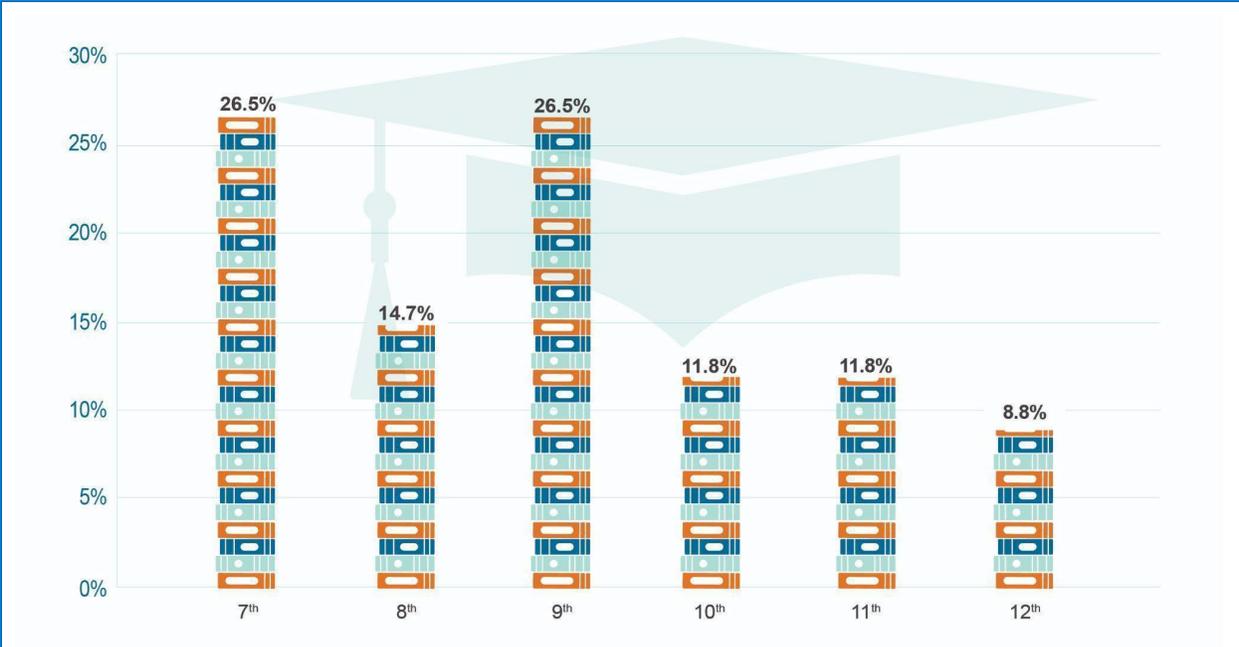


Figure 16. Highest Grade Completed at the Time of Participation



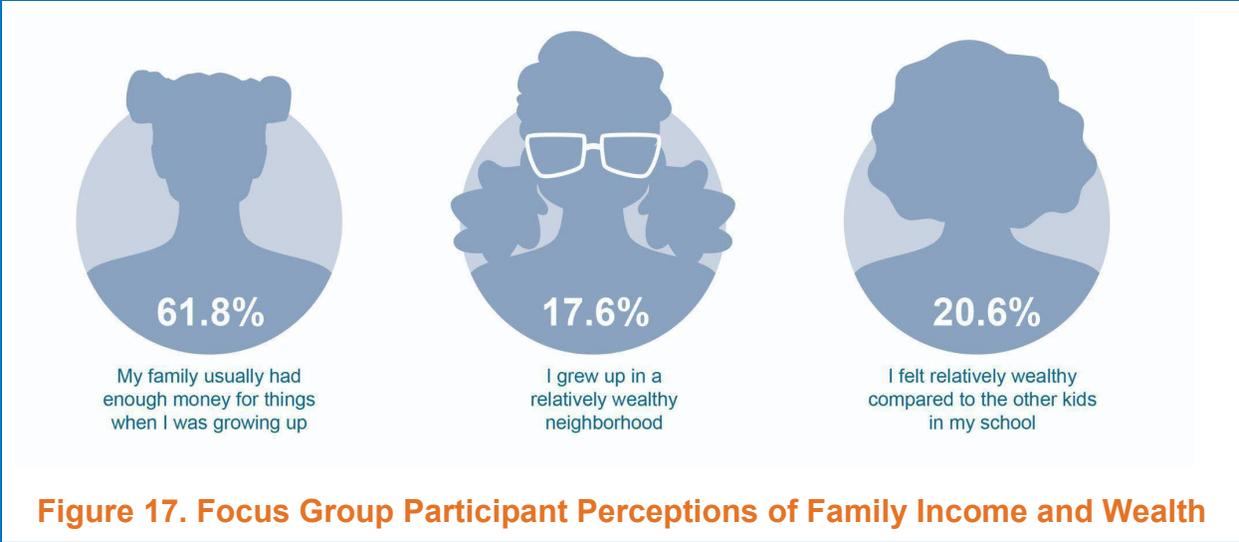
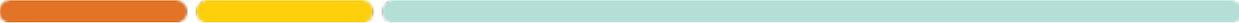


Figure 17. Focus Group Participant Perceptions of Family Income and Wealth

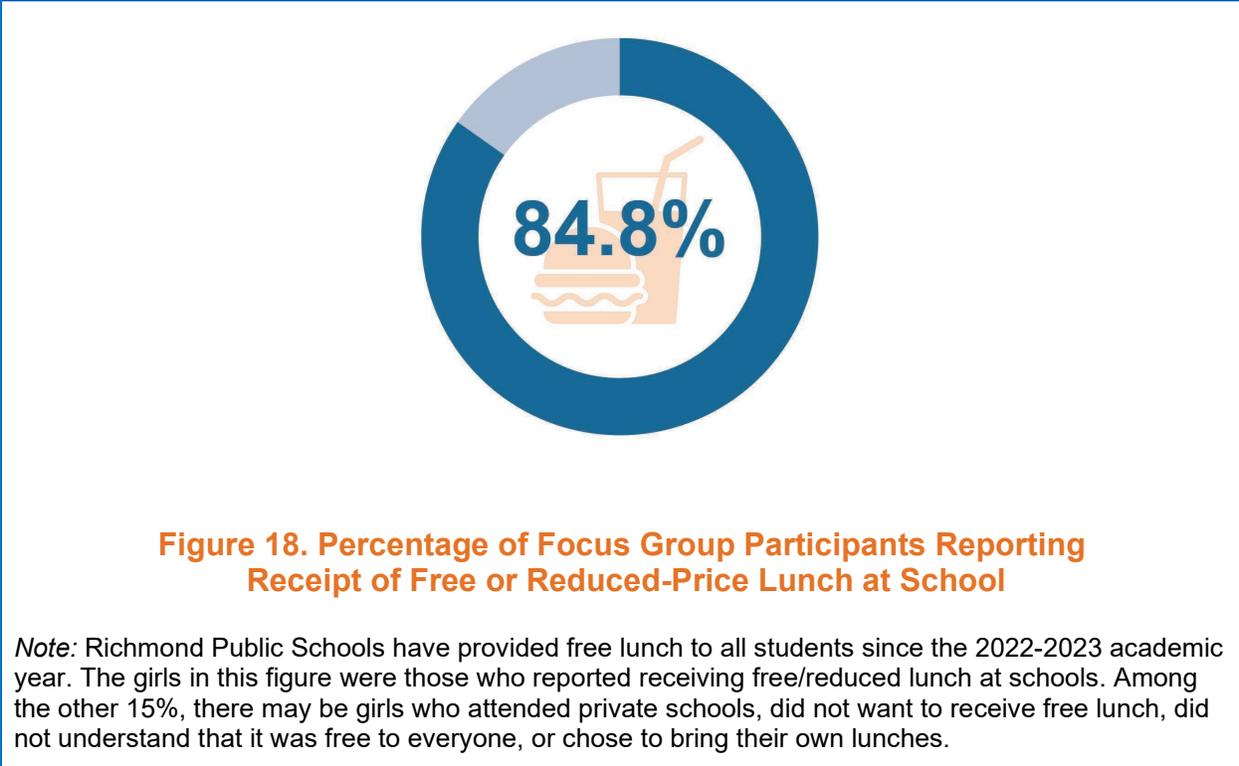
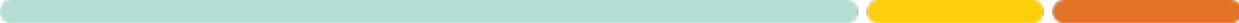


Figure 18. Percentage of Focus Group Participants Reporting Receipt of Free or Reduced-Price Lunch at School

Note: Richmond Public Schools have provided free lunch to all students since the 2022-2023 academic year. The girls in this figure were those who reported receiving free/reduced lunch at schools. Among the other 15%, there may be girls who attended private schools, did not want to receive free lunch, did not understand that it was free to everyone, or chose to bring their own lunches.

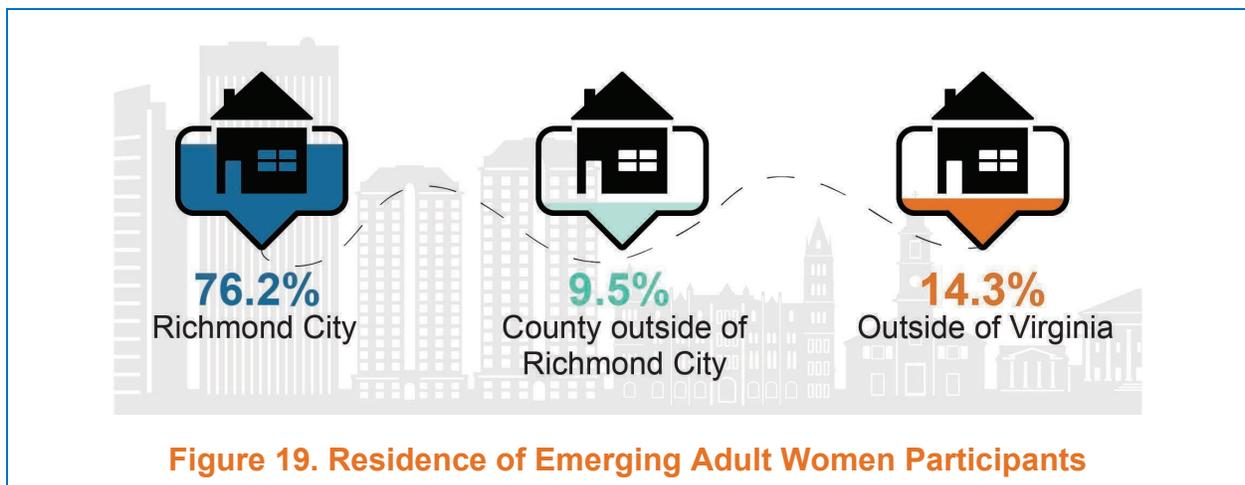


Emerging Adult Women in Interviews

The majority of the 21 emerging adult women interviewed (76.2%) resided in the City of Richmond (Figure 19). About 9.5% lived in surrounding counties, and 14.3% lived outside the state of Virginia. Among those residing in Richmond, more than half (57.1%) lived on the Southside, 19% on the Northside, and 19% in other parts of the city (Figure 20).

Regarding their current life circumstances, nearly 43% of participants identified as college students who were also employed (Figure 21). Approximately 19% were college students not currently working, and a similar proportion (19%) were high school students without employment. A smaller share, fewer than 5% were both in high school and working, while about 10% reported working but not attending school or college.

When asked about household income (Figure 22), the majority (38.1%) stated that their household income was between \$25,000 and \$49,999, followed by \$100,000 or over (14.3%). Less than 5% reported a household income of less than \$25,000 or between \$50,000 and \$74,999. About one-third of participants did not report their household income.



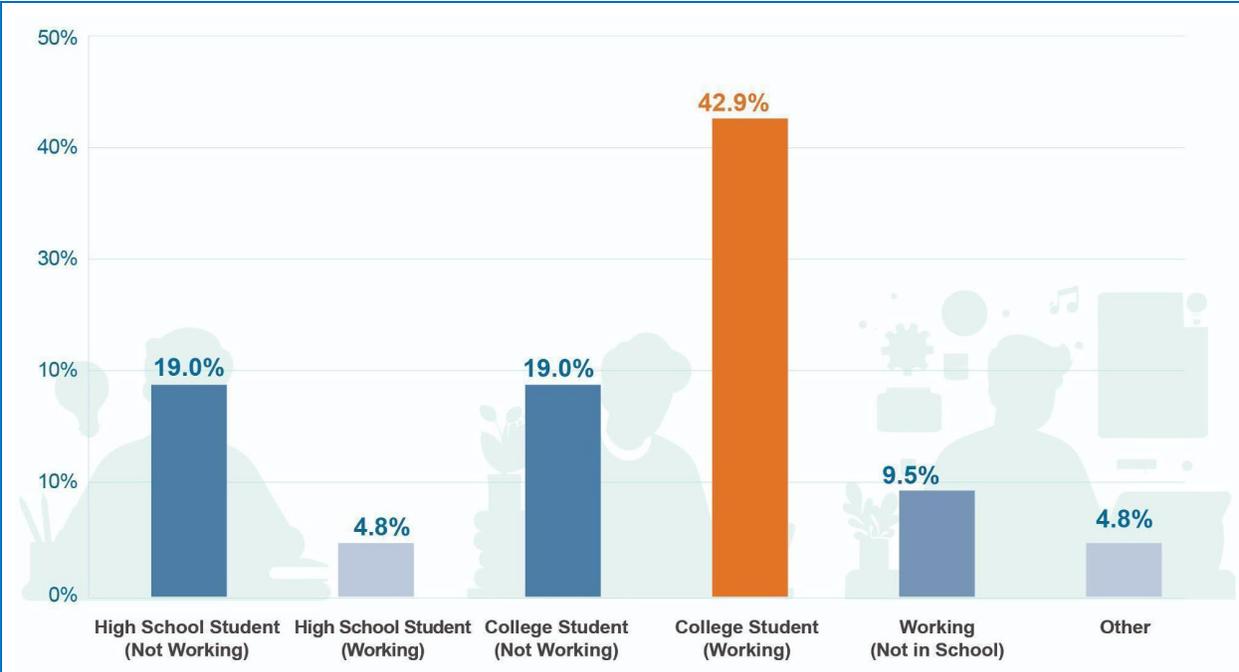
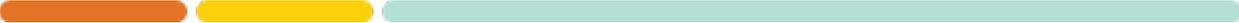


Figure 21. Current Educational or Employment Status of Emerging Adult Women Participants



Figure 22. Household Income of Emerging Adult Women Participants



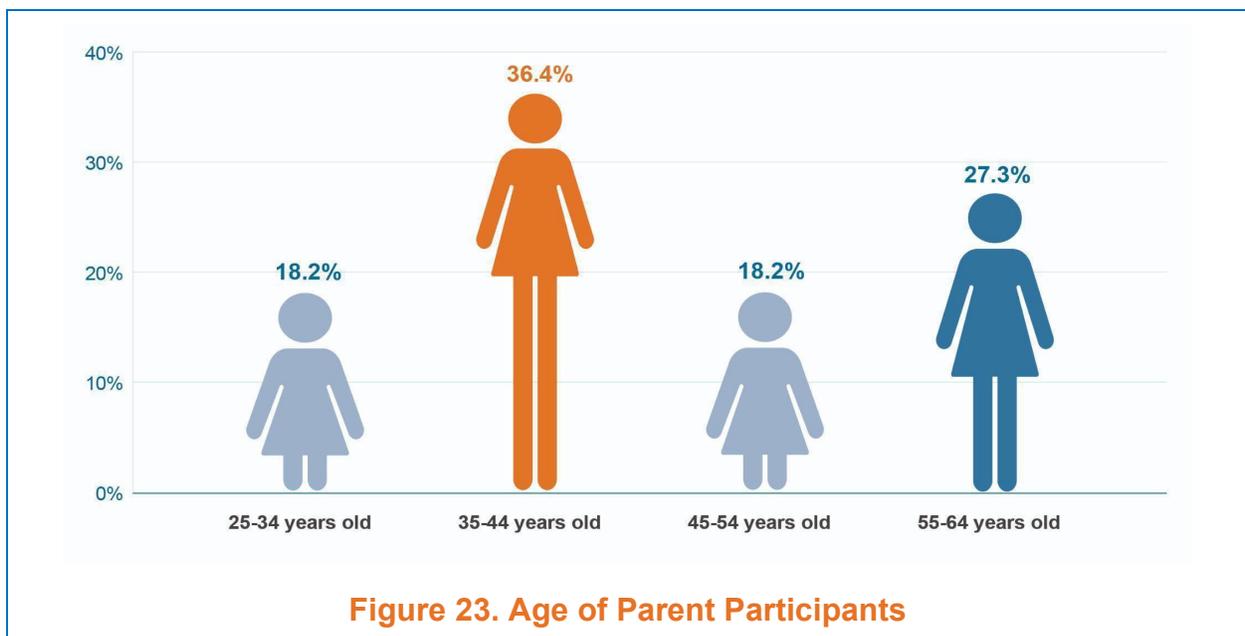
Parents/ Guardians In Interviews

Among the 11 parent participants, more than one-third (36.4%) were between 35 and 44 years old. Less than 30% were between 55 and 64, while fewer than 20% fell into the 25-34 or 45-54 age ranges (Figure 23). Most of the participants' daughters were 12,13, or 17 years old (21.4% each), with smaller proportions having 14-year-old or 22-year-old daughters (both under 15%). A few participants (7.1%) had a 6-year-old daughter. Although interviews were designed for parents or guardians of Black girls aged 12 to 17, some participants reported having additional daughters who were either younger or older (Figure 24).

The majority of parent participants (81.8%) identified as cisgender women, while fewer than one in five identified as cisgender men (Figure 25). Educational attainment varied, with just over half (54.5%) holding a bachelor's or associate's degree. Fewer than 20% had only a high school diploma or equivalent, and small shares (9.1% each) reported having completed some college without earning a degree, some postgraduate coursework, or a postgraduate degree (Figure 26).

All parent participants lived within the City of Richmond. Most (63.6%) resided on the Southside, fewer than 10% lived on the Northside, and about a quarter (27.3%) reported living in other parts of the city (Figure 27).

Household income levels varied widely (Figure 28). Over one-third (36.4%) of participants reported earning \$100,000 or more annually. Smaller proportions, each under 20%, reported incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999 or between \$25,000 and \$49,999. A small share (9.1% each) reported household incomes between \$75,000 and \$99,999, or less than \$25,000 per year. Overall, the sample reflected a mix of moderate to higher income families, with notable representation from middle-class households living primarily in Richmond's Southside.



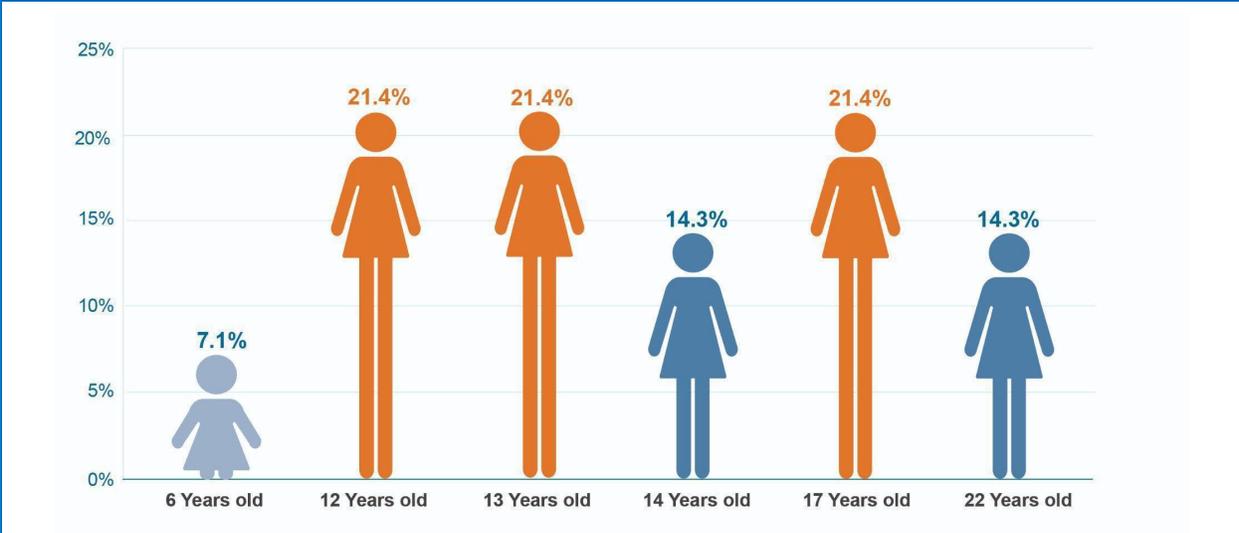
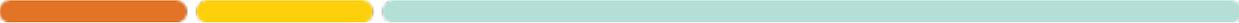


Figure 24. Age of Parent Participants' Daughters

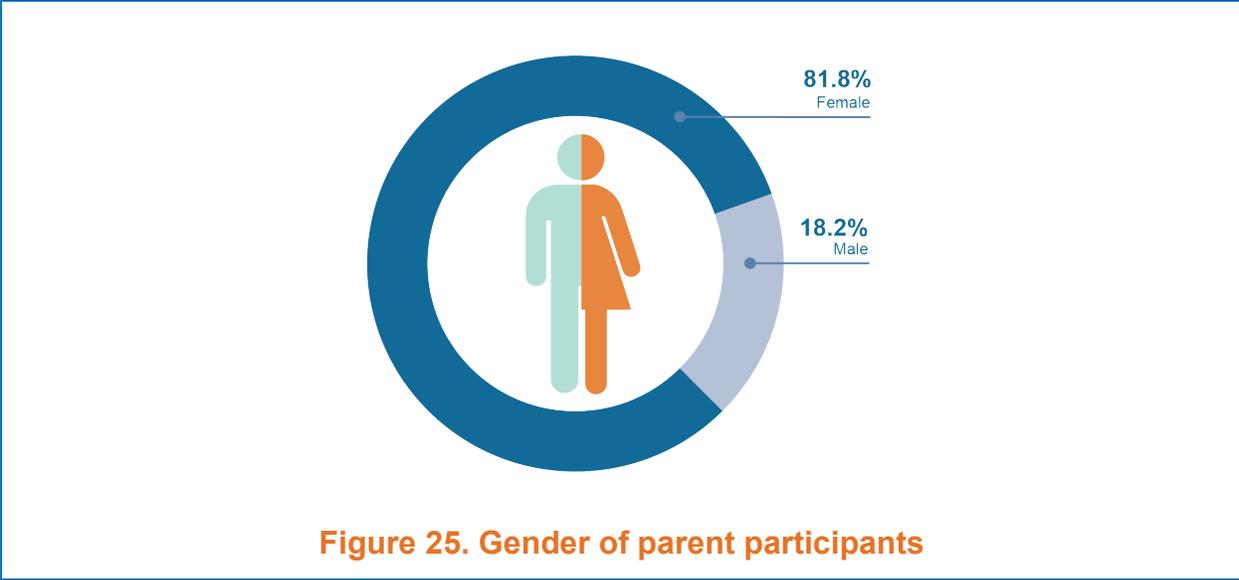


Figure 25. Gender of parent participants



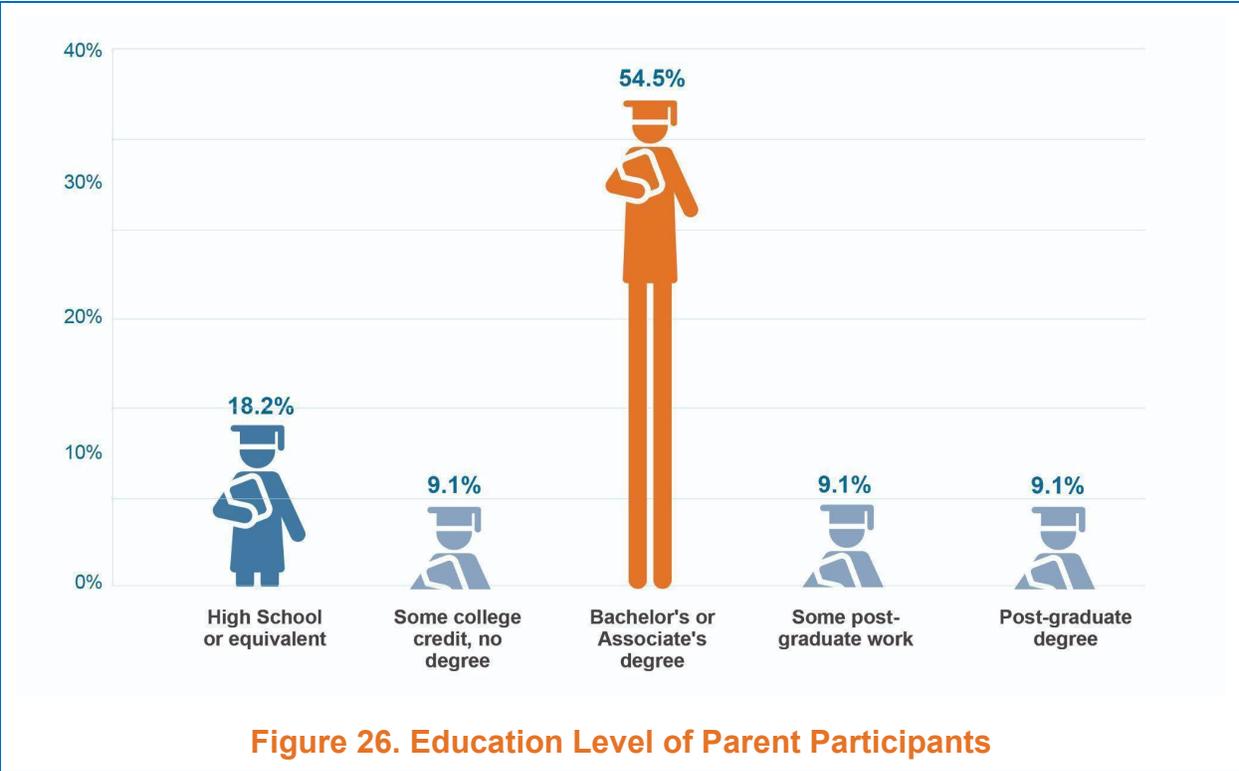
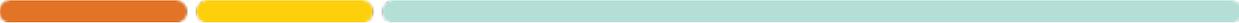
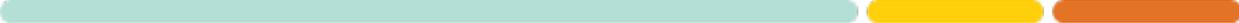


Figure 26. Education Level of Parent Participants



Figure 27. Location in Richmond Where Parent Participants Reside



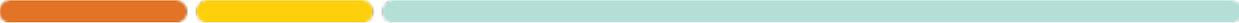


Figure 28. Household Income of Parent Participants



FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Girls, guardians/parents, and emerging adult women shared valuable insights about Black girls' lived experiences, highlighting their individual strengths and community assets. Their stories demonstrate how Black girls rely on resilience, cultural pride, and supportive networks to thrive in different environments. The findings combine qualitative and quantitative data to illustrate each domain area, reflecting the full scope of these perspectives. The results are organized around five domains of strengths and experiences in Black girls' lives.

- Identity
- Health and Well-Being
- Home and Family
- School and Learning
- Community

Together, these five domains help integrate the micro, mezzo, and macro-level assets that girls and their guardians identify as crucial to their daily lives.⁸⁵ Each domain represents a distinct sphere where individual, relational, and structural factors connect. Identity explores how Black girls define themselves, express pride, and navigate social perceptions across different settings. The Health and Well-Being domain examines how Black girls experience, maintain, and protect their physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness, considering systemic inequities and community strengths. The Home and Family domain highlights the vital role of family relationships, caregiving networks, and intergenerational wisdom in shaping the girl's sense of safety and identity. The School and Learning domain focuses on the academic and social experiences that influence engagement, motivation, and achievement. Lastly, the Community domain reflects the broader social and cultural context that supports Black girls.

Technical Note

1. Figures referenced in the remainder of the report are provided at the end of each section for ease of review.
2. Throughout this section, pseudonyms replace real names when available and contextually appropriate. Each participant reference includes the pseudonym, participant age, and the data source in parentheses. For example, "Renessemee, age 17, Focus Group #1." This convention ensures consistency and allows readers to track contributions by participants and settings.

⁸⁵ In this report, micro-level assets refer to individual and interpersonal resources in girls' immediate lives (e.g., personal skills, health, and close relationships); mezzo-level assets refer to community- and institution-based supports that mediate daily experiences (e.g., schools, neighborhood organizations, service providers); and macro-level assets refer to broader structural, cultural, and policy environments that shape opportunities and constraints (e.g., laws, social norms, and economic conditions). This framing is consistent with multilevel ecological and public policy analyses (e.g., Bronfenbrenner 1979; McLeroy et al. 1988). Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press. And McLeroy, K. R., Bibeau, D., Steckler, A., & Glanz, K. (1988). An ecological perspective on health promotion programs. *Health education quarterly*, 15(4), 351–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019818801500401>



Identity

“I would say kind-hearted [as my strength] ‘cause I’m really nice and I don’t mind giving someone my [last] if I have to. As long as they’re okay or happy, I don’t mind doing so.”
 (“Renessemee,” age 17, Focus Group #1)

The Black girls in Richmond resonated with a variety of identities, characteristics, and strengths, leading to their diverse definitions of self. Black girls are of a variety of ethnicities like African-American, and a diverse array of Afro-Latino, Caribbean, and African ethnicities. Over 60% of the girls (see Figure 29) in the online survey reported that they were aware of and learned about their ethnicity through internet searching, keeping up with current events, reading books, magazines, newspapers, or other materials, and participating in activities that have taught them about their ethnicity. A little over half of them also experienced things that reflected their ethnicity, such as eating food, listening to music, and watching movies. However, around 20% stated they did not engage in activities that would teach them about their ethnic identity.

Additionally, these girls often received affirmations and sentiments from their parents or guardians at home regarding their race/ethnicity and gender identity (see Figures 30 and 31). The majority of girls reported that their parents or guardians always or most of the time taught them one of these empowering statements. For example, the majority of them (92.8%) reported that their parents or guardians always or most of the time said Black girls are intelligent. Over 80% of girls stated that they were frequently taught by their parents or guardians that Black girls are beautiful and strong, and should have self-confidence, self-respect, be proud to be a Black girl, and love their skin color.

In addition to race/ethnicity and gender, about half of these girls identified themselves as religious or spiritual (see Figure 32). Among these individuals, a notable portion felt a strong personal connection to their faith. For example, about one third of them described their relationship with God as experienced through unconditional love, their faith helped them experience forgiveness when they act against their moral conscience, and they felt strongly related to a power greater than themselves (see Figure 33).

All these identities and the empowerment and affirmation these girls received has played a significant role in shaping these girls’ strengths and their way of life, which was reflected in the variety of qualities and strengths frequently reported by these girls. The strengths frequently mentioned by these girls include being altruistic, athletic, courageous, caring, confident, creative, empathetic, family oriented, friendly, flexible, goal-oriented, health-conscious, hardworking, independent, nurturing, optimistic, persevering, resilient, respectful, supportive, studious, sociable, and tech-savvy. Below are a few selected quotes in which girls described their strengths such as being confident about themselves, being caring, sociable and supportive:

“My favorite thing about myself is everything.” (“Ariana,” age 17, Focus Group #7)

“[I am] loving because I make everybody around me smile.” (“Carneisha,” age 15, Focus Group #1)



“My favorite thing about myself is [that] I’m outgoing.” (Ladybug,” age 17, Focus Group #7)

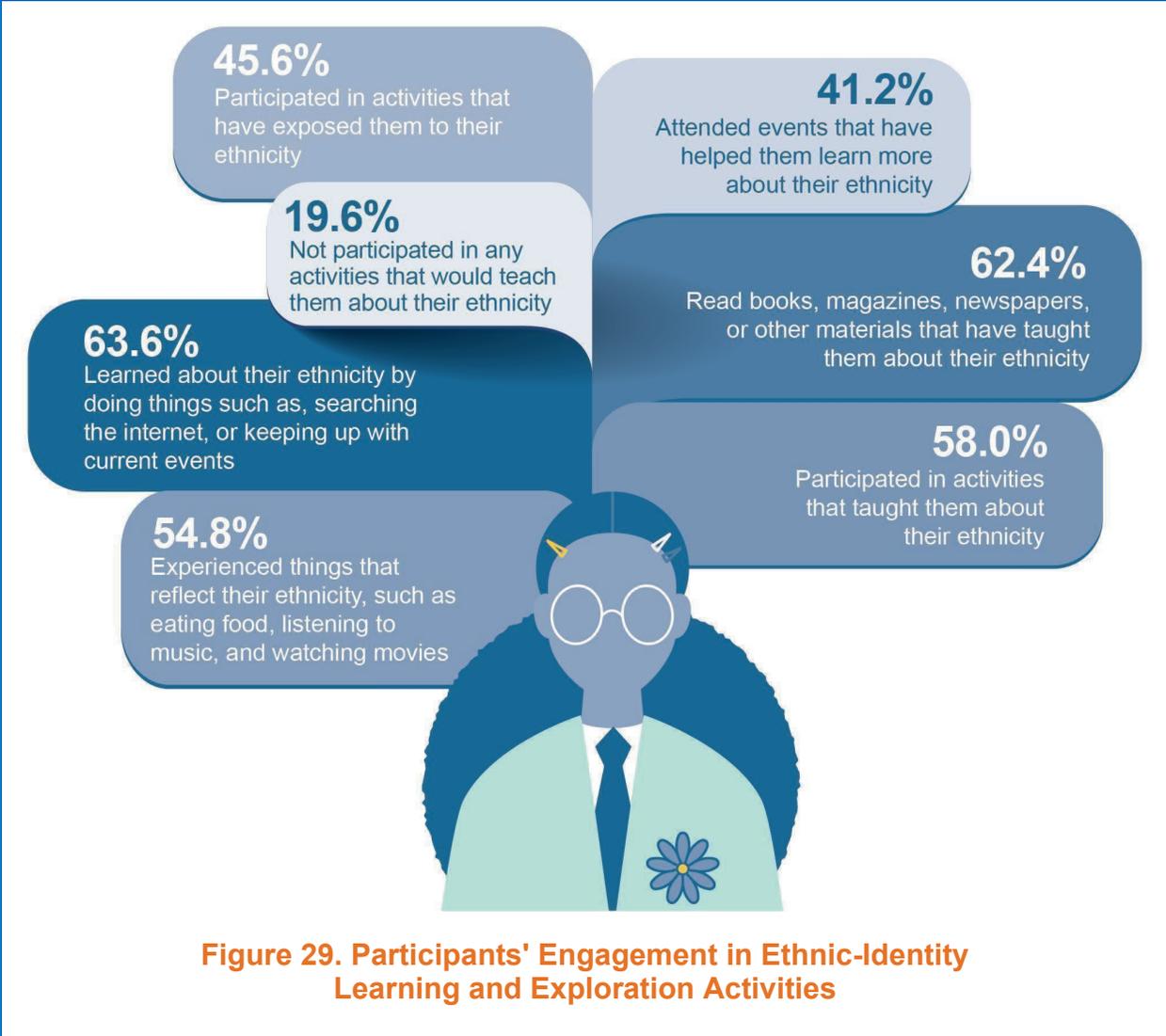
“I put pretty [as one of my strengths], I put support for my parents [as another strength]. And then I’m in the nursing program so I do that and I just work.” (Summer,” age 17, Focus Group #6)

These varieties of strengths remain diverse even as Black girls grow into emerging adult women. Emerging adult women who grew up in Richmond reflected on their experiences and their friends growing up. They described the strengths of Black girls as multifaceted. For example, Black girls are creative, family-oriented, patient, caring, honest, nurturing, empathetic, and friendly. One woman described her friend.

“I guess my friends would be a perfect example. So, one of my friends, they – I guess it’s the same as mine, they’re extremely – they’re sensitive. She’s sensitive, but she’s also – I guess she doesn’t like having people to be left out, so she’s, like, caring, and she thinks about others, and she gives. She’s just, like, a giver. She does not, I guess, take, it’s more of giving, and that’s one quality that I really admire her for. She’s very nice, friendly, and very independent and mature.” (Emerging Adult Woman #8)

In spite of these many individual strengths, there were still forms of discrimination that got in the way of these girls’ growth. Skin color and hair discrimination were experienced by almost all Black girls in the survey (see Figures 34 and 35). Most had these experiences in the City of Richmond either a few times or even frequently. Moreover, several focus group participants discussed how they have to be resilient due to the negativity they experience in schools especially. For instance, one girl stated,

“I mostly put these [Whammy wrote down words — funny, always in a good mood, positive, love to write, a good person, and cool to be with — in the drawing activity in which she was asked to put down words to describe her personal strengths], because it’s who I am. Kind of because of what [the other girl] said with the whole entire negativity stuff and every single thing at school. Mostly just be in my own little world. You know, never let people put me out of my good mood.” (Whammy,” age 16, Focus Group #3)



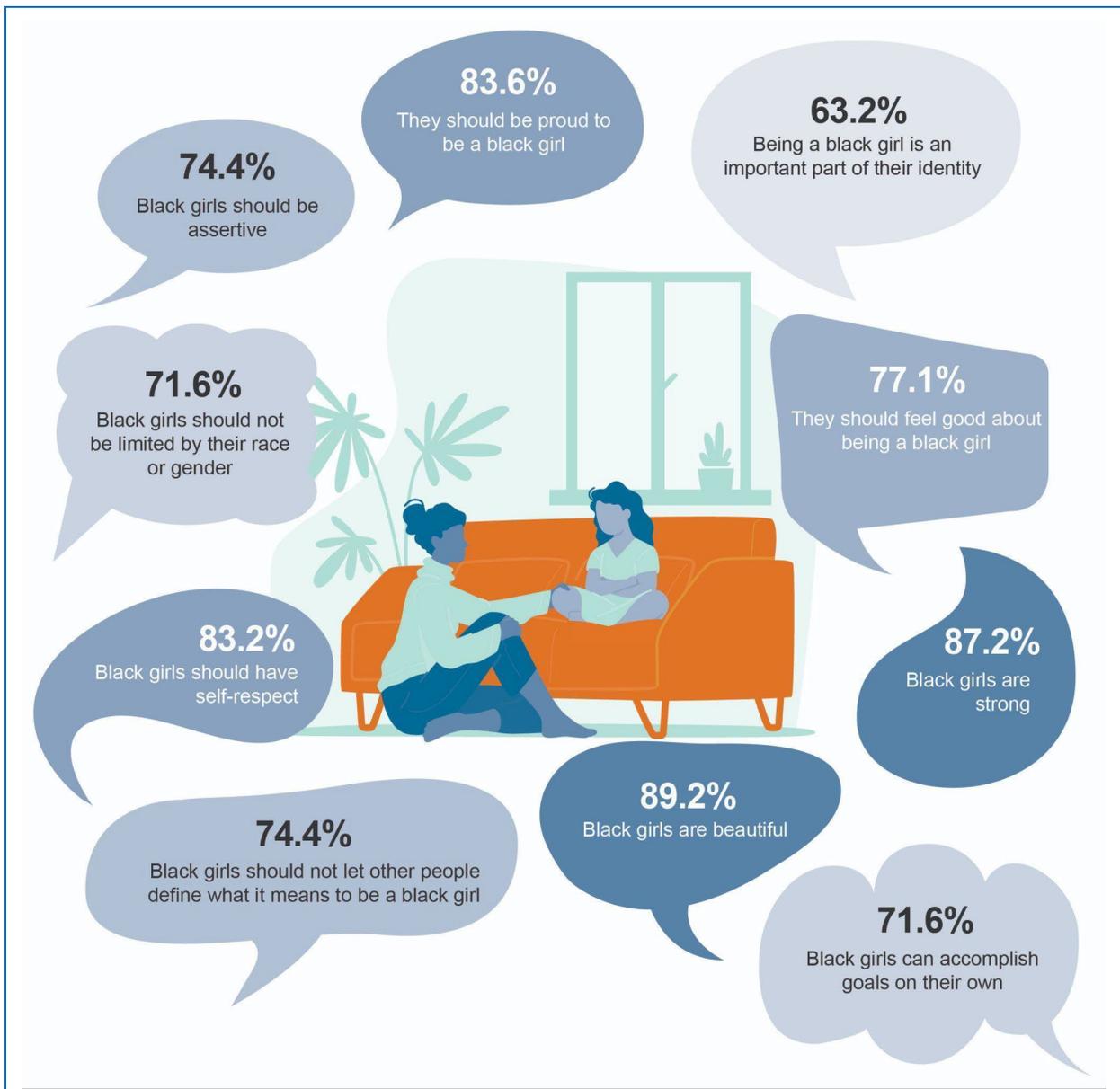


Figure 30. Frequency of Positive Affirmations from Caregivers



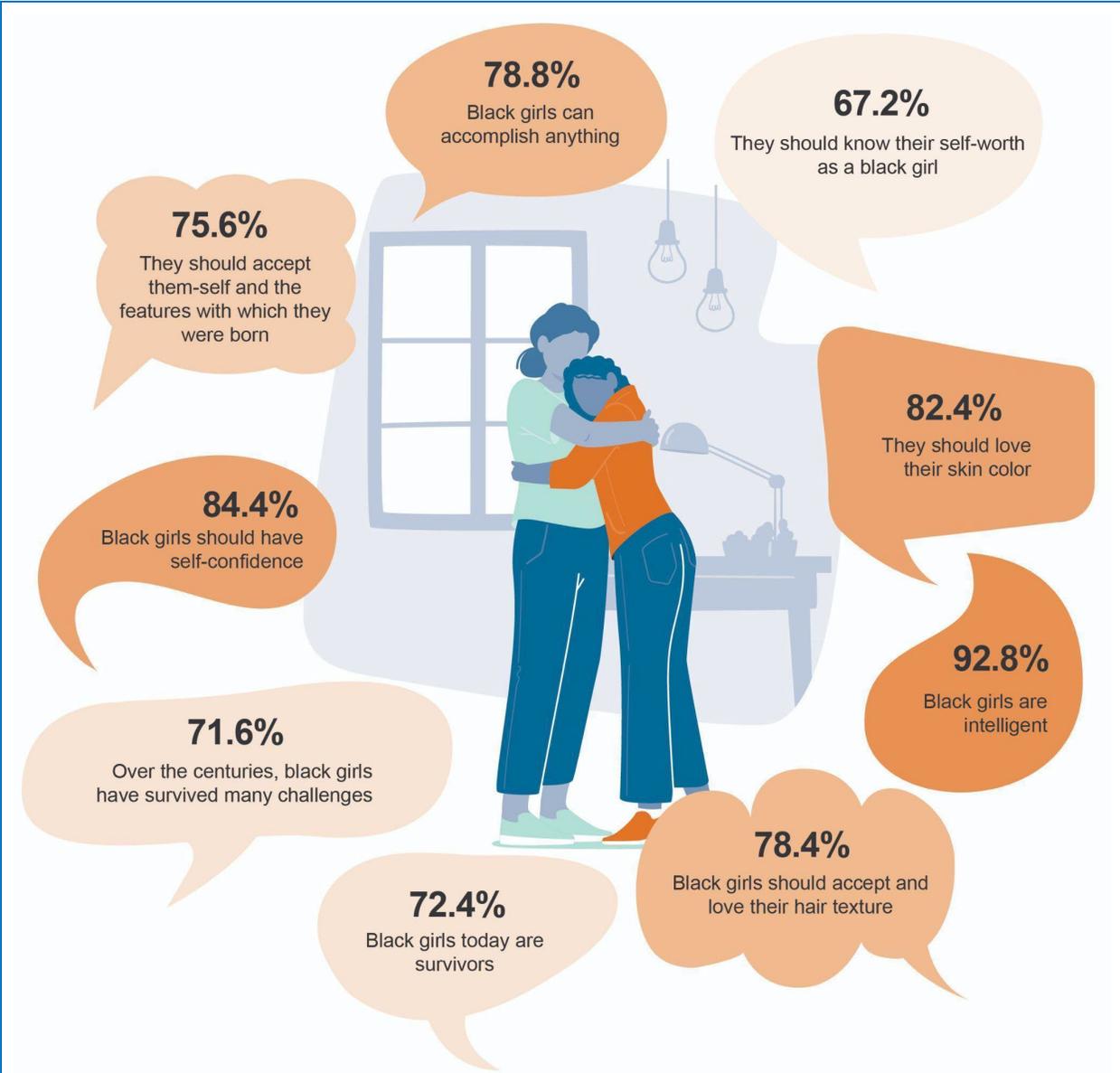
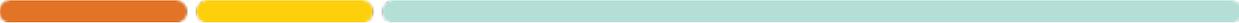


Figure 31. Frequency of Positive Affirmations from Caregivers (Cont.)



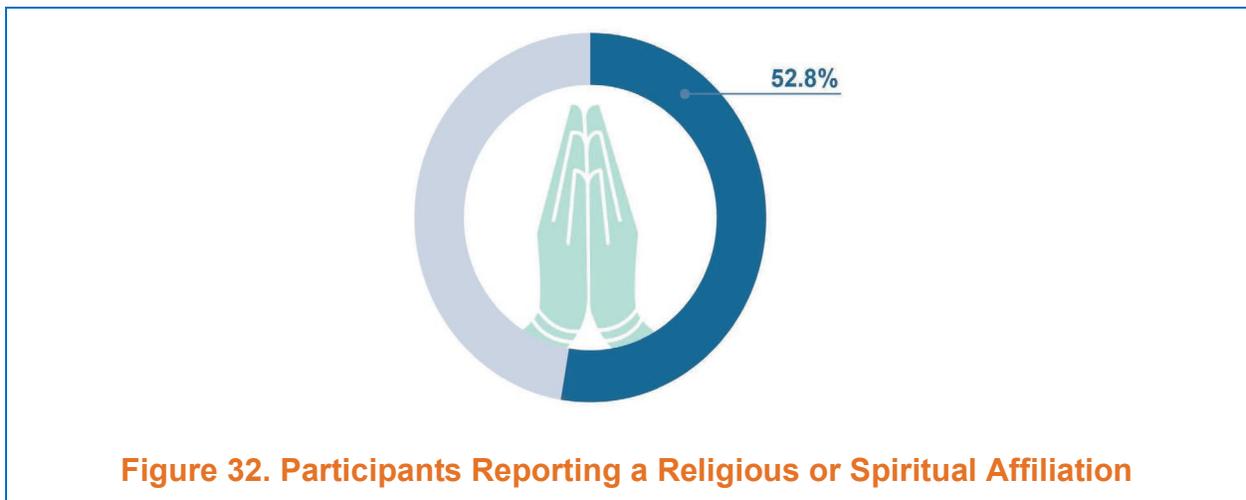
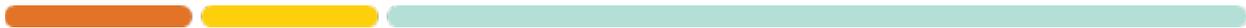


Figure 32. Participants Reporting a Religious or Spiritual Affiliation



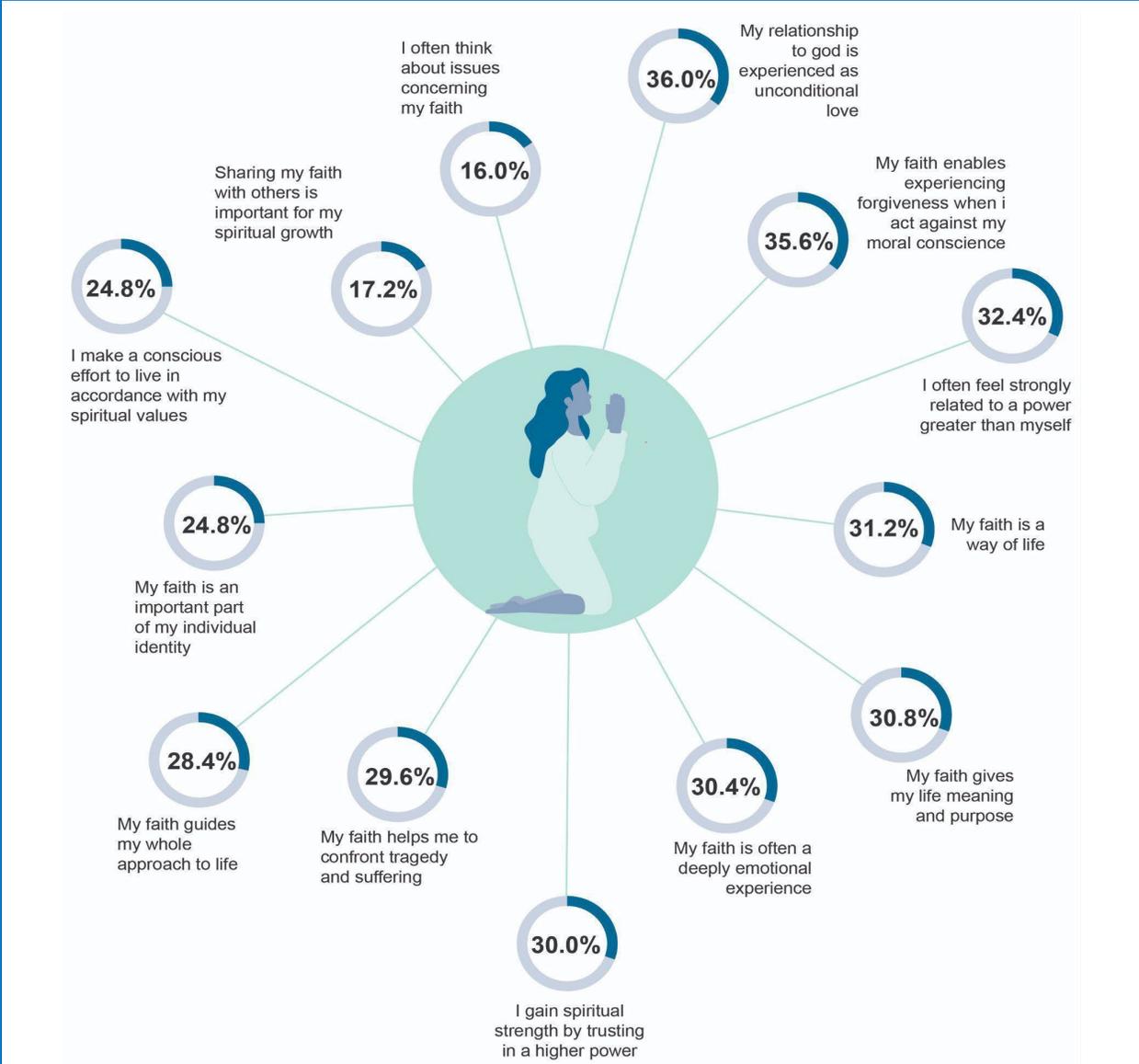
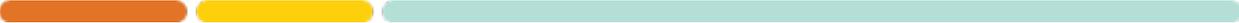
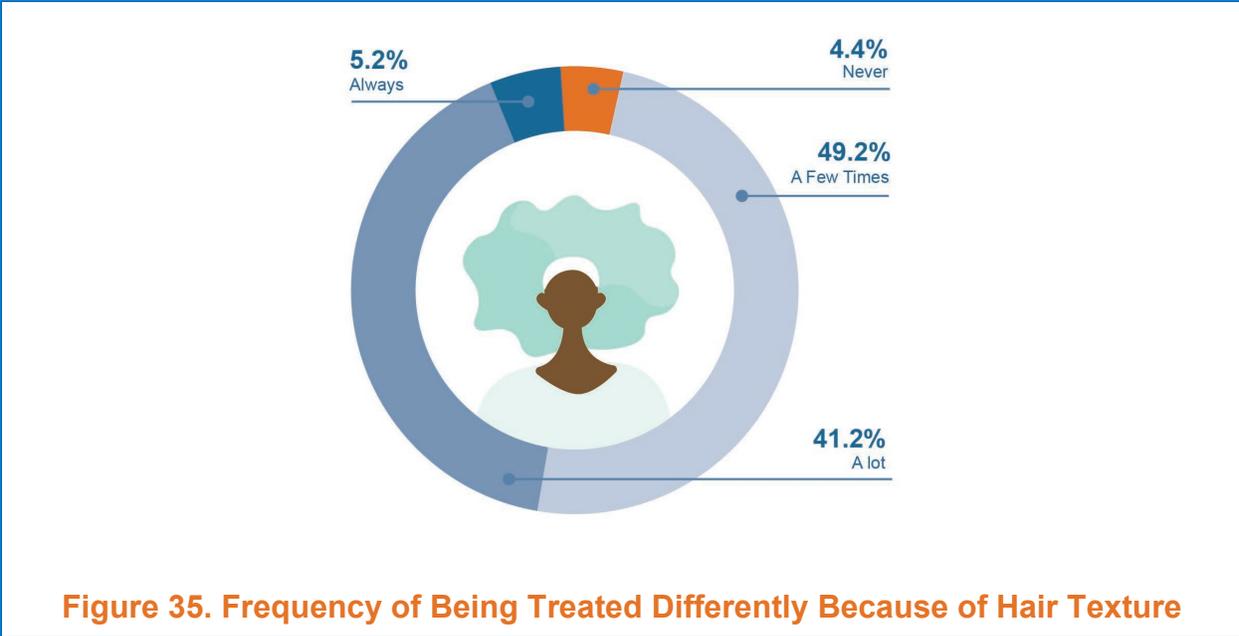
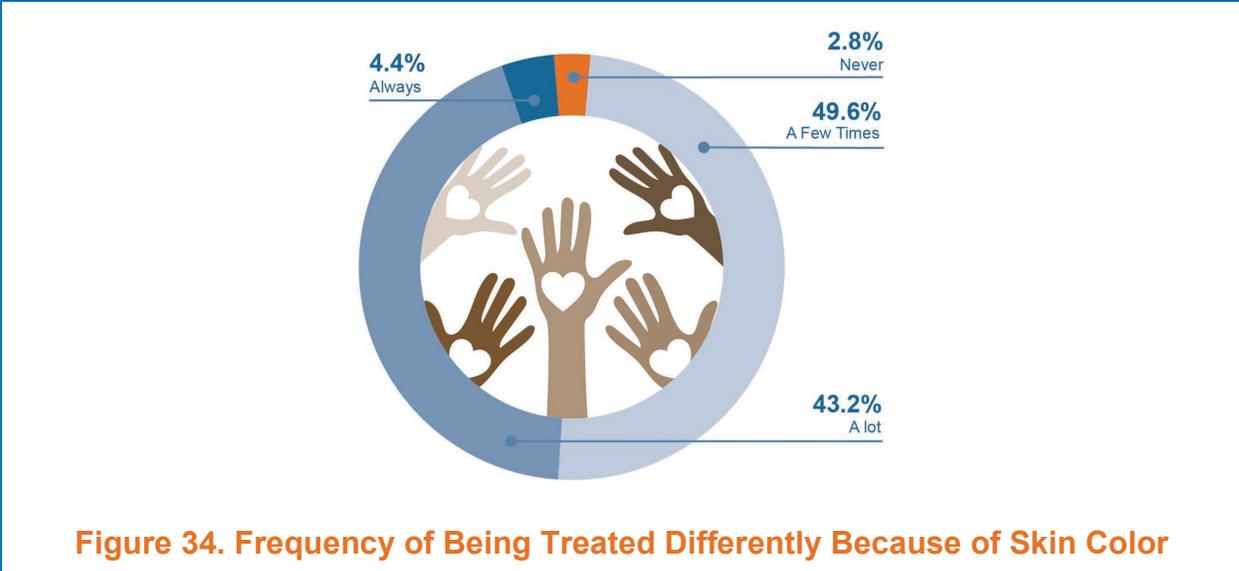
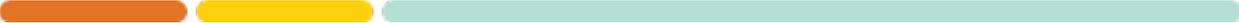


Figure 33. Perceived Importance and Influence of Faith in Participants' Lives







Health and Well-Being

“...more...mental health centers, because we go through a lot day-to-day as women, as Black women, and sometimes the families that we’re in, they might not know how to help you with that.” (Emerging Adult Woman #12)

Throughout the survey and qualitative data collection, participants discussed their physical and mental health, and sense of well-being. Results suggest the sample of girls view themselves as being in good health and able to access a range of resources in their community to improve their health and well-being. However, girls and emerging adult women in the sample indicated areas where they would like to see improvements in their communities, focusing primarily on availability of services and resources. These comments emphasized healthy food options and mental health services and safe spaces for Black girls. Notably, survey results indicated many girls were open to the possibility of speaking with mental health professionals and had someone to speak with informally about their lives, and focus group participants and interviewees expressed the need for more of those formal services in their communities.

Over 90% of respondents reported that these two statements were definitely or mostly true to them: *I am as healthy as anybody I know* and *my health is excellent*. Only a small percentage of respondents reported that they seem to get sick a little easier than other people and they expect their health to get worse (see Figure 36).

As illustrated in Figure 37, respondents were asked about their sleep health, over a quarter of respondents (28.8%) reported they always or often need help getting sleep. Additionally, 23.2% reported they always or often have trouble settling down when it is time to go to sleep. Others reported that after waking up during the night, they always or often need help to go back to sleep (14.4%), have trouble going back to sleep (12.4%), and have trouble getting comfortable (8.8%).

Participants were asked about how often they have specific experiences regarding their mental health (Figure 38). Results showed a large proportion of respondents felt that for most or all of the time, they have been a happy person (58.4%), they felt full of pep (47.6%), they had a lot of energy (47.2%), and they felt calm and peaceful (39.6%). Consistently, a very small proportion reported that for most or all of the time, they felt very nervous (6.0%), worn out (4.0%), down in the dumps (3.2%), tired (3.2%), and downhearted and blue (2.8%).

When asked about the likelihood of speaking to a mental health professional (Figure 39), most respondents expressed some openness to seeking support. Over 40% said they were somewhat likely to reach out, and 4% indicated they were very likely to reach out. While a smaller proportion of respondents were hesitant, about a quarter (27.2%) reported being somewhat unlikely, and roughly 4% said they were very unlikely to seek professional help.

When discussing how often they want to talk to someone when they are experiencing problems or challenges (Figure 40), over 60% of respondents indicated that they would like to speak to someone sometimes. Over one-third reported they want to talk to someone regarding their



problems or challenges most of the time. Only a small proportion (2.4%) stated they always want to talk to someone about their challenges. Less than two percent of respondents reported that they never want to talk to someone about their problems and challenges.

Regarding who they feel most comfortable asking for advice or help (Figure 41), a large majority of respondents answered that they felt the most comfortable with their friends (73.2%) and their mothers (68.4%). Less than half of respondents reported that they would feel most comfortable seeking advice or help from their fathers (39.6%) and sisters (32.0%). About five percent or less indicated other significant figures, such as extracurricular leaders, partners, counselors, or foster parents, were the one from whom they felt comfortable seeking help or advice.

During qualitative data collection, participants were asked about what resources they would like to see more of in the City of Richmond in order to improve the health and well-being of Black girls. As part of those discussions, several participants mentioned that there should be more resources available that support the mental health of young Black girls in schools, who they viewed as more susceptible to bullying. These participants highlighted counseling and mental health group services, and having more resources that encourage holistic health. The emerging adult women below discussed how these resources would have helped them in their own childhood and adolescence.

“...in a neighborhood with other people, like, some sometimes people of color and white, so I kind of felt discriminated that time I was under 18. You know, I -- as of that time, I was always, like, pretty, like -- I was always embracing my color. I hardly had friends. I don't go outside of school. The community I find myself at that time was actually affecting my mental health. The only person I was being happy with was with my parents because they love me for who I was.” (Emerging Adult Woman #9)

“Also, more like mental health centers, because we go through a lot day-to-day as women, as Black women, and sometimes the families that we're in, they might not know how to help you with that.” (Emerging Adult Woman #12)

These quotes suggest that accessing these services during their childhood and adolescence was often difficult, and could have been made easier by integrating mental health services into school settings. One emerging adult woman discussed how finding a provider that the girl or woman liked was important for those who could access these resources.

“And I just feel like, out of all the people -- because I had different other therapists, um, because I've been dealing with my mental health since I was 15. So, I've been in and out and back and forth from the hospitals and stuff. So, all the therapists that I had, I like RBHA [Richmond Behavioral Health Authority] therapists. Like, there's one that works here...Miss [D]...She's a...TDT [Therapeutic Day Treatment] worker here, she works through RBHA. I love her -- damn, I love her so much. Like, she is my favorite.” (Emerging Adult Woman #18)

Additionally, some participants mentioned that there should be more resources in the City of Richmond that focus on healthy eating and living catered specifically to the Black community.



They highlighted how policies that cater to food justice concerns in the community would benefit the residents. The participants specified how these resources should teach girls, adolescents, and women how to use healthy foods when they are available as well. Several of the emerging adult women highlighted how this is an issue for the entire family. When healthy foods are available, it has the potential to improve the health and well-being of everyone in the family. However, the emerging adult women highlighted how these healthy foods are often not available to them.

“You have only food places and you only have -- a bunch of food places, especially the ones that aren't healthy. You know what I'm saying, yeah, maybe one, you know, and then they overcharge you for the healthy stuff. So, it's like, why would you get it? You can't afford it. You know what I'm saying, so it's not accessible. So, and then I don't know, we also have Black people, they'll buy all this stuff and food and then they don't want to put no healthy stuff in there. I'm like, 'You had bought all this, you know, bad food and you can't get not one bag of salad?' So, it's like, it's almost as if, it's also with the parents. Like, you have -- like, if the parent's buying this and that, that's what we're eating. That's it. You can't just say no to the parent. So, it's also having conversations with the parents because they're going to control what's going on at home as far as when we're eating. It's not like we have a choice of what we're choosing to eat. If I could choose to eat better, I would. But if you're in a household that's doing this, you're going to eat this. That's it.” (Emerging Adult Woman #2)

“Any - any Black farmer or, um, Black person that challenges health narratives, uh, healthy eating, healthy living, um, to make it appealing to Black people - not appealing, but validate your experience in that - in that world... that would be it, any - any Black person prioritizing holistic health or, uh, social justice, um, and mental health, and community resources that surround that...and food justice.” (Emerging Adult Woman #14)

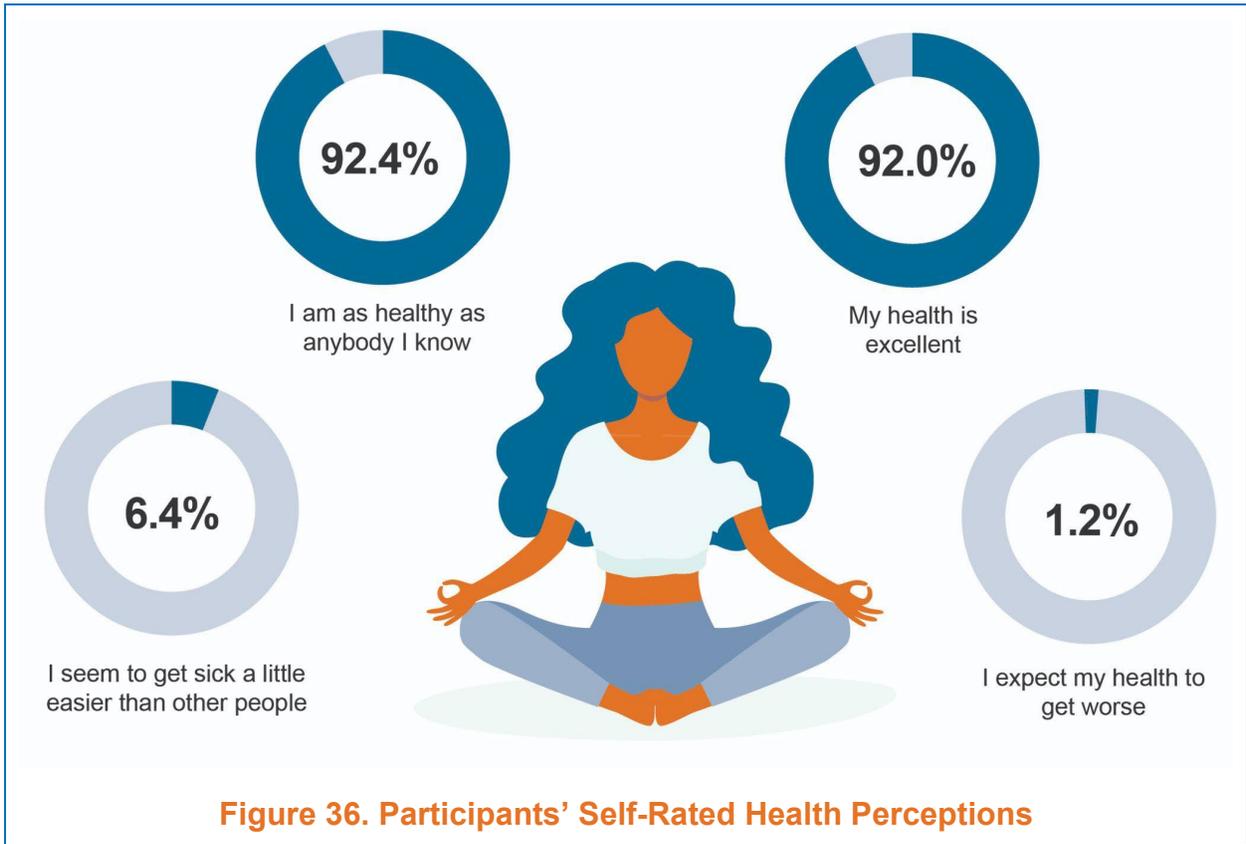
In the focus groups, two girls discussed how they engaged in athletic activities and that supported their health and well-being. One regularly goes to the gym and another has engaged in ballet practice for most of her life. Parents also discussed how their girls engage in physical activity.

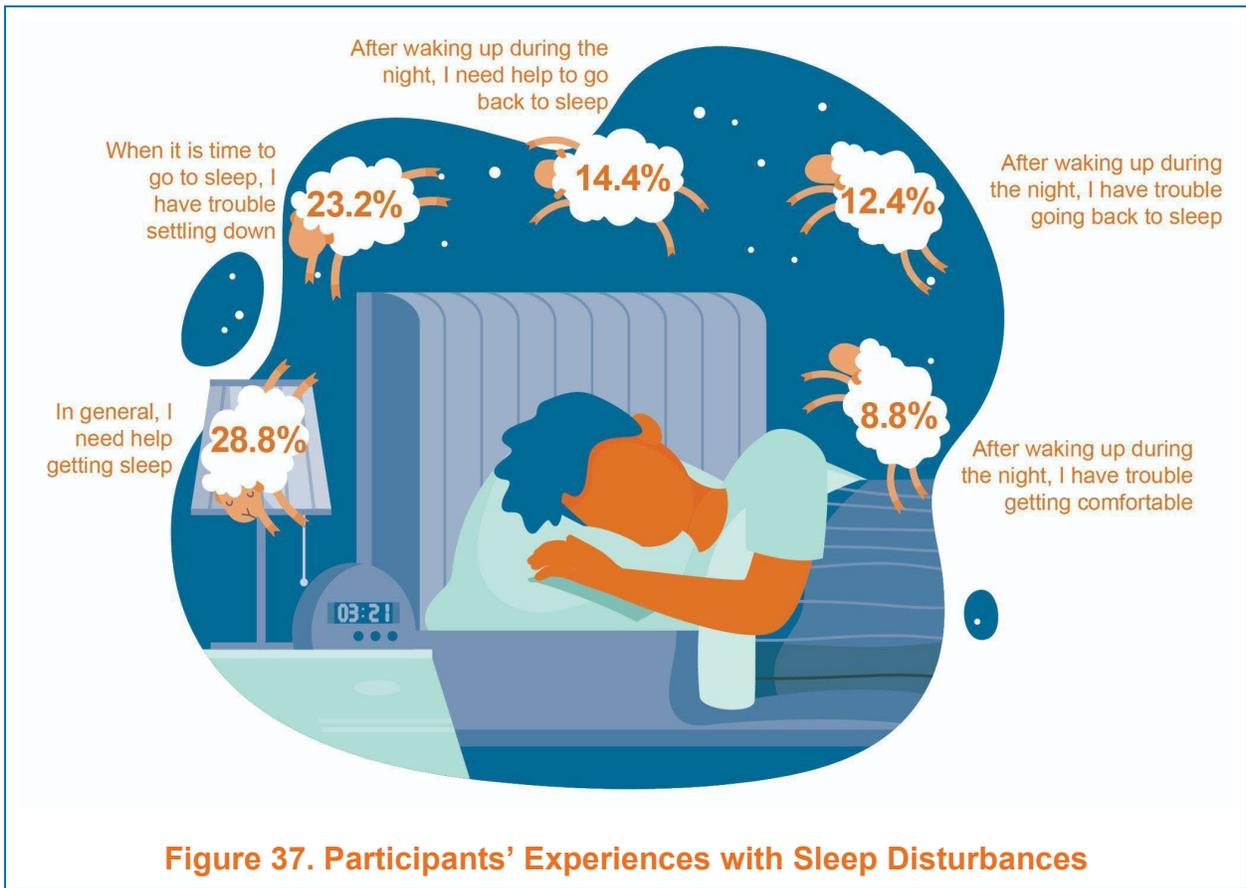
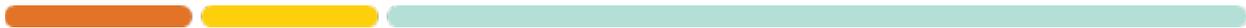
“Gold's gym because I go there to work out and to keep myself pumped up.” (“Blossom,” age 16, Focus Group #1)

“I grew up doing ballet when I was 4, and ever since, I've been attached to it.” (“Renessemee,” age 17, Focus Group #1)

“...program with our personal trainer at the gym, and she really, really likes the coach at the gym, so that makes it even better. But she started doing some weight lifting, which, she can actually lift more than I can.” (Parent #1)

Other girls and parents indicated they participated in sports, including swimming, basketball, and volleyball. While these quotes represent a small proportion of the overall set of participants, they suggest that some physical activity resources are available and accessible in the participants' communities.





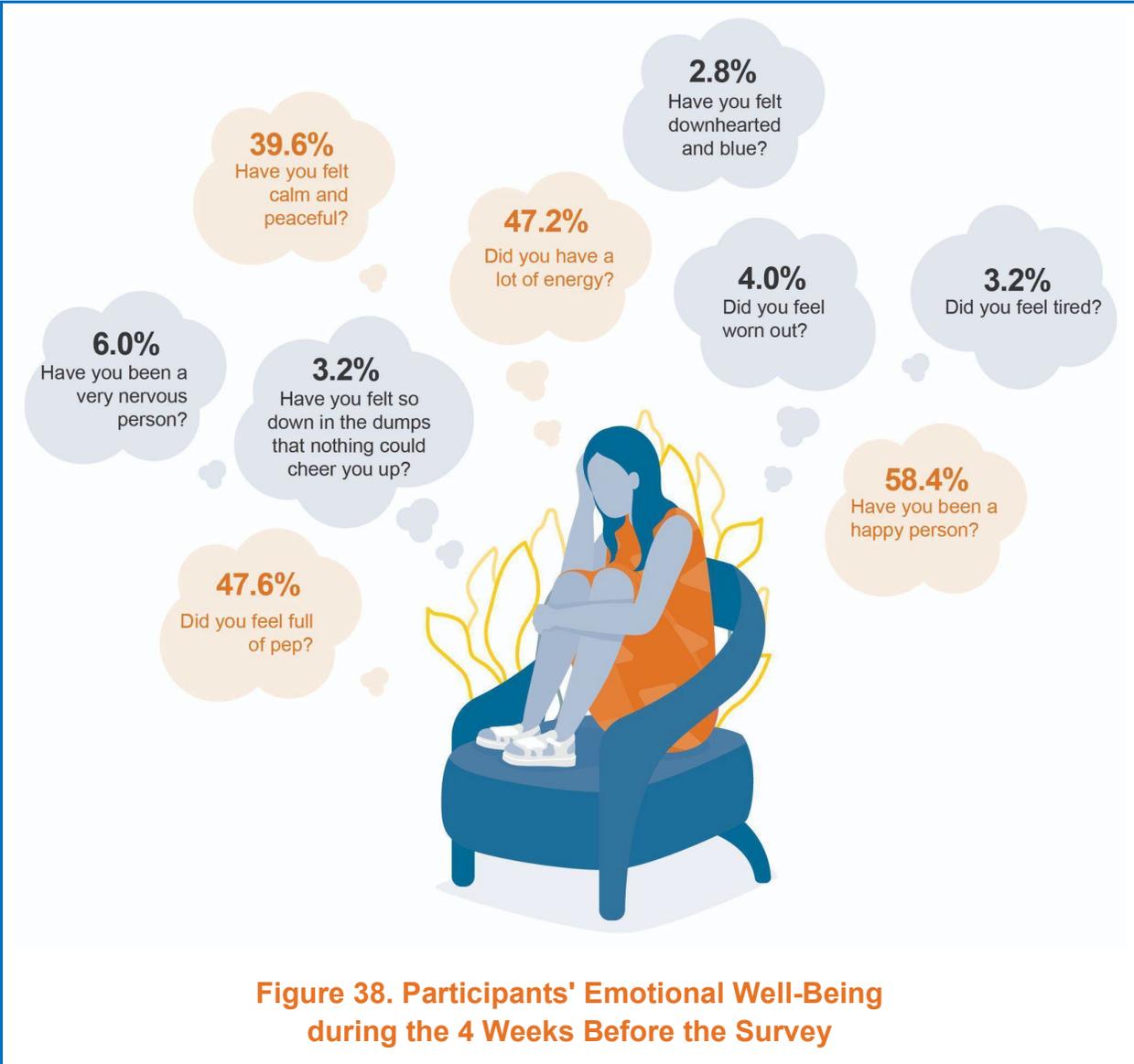
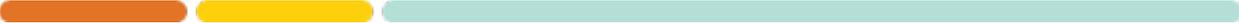
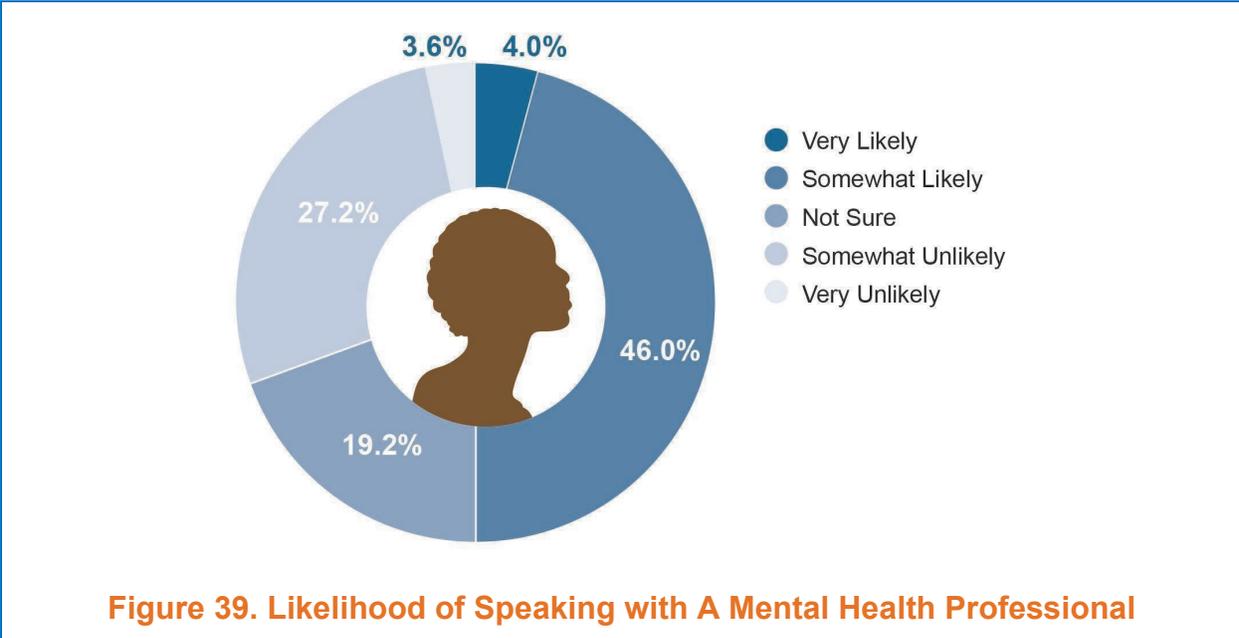
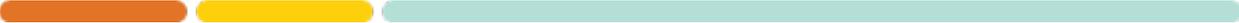
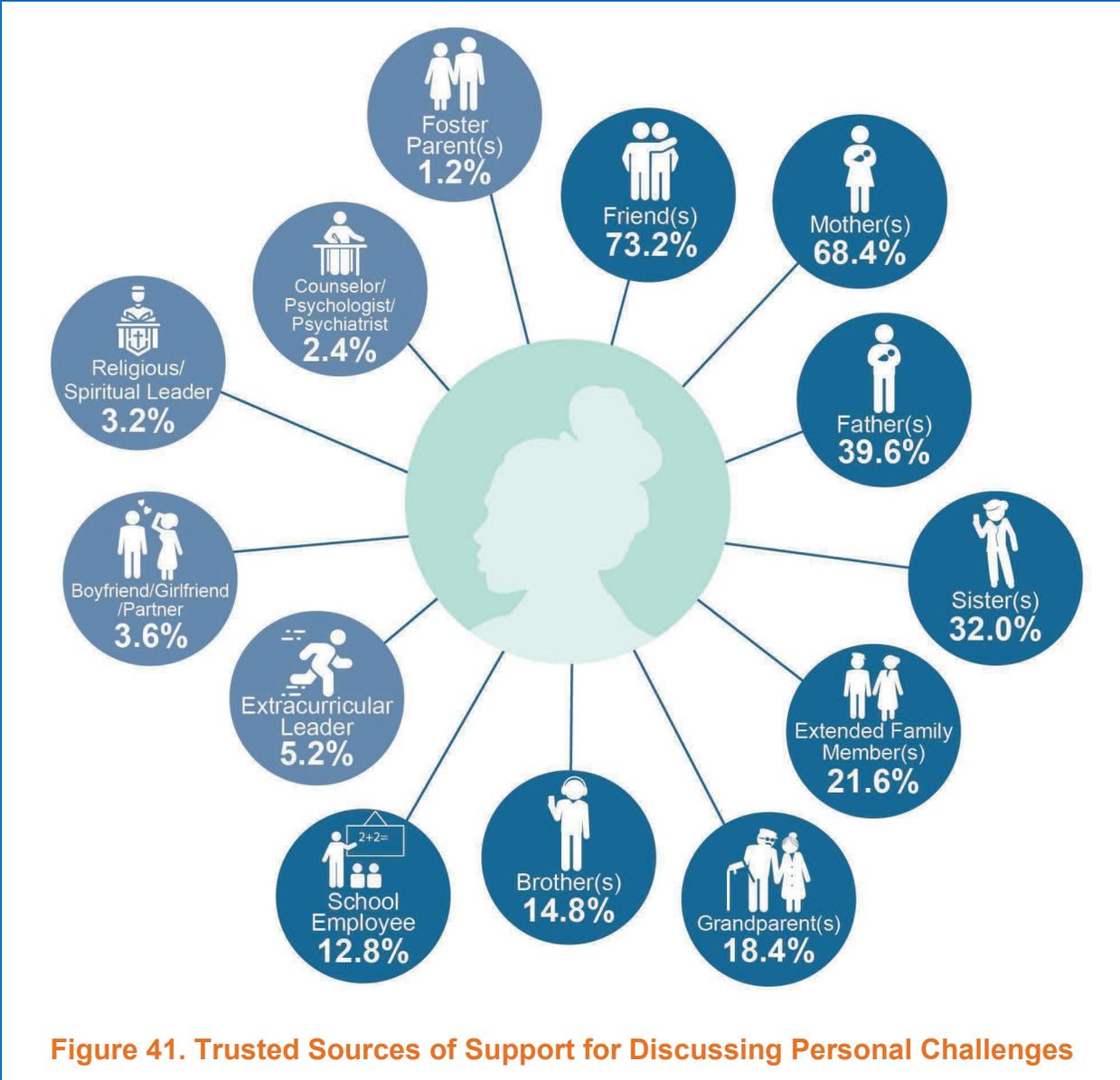


Figure 38. Participants' Emotional Well-Being during the 4 Weeks Before the Survey







Home and Family

"Oh, well, I think most Black girls are adaptable. They are strong in their beliefs. The girls that I know have very strong cultural beliefs and love being Black, and that's important. They can multitask. They can -- hmm. All the ones that I know are very similar to my daughter. So, yeah, they are excellent. They want to be excellent in all areas of their lives, whether it's academic, social activities, you know, so that's important." (Parent #7)

When describing their home and family life, the participants describe a generally positive home life and set of family relationships. Most girls live with their mother and many live with a sibling. Survey data indicates a majority of girls have a positive relationship with their parents or guardians. Qualitative data supports the results highlighting positive relationships with family members, with consistent discussions about how participants interact with a large number of family members and feel they receive high levels of support from those people. This support was indicated to include emotional support and nurturing, encouragement, and material support such as financial support, career advice, and transportation. Additionally, survey data indicates the girls in the sample have high housing stability, with few moves reported during their lifetimes.

Girls reported information about their family circumstances and home life in the survey. When asked about the family members (and other individuals) with whom they live at home most of the time (Figure 42), the majority of respondents (82.8%) indicated that they live with their mother, while over half of respondents indicated that they live with their father (57.2%). Slightly over half of the girls live with both their mother and father (50.8%) and 89.2% of the girls live in a household that is headed by their parents. Additionally, 2.4% of the girls live in a household headed by a foster parent. Most participants live with a sibling, with 78.0% of the girls reporting living with any siblings (22.0% reported being single children in the household). Among the girls, 46.0% live with sisters and 44.0% live with brothers. About a third of the girls lived with a grandparent (34.0%); 29.2% live with their grandmother; and 12.4% live with their grandfather. Additionally, 28.8% of the girls live in a multigenerational household (girl, parents, and grandparents) and a majority of those (22.0% of the total) live with siblings in a multigenerational household. Five percent (5.2%) of the girls reported living in a household headed by a grandparent. Less than one-tenth of respondents (8.8%) live with another related adult woman (e.g., aunt, cousin, etc.), and 1.2% of the girls live primarily with another related adult as the head of the household. A few of the girls who participated (1.6%) did not specify living with a parent (including foster parent), grandparent, or other related adult most of the time in their house.

Additionally, several of the mothers had an expansive definition of family to include peers and their other children as part of their perceptions of family.

"They're always extended family, whether they're blood or not blood, we call them family. So, my kids have been greatly influenced by a group of blood relatives and non-blood relatives that they've seen their whole life, that have supported them in every aspect, come to all of their performances." (Parent #7)

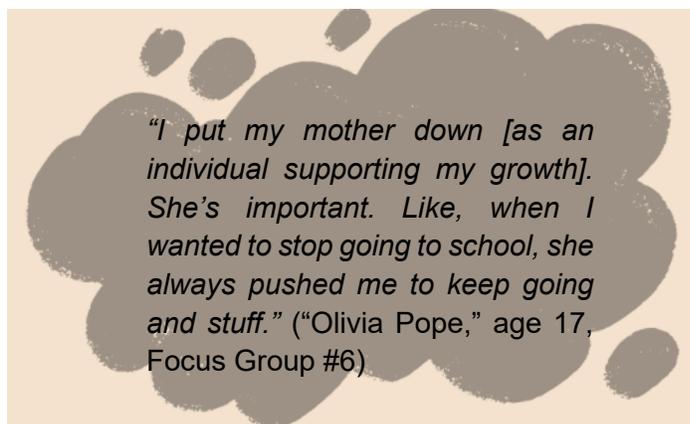
"We mainly are closer with, I guess, my friends and their kids. So those are like, kind of like her cousins." (Parent #11)

When talking about their family members in focus groups, the girls discussed their mothers, fathers, guardians, brothers, and sisters as immediate family members that are important to them. Additionally, these girls often discussed how multiple members of their immediate or extended families provide support and feedback on their actions and activities. The girls indicated the family members they identified are supportive, encouraging, and offer mentorship and advising, especially during difficult moments. They also actively build relationships, offer emotional support, nurturing, resources, and build their confidence.

"So, my foster mom likes me. Because she's like helpful, we got out for ice cream every Friday. If there's like something bad happening, we go to Aldi and get it from ice cream places. But, she also helps me because like when I want some chips or something, she's like no and then like I'm okay. And then I'm being good and I end up getting chips cause I was being good. And she also helps me because she is really nice. And she helps me because she understands my feelings and stuff." ("Lattifa," age 13, Focus Group #2)*

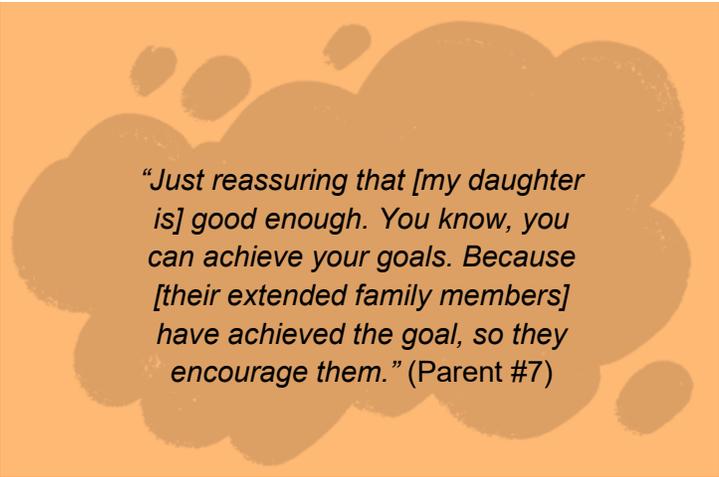
"Yeah, so I put siblings, friends, mother [as individuals who are helpful for my growth]... So, first off, my siblings because I'm with them 24/7 and when I have some problems or anything going on, I mostly go to them and they give me feedback. Me, I don't really have a lot of friends, but the friends that I do have, they are my life. So, they help me. My mama, she's like my best friend. I tell her everything. She tells me everything. Whenever I have something going on, the first person I go to is her. She gives me feedback, we talk about it and it makes me feel better." ("A.W.," age 15, Focus Group #3)

Figure 43 depicts respondents' descriptions of their relationships with their parent(s)/ guardian(s) from their survey responses. Most of the girls have a positive relationship with those people. Almost a third of respondents (31.6%) described their relationship as "excellent" and over half of respondents (54.0%) described it as "good." The remaining 14.4% of respondents described it as "alright, but could be better." None of the respondents described their relationship with their guardian(s) as "Bad."



The mothers of Black girls described how their daughters received support from family members, often involving many relationships for their daughters. They stated that mothers, fathers, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and guardians are all important individuals in the lives of their daughters. In their interview responses, the mothers discussed how the relationships were positive between their daughters and other family members, similar to the

survey data from the girls and described during their focus groups. The mothers indicated these family members provide a wide range of support to their daughters, including nurturing, emotional support, encouragement, and mentorship. Many mothers indicated their daughters had close relationships with grandparents and other extended family members. Often, interactions between their daughters and extended family members are highly frequent, including some instances of daily interactions.



“Just reassuring that [my daughter is] good enough. You know, you can achieve your goals. Because [their extended family members] have achieved the goal, so they encourage them.” (Parent #7)

“Her grandmother, even though she’s elderly, always pushes her in the right direction, and supports her.” (Parent #1)

“I would say her grandmother is probably her -- literally, her number one fan. She’s her biggest supporter ever. Her grandmother is always there every step of the way. So I would say, her grandmother.” (Parent #14)

These family members also help cultivate their interests, career development, and in-school and extracurricular opportunities. The mothers also indicated many of these family members show up for their daughters’ daily activities and special events, which improved their relationships. Parents said that this support can often help families through adverse life circumstances.

“And she’s got a lot of aunts and uncles. You know, we’re kind of a big family, and they’re relatively supportive if she has events, if she’s got games, they all come out. Maybe not all at once, but they all come out and support her, you know, in their own ways. They make little signs and, you know, just always there to cheer her on.” (Parent #1)

“They are wonderful grandparents. Not only that, she [the Black girl] has been blessed to have been raised around my grandmother... My mom would pick her up from school for me for years, until I started, you know, working from home. She talks to my mom every single day, and my dad. So, yeah, they are a huge presence in my daughter’s life.” (Parent #4)

“...older nieces, you know, um, and so they, you know, whenever my, uh, daughter is in something, if she’s in a play or something like that, you know, they’re already, you know, supportive of her, you know, reaching out to her, um, you know, congratulating her.” (Parent #9)

“My in-laws, um, or her grandmother and grandfather are always encouraging, they show up for all of her activities, I mean whatever they may be, whether she’s winning an award or I mean receiving an award at school, or, you know, um, anything that she’s doing, they



are there front and center, um, encouraging her, and congratulating her. Um, so yeah, they are - they are very supportive.” (Parent #9)

Mothers also discussed the support they received from family members that improved the circumstances of their daughters. They said this support included providing transportation as shown in previous quotes, and financial and care resources.

“Yes, without her and the sacrifices that she had made previously, like, we wouldn’t even be able to be here the way that we are set up the way we are today.” (Parent #10)

“My mom, their grandmother lays the foundation of where they are now and where I am, just giving the extra assistance for me to have the mental ability to even have them in the space that they’re in now. So, I would say their grandmother is the foundation. We owe it all to her, just for her assistance in so many areas of life.” (Parent #13)

One parent identified how mentorship can take the form of modelling behavior and ways of living to achieve life goals. This provides helpful examples for the girls for how to live their lives and achieve their goals.

“They’re hard workers. So she does see that a lot, her aunts work very hard for everything.” (Parent #12)

The emerging adult women expressed similar views on the importance of their family members to the mothers of girls who participated. Their perspective was primarily based on remembering their own childhoods and how that has continued into young adulthood. They discussed how family members were inspiring, supportive, and encouraging.

“My friends, they were very helpful in just keeping me going during, like, my high school experience, and like my family as well. Like my mom -- yeah. I just feel like there was a lot that happened during high school that kind of made it a little difficult during -- I don’t know if I can or will be able to say it, but yeah, I just think it was a little difficult. I went through a difficult time of loss...Like, I love my mom, so she’s just supported me through everything. It hasn’t been easy for her because she has -- like, it’s five of us.” (Emerging Adult Woman #21)

“And then, yeah, I’d say my neighborhood is like, majority Black and Hispanic, but Black ranges like, from Jamaican Black people or African American Black people. And then, you know, is broken up in like, different prices or incomes, too. There are some Black people that like, live with their -- like, kids that would live with their parents or their grandma because their parents couldn’t afford to keep them. I think for most cases, the households are funded by the grandparents. And that leaves like, a wide opportunity for, you know, young people to live with their parents and then be away for work most of the time, while the young people kind of run the show.” (Emerging Adult Woman #5)

In order to examine the stability of respondents’ housing situations, participants reported how frequently they have moved homes. A large share of respondents (36.8%) indicated that they

rarely move. Almost a quarter of respondents (24.4%) have lived in the same house all their life, while another quarter (24.0%) indicated they only moved once over a 4-5 year time span. This may indicate these respondents have had relatively stable housing. However, the remaining 14.8% of respondents move once every 2-3 years, implying less stable circumstances (Figure 44).

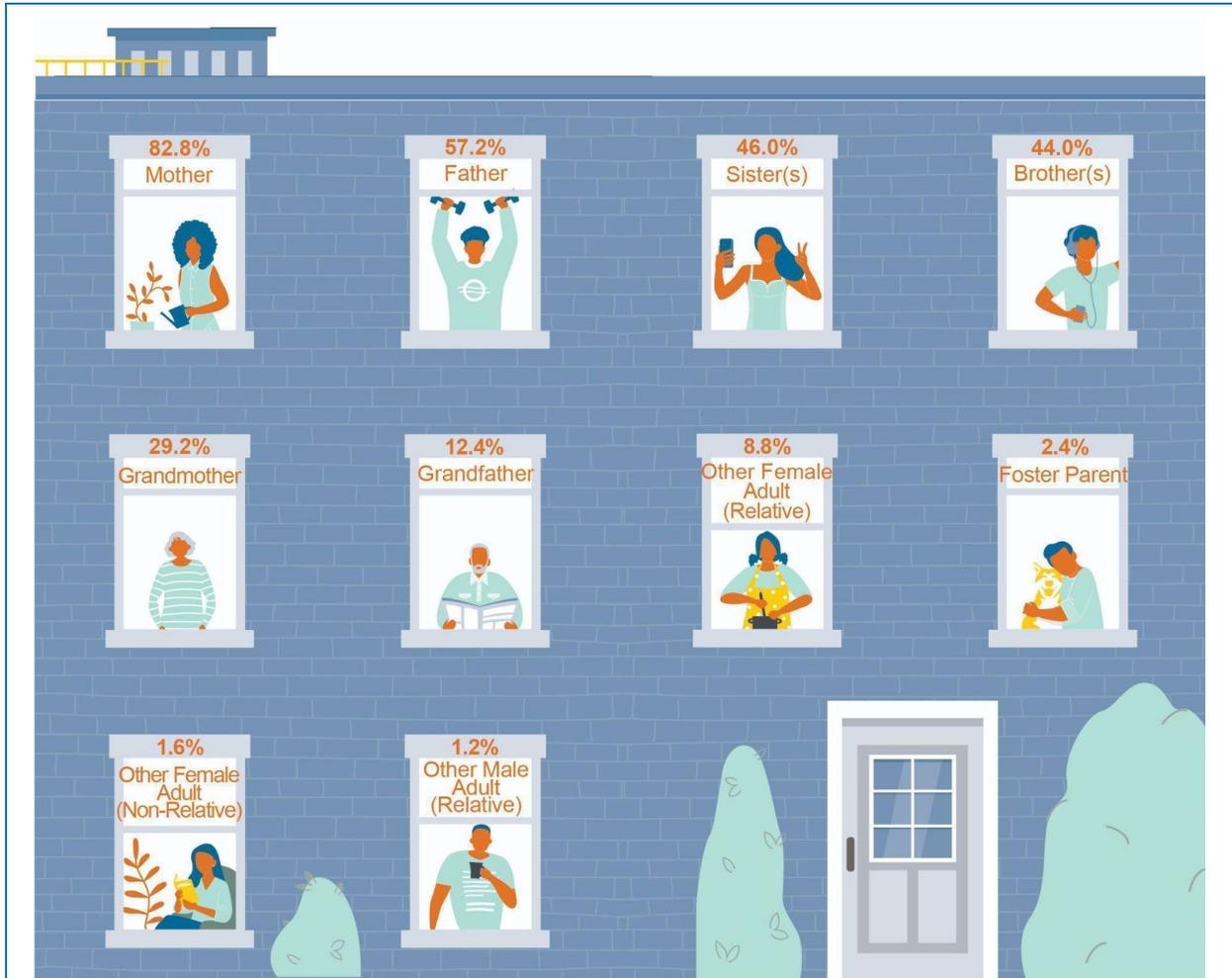
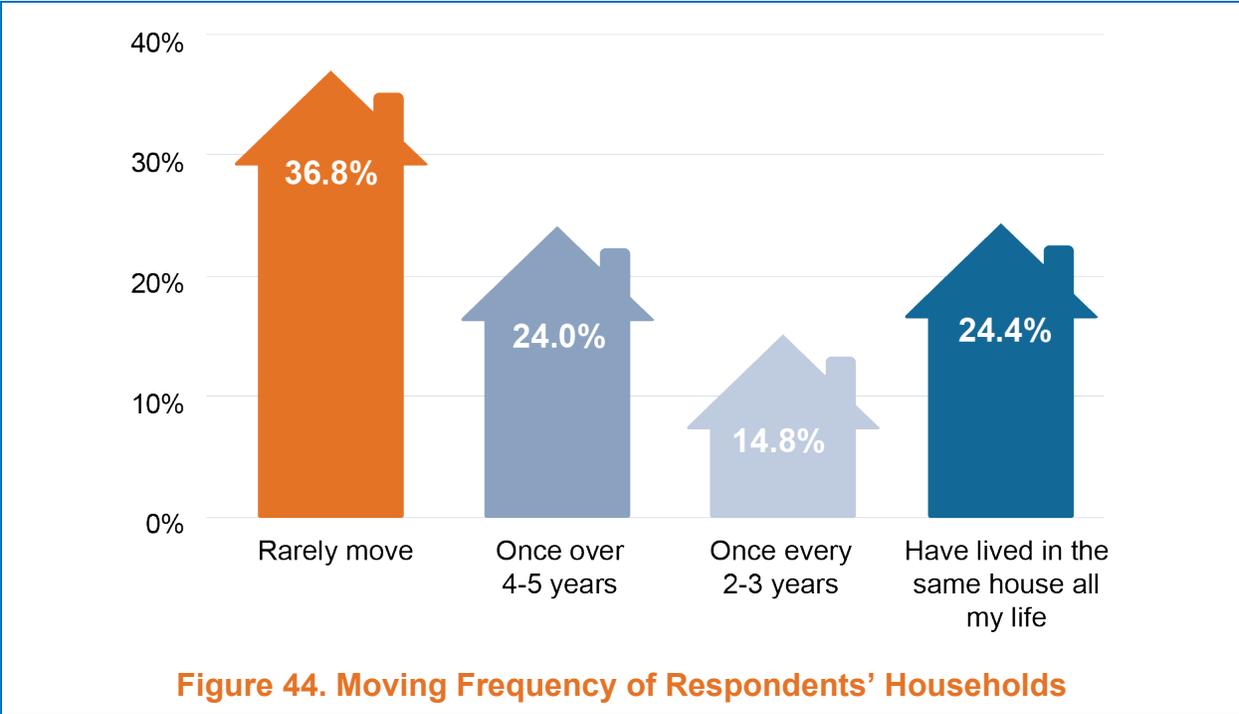
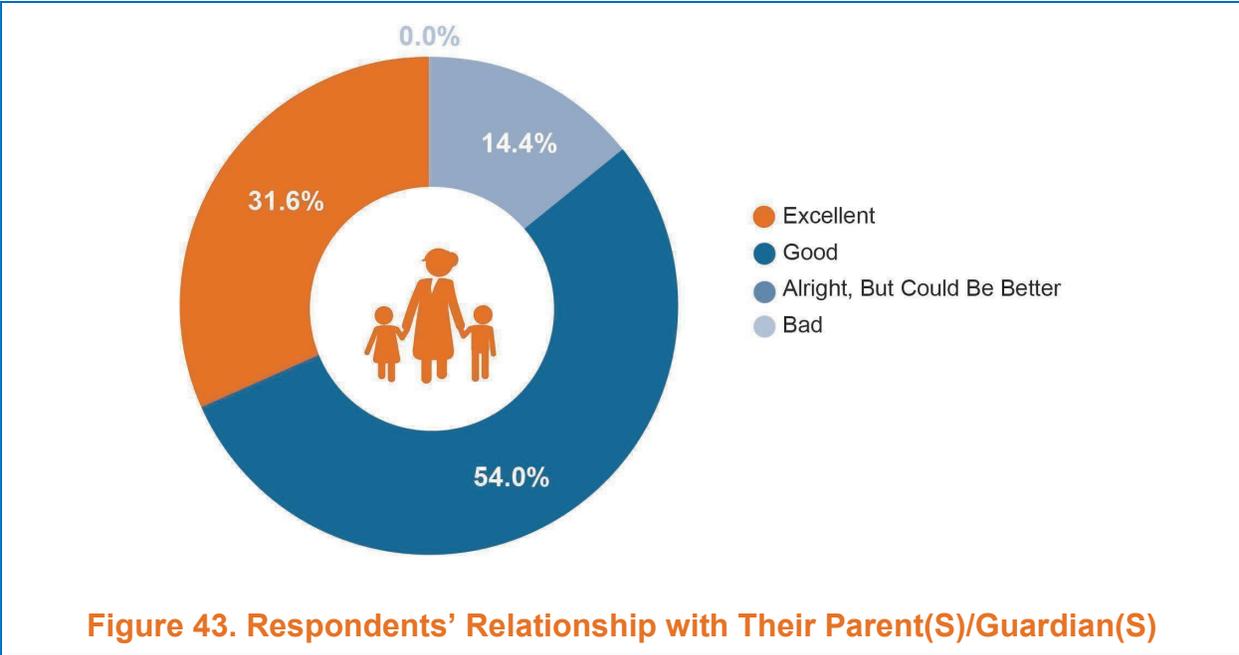
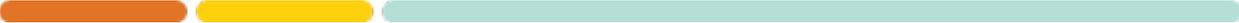


Figure 42. Household Composition of Participants





School & Learning

“And then specifically at school, yes, it has been a couple of teachers, a few teachers who I've seen just kind of take the extra step when they see you, maybe an area of lack, they try to just lift the child up, even if it's something that they didn't get and they probably may not get anytime soon, just the encouragement that is given and like, letting them know that they're not a failure just because they don't understand something, I think means a lot.” (Parent #10)

Academic Support

Through focus groups, interviews, and a survey, we learned how important schools are in the lives of young Black girls, and more specifically, how much teachers mean to them. For many girls, school is more than just a place to learn. In Virginia, students spend about 180 days in school each year, making it a central part of their lives. Schools become spaces of connection, care, and community, places where Black girls find guidance, encouragement, and support.

What stood out most in our findings was how often girls turn to their teachers for help. As shown in our survey (Figure 45), the majority of Black girls ages 12-17 said they go to their teachers or friends for academic support. While many also rely on family, such as mothers (50%), fathers (44.4%), and siblings (36.8%), teachers play a particularly important role in helping students grow and feel seen.

When girls talked about their experiences, they often described teachers who went beyond the basics of teaching. Some said their teachers felt like family, people they could talk to about school, sports, and life. Teachers were described as mentors, coaches, and even parent figures who made them feel safe, supported, and capable.

“I also wanted to say that my teachers and my coach are, like, some of the -- I consider, like, a big part of my life or, like, one of them is like a father figure to me because he helped me the most. And he was my teacher and my coach, both, and so I've seen him a lot, and -- yeah.” (Mimi,” age 13, Focus Group #5)

Emerging adult women who reflected on their school years echoed these experiences. Many said that the relationships formed with teachers had a lasting impact on their confidence and sense of self. One woman shared:

“Yes, so I've had so many teachers throughout school just always -- like, it's like they saw me. It's like they understood me, and they understood why I was there and why I was trying so hard. And it really -- you know, it really just kind of made me want to continue to just grind and focus on school even more because they saw me. But I can't say that it was the same for everyone else.” (Emerging Adult Woman #20)

Parents also saw the difference teachers made. They shared stories of who challenged their daughters to aim higher, supported them through tough times, and stayed in touch even after their daughters moved on. Some parents emphasized how teachers helped keep their daughters safe



and engaged after school hours, creating a sense of structure and care when parents were at work.

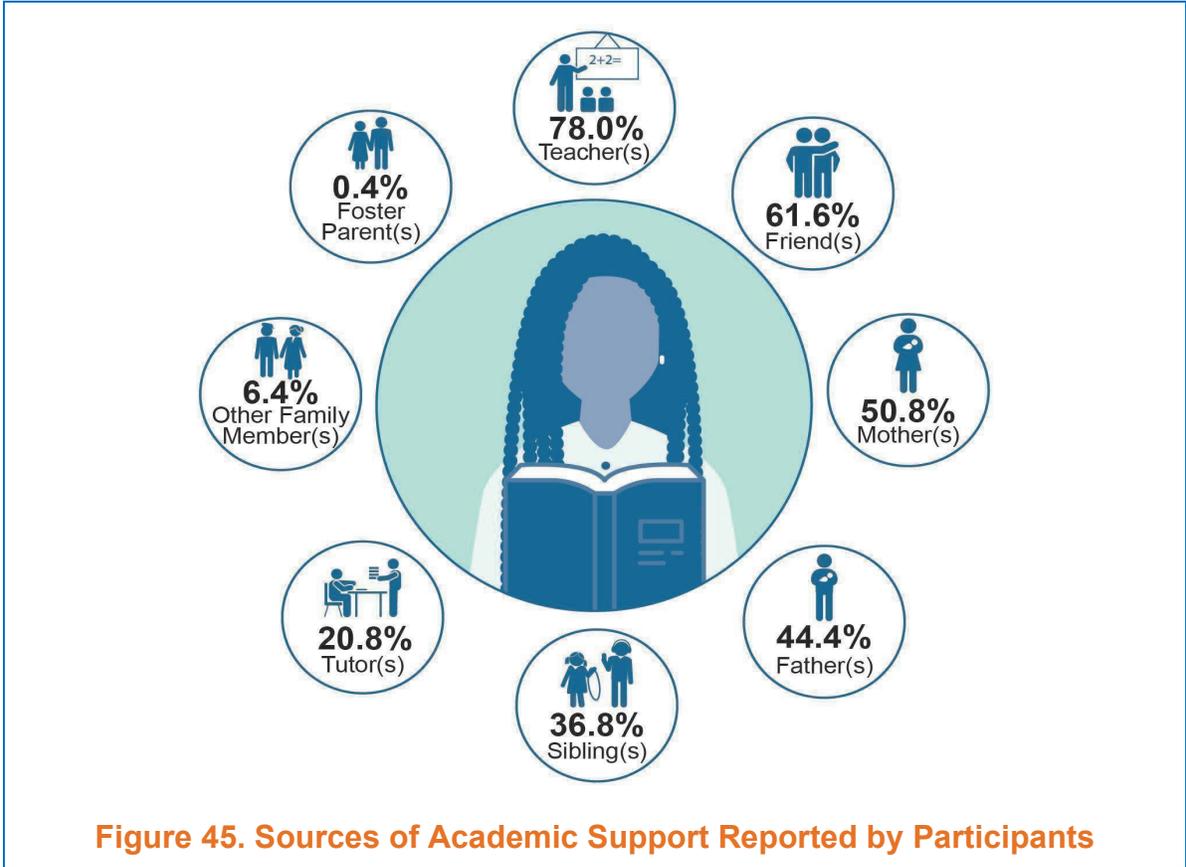
Together, these voices show that for young Black girls, teachers are more than just educators. They are mentors, advocates, and everyday sources of strength, helping them navigate not just academics, but the challenges and opportunities that come with growing up.

Extracurricular Activities

Survey results revealed that most girls are actively involved in extracurricular activities that expand their skills and networks. Over half (55.6%) participate in the arts, while nearly half (47.6%) are engaged in academic clubs, and 46.8% in sports (Figure 46). Others are involved in cultural organizations (32.4%) and community groups (26%). The findings closely align with participants' shared insights from focus groups.

“For band [in school], we do a lot of stuff that pushes me out of my shell. We go to competitions, we march, do concerts, which pushes me out of my shell because usually I wouldn’t do stuff like that or I’m not comfortable doing stuff like that, but when I’m doing it with people around me, like not by myself, it makes me comfortable. I also meet new people through competitions and games and stuff. Which helps me build relationships with people who do stuff I like.” (“June,” age 17, Focus Group #1)

These programs help build resilience, discipline, and confidence, skills that extend beyond recreation into academic and personal success. Investing in partnerships that expand access to creative, athletic, and leadership opportunities can deepen community impact and strengthen the foundation of support for Black girls across Richmond.



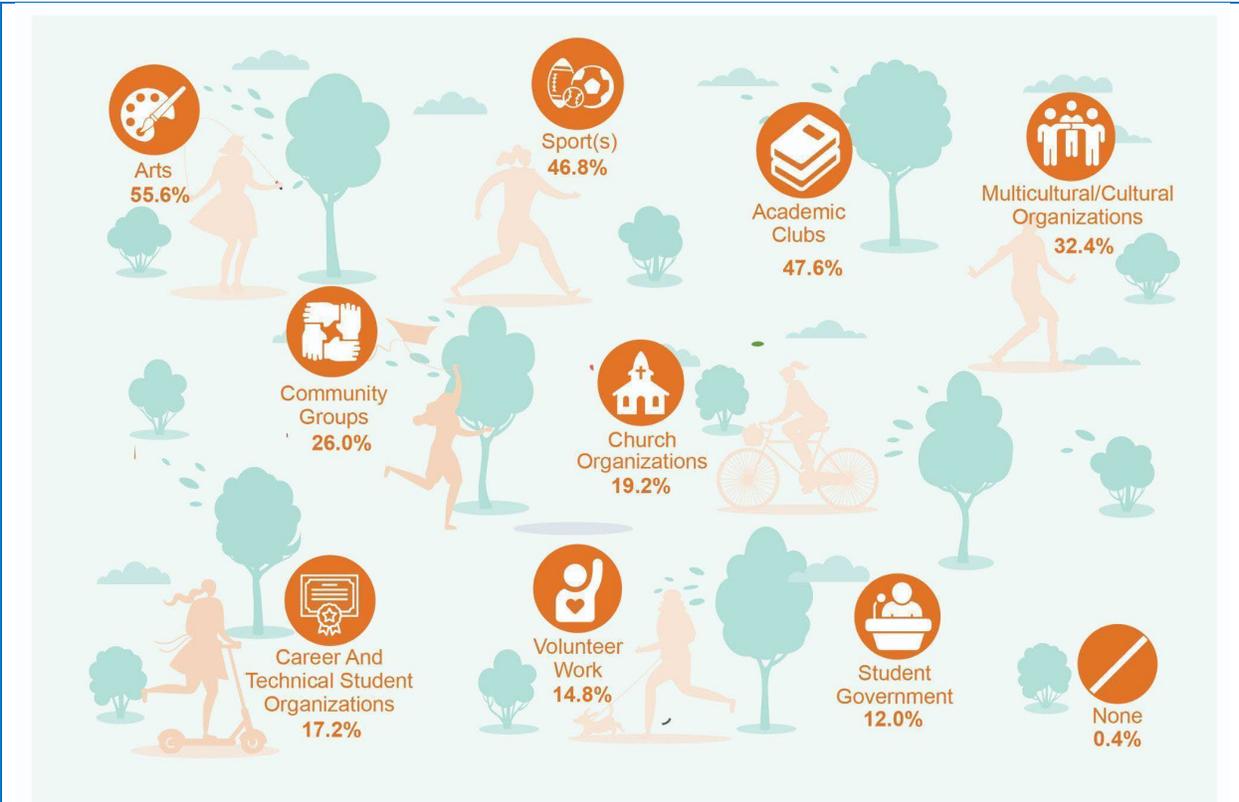
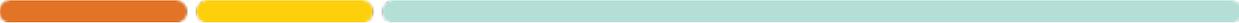


Figure 46. Participants' Involvement in Extracurricular Activities





Community

Another girl stated, “Friends, not like all the people in the neighborhood that are my friends. But those [who are my friends], they come and talk to me, ask me how I feel, how is my day, and stuff like that.” (“Aniyah,” age 14, Focus Group #2)

Community Perceptions and Wellbeing

A key part of the asset-based process emphasizes the assets that individuals and the community already hold. Our findings indicate that Black girls gain friends, participate in extracurricular activities, receive support, and develop a range of skills. Through focus groups and surveys, we learned that a strong sense of safety and belonging plays a vital role in the mental and emotional well-being of the girls it serves. Feeling safe in their neighborhoods helps young people connect with others, form friendships, and participate fully in their communities.

Most participants described their communities as safe places where they could be themselves and enjoy outdoor activities. More than four out of five girls (85.2%) said it is safe to go out and exercise in their community, and 84.8% said they generally feel safe where they live (Figure 47). Likewise, 80.4% reported feeling less fearful overall. Even in an era when many children spend more time indoors and online, 42% of girls said they regularly play outside, a sign that their neighborhoods provide a sense of security and freedom.

Safety also extends beyond physical security. Nearly all respondents (97.6%) said others in their community accept their family's customs and traditions, and 85.6% reported having supportive friends outside of school (Figure 48). The acceptance and social connection help the girls feel valued for who they are, reinforcing their confidence and sense of identity.

The findings highlight the importance of community belonging as a protective factor in young girls' well-being. Programs that strengthen neighborhood ties, celebrate cultural diversity, and provide safe community spaces can build on these existing strengths. By continuing to support environments where girls feel both secure and accepted, we can help sustain the emotional and social foundations that allow them to thrive.

Friendship

Through the research, we learned that strong friendships are central to how young girls experience belonging and support in their daily lives. When girls have trusted peers, they are better able to navigate challenges, express themselves, and feel seen in their communities.

Most participants reported having at least a couple of close friends they could rely on. Nearly three-quarters of girls (74%) reported having two or three close friends, suggesting that social connection is a key strength among this group (Figure 49). Only a minimal number reported



having no close friends at all, reinforcing the importance of friendship networks in their emotional well-being. These friendships are often rooted in shared environments and experiences. The majority (76.8%) said they met their close friends at school, while about one in five (21.6%) connected online. This reflects how school remains an essential space for building supportive relationships, even in an increasingly digital age.

Importantly, friendship networks also show diversity and openness. More than half of respondents (56.8%) said their close friends were of a different gender, and 43.2% reported having close friends of a different race or ethnicity (Figure 50). About 30% said their close friends practiced a different religion, showing that many girls are already engaging across lines of difference and valuing diversity. The findings highlight the resilience and inclusivity present within girls' social networks. Programs that encourage peer connection, celebrate diversity, and create inclusive spaces can build on these natural strengths. By nurturing environments where friendships can form across backgrounds and identities, we can continue to support the confidence, empathy, and social belonging that help young Black girls thrive.

Community Resources and Activities

We learned that access to community spaces and local programs play a crucial role in helping girls feel connected, supported, and confident in who they are. These resources not only offer opportunities for recreation and learning but also foster relationships, self-expression, and pride in cultural identity.

Spaces that Promote Connection

When asked which community locations were most helpful to them, girls overwhelmingly identified parks (64%), bus stations (52%), and public libraries (52%) as key places they rely on (Figure 51). Parks in particular serve as safe, welcoming spaces where girls gather with friends, exercise, and enjoy the outdoors. More than 60% reported visiting a park at least once a week in the past month (Figure 52). Other facilities, including churches (46%), recreation centers, and gyms, also contribute to girls' wellbeing. One participant described how regular exercise helps her manage her school-related stress:

"I go to the gym a lot, to relieve stress. It was very helpful when I was in school, because, you know, like, towards the end, you get all these studies, and there's tests coming up. And so, that was a little stressful, so the gym helped clear it up." ("Mimi," age 13, Focus Group #5)

These findings highlight that physical spaces for regeneration and gathering are not simple amenities; they are essential support for girls' mental health and connection.

Programs that Build Confidence and Identity



The girls also described how youth organizations and community programs have helped them grow and feel empowered. Across focus groups, participants named programs such as Girls For A Change, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, REAL Girls, Peter Paul, Girl Scouts, Richmond Ballet, and Teen Center as especially meaningful.

“I chose Girls For A Change [as the helpful place] because it’s a girl action team, and they allow us to express ourselves and do a lot of cool things.” (“Blossom,” age 16, Focus Group #1)

These organizations help girls build friendships, discover their interests, and gain confidence in their identities. Agencies that prioritize the development of Black girls, in particular, provide safe environments where they can thrive and feel seen. Church programs also play a significant role. As one girl explained,

I chose the youth life program [as the helpful program]. That was the very first program I was in when I moved to Richmond. It was like a church program, and it basically helped you with school work and stuff to help you stay on track.” (“Blossom,” age 16, Focus Group #1)

The experiences show that youth-centered, identity-affirming programs are key community assets that promote belonging and growth. Supporting and partnering with such programs strengthens the broader goal of creating equitable opportunities for all Black girls.

Community as a Source of Belonging and Opportunity

Together, these findings show that community resources —whether parks, libraries, churches, or youth programs —are not isolated supports but part of a broader ecosystem that helps Black girls feel safe, connected, and capable. We can build on these insights by continuing to invest in partnerships that sustain these local assets and by advocating for policies that ensure access to safe, supportive spaces for growth.

Besides individuals, participants frequently mentioned valuable resources such as institutions, programs and facilities that are available to them in the City of Richmond. These include agencies, churches, clubs, facilities, programs, and sports.

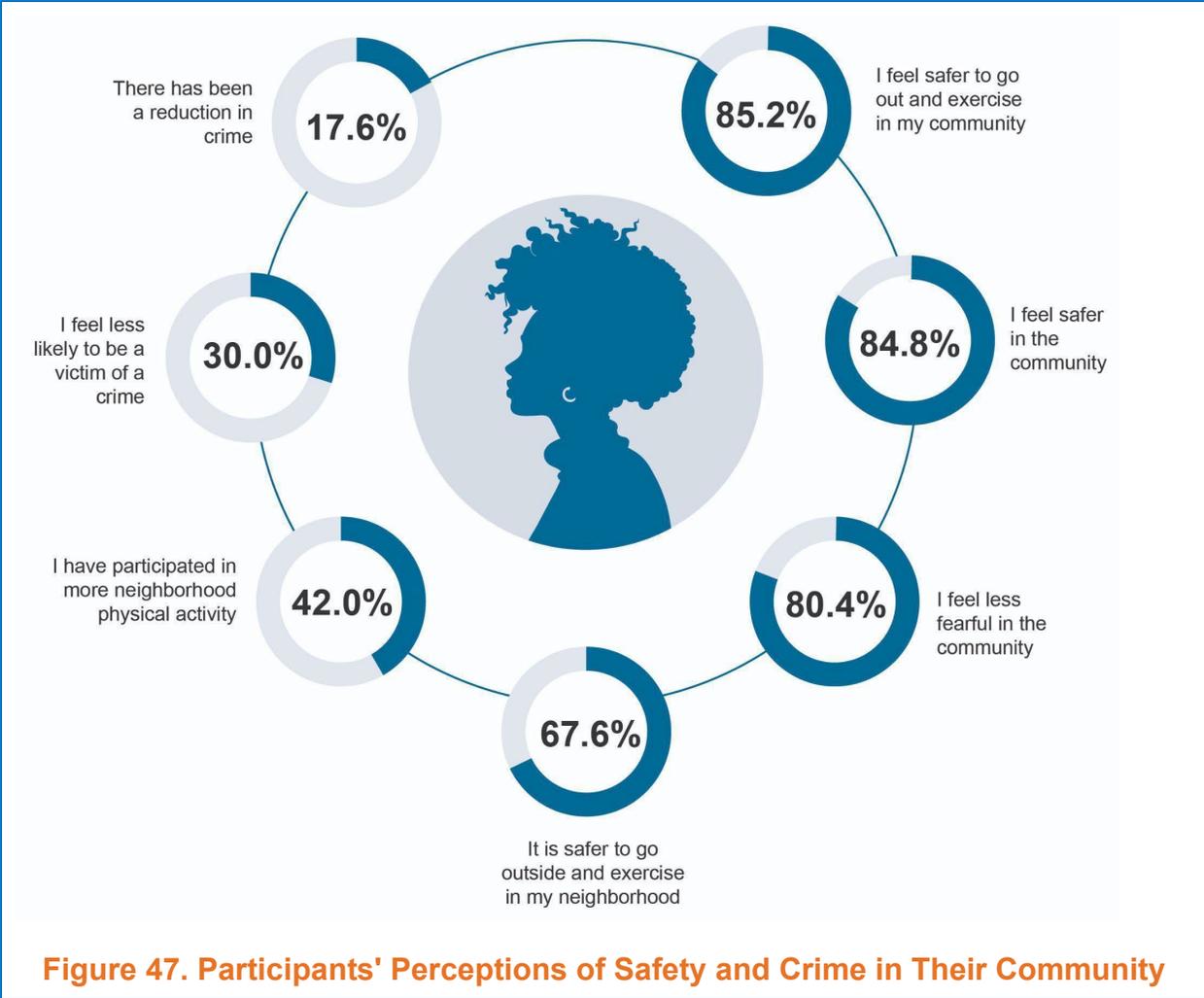
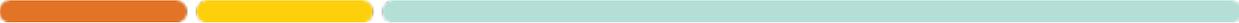
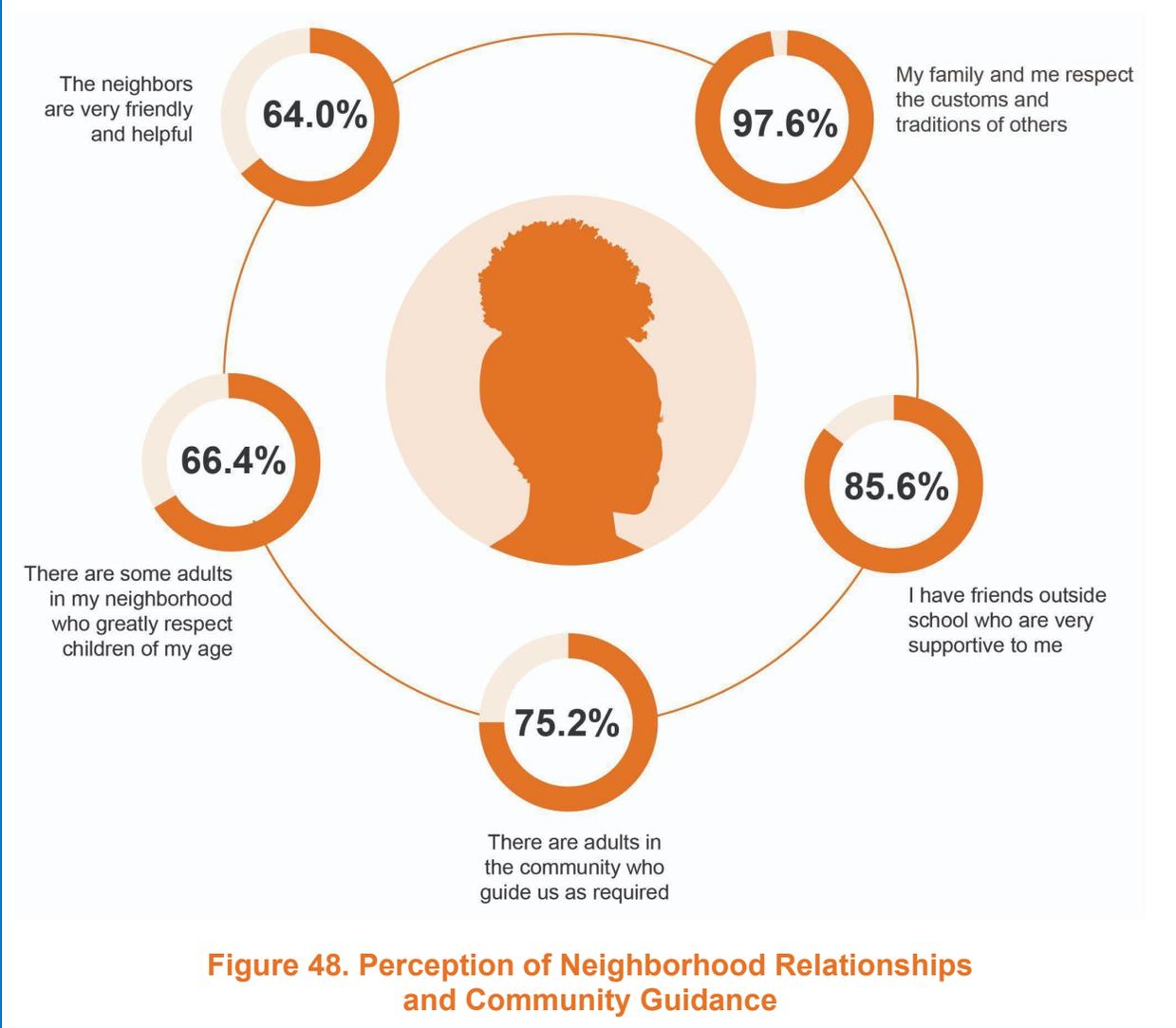
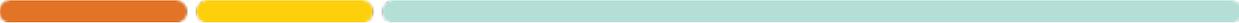
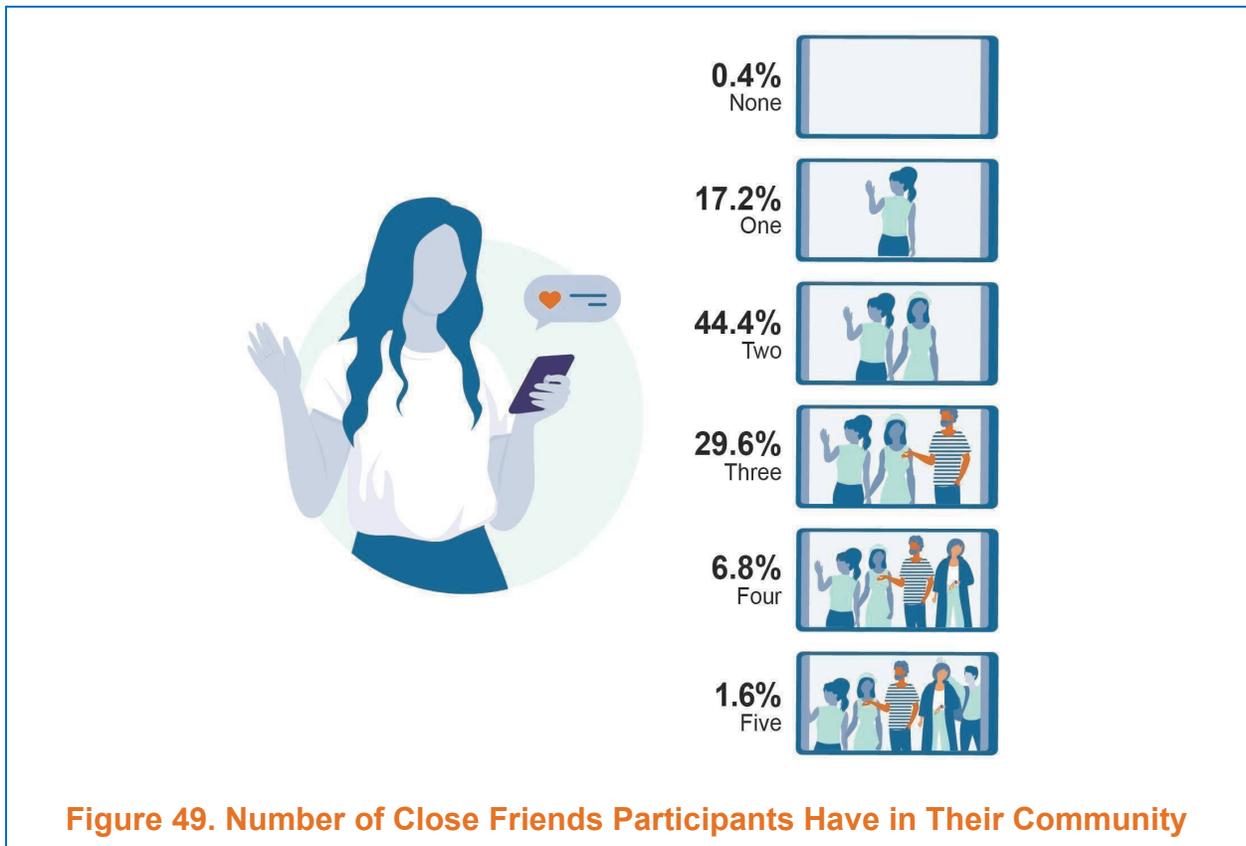


Figure 47. Participants' Perceptions of Safety and Crime in Their Community







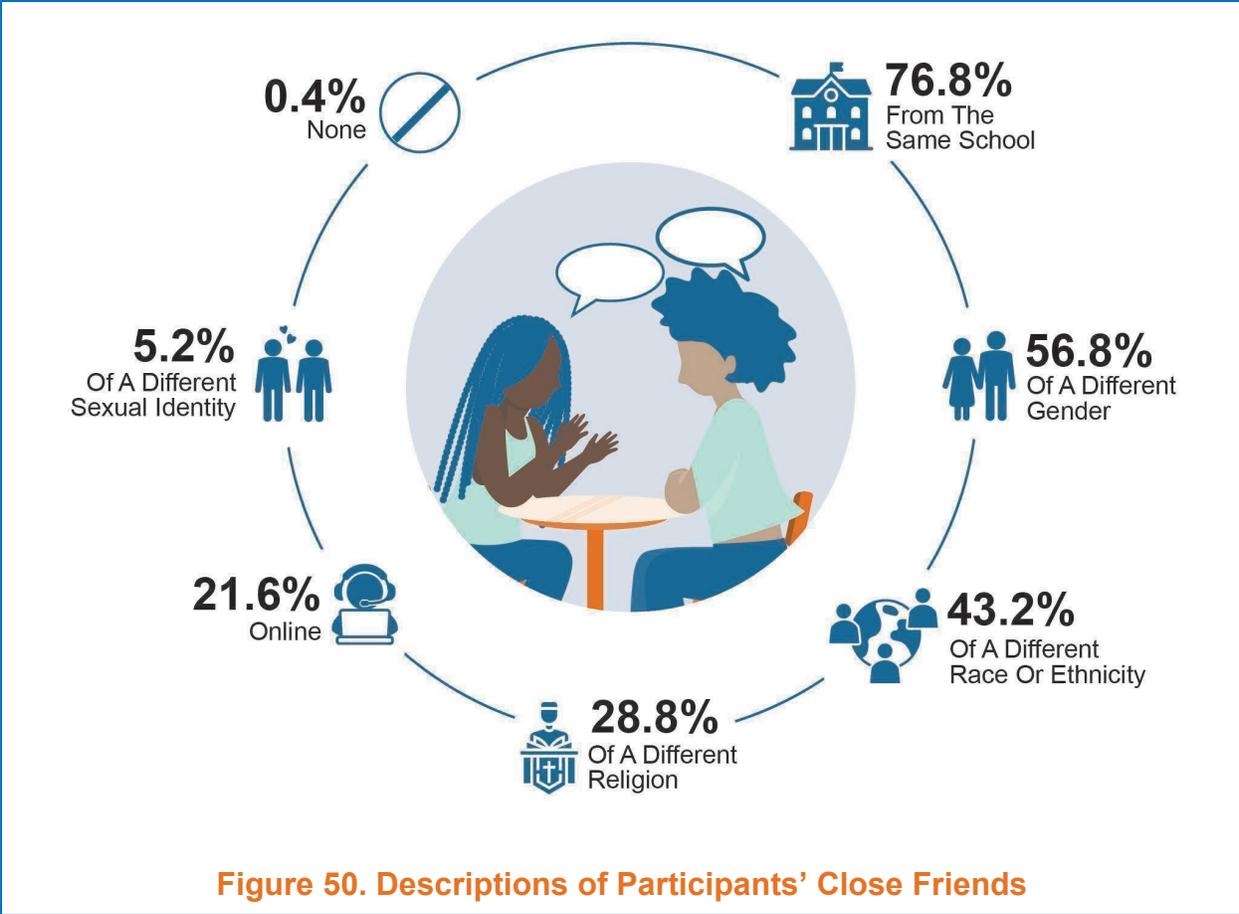
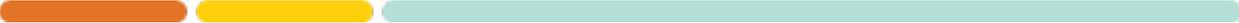
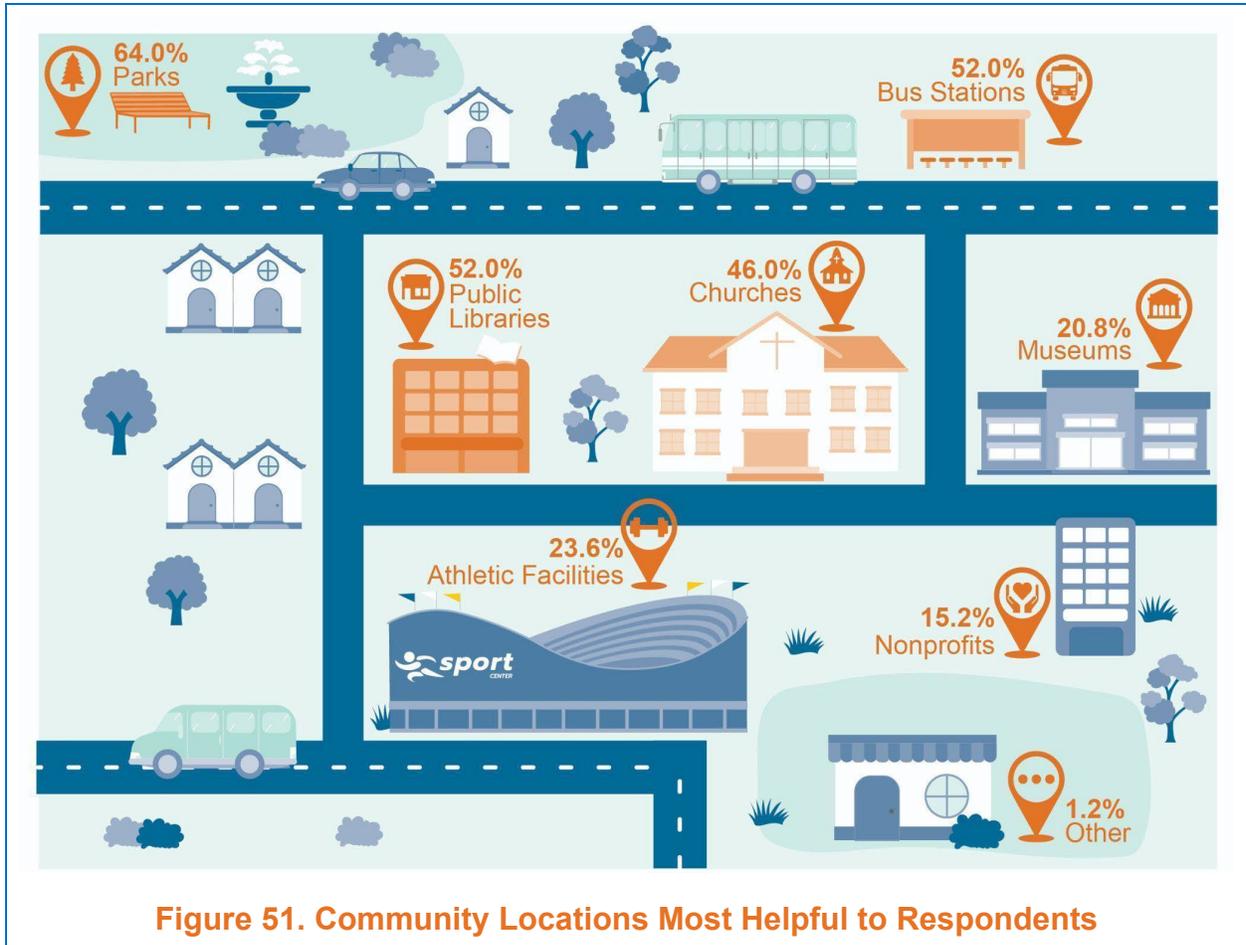


Figure 50. Descriptions of Participants' Close Friends





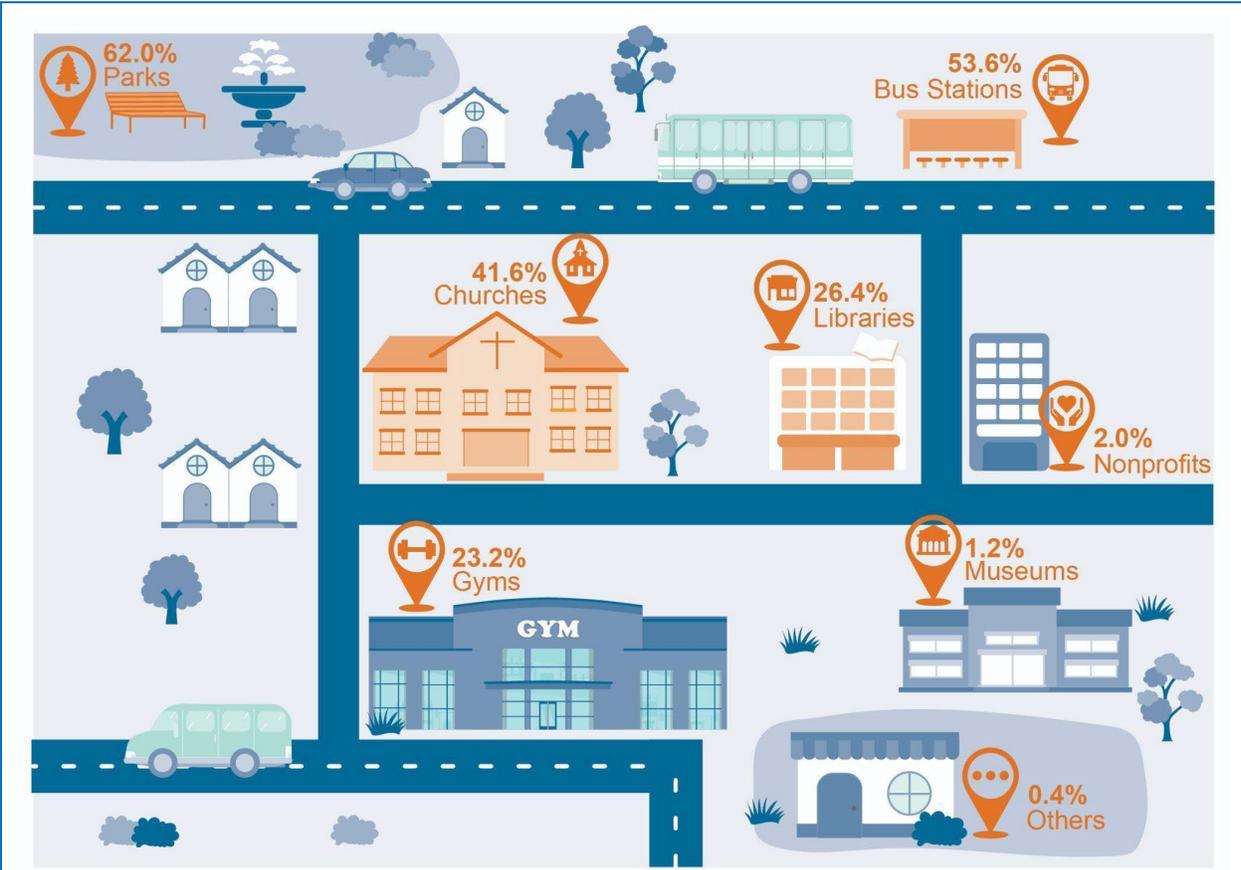


Figure 52. Participants' Visits to Supportive Community Spaces during the Past Month





Future Outlook from Participants

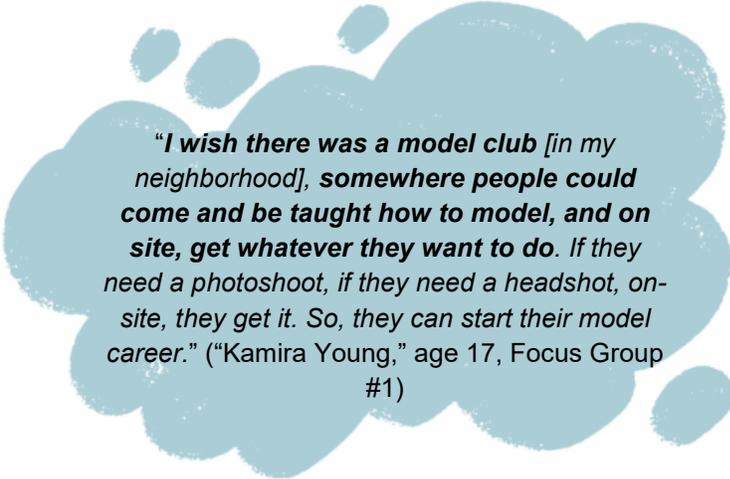
“I needed more of a mentorship and someone to talk to, and then connections into the workplace. Like, people who know things, like, that I’m passionate [about]. So, if I’m interested in healthcare, I can talk to this person. If I’m interested in law, I can talk to this person. Like people who are deeply involved in their jobs.” (Emerging Adult Woman #2)

Provide more programs for developing personal interests and skills

Participants, including girls, emerging adult women, and parents, expressed their future outlook and provided suggestions to better support Black girls in the City of Richmond. One of the key suggestions highlighted by participants is to offer more programs or activities to further develop Black girls’ interests and skills. For example, one of the girl participants mentioned that she wishes to have a poem discussion group in their neighborhood to share perspectives, and the other girl would like to have a model club where they learn how to become a model. See the quotes below:

“Poem discussions. Like - I wish in my neighborhood - I wish it was like a poem class you go up and read your poem. I think that it’s an actual thing, but I don’t think it’s in my neighborhood. I want it in my neighborhood because it will let you hear other people’s opinions and voices through rhythm. And an earth cleaning group because I hate when people throw trash on the ground outside.” (“Blossom,” age 16, Focus Group #1)

Support for adult transition, college readiness, and career development

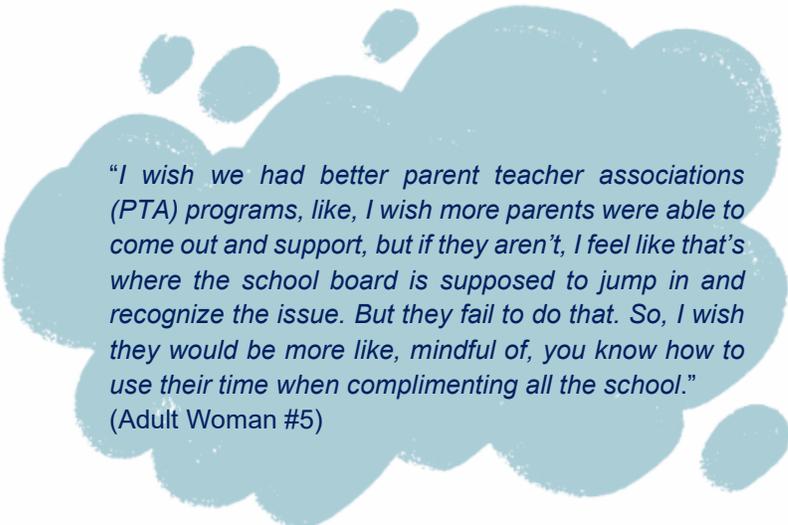


“I wish there was a model club [in my neighborhood], somewhere people could come and be taught how to model, and on site, get whatever they want to do. If they need a photoshoot, if they need a headshot, on-site, they get it. So, they can start their model career.” (“Kamira Young,” age 17, Focus Group #1)

Another key suggestion from the participants, particularly from parents and emerging adult women, is to have more programs or opportunities to help these girls to prepare for adult transition, college, and/or future career. These include increasing access to more programs that teach these girls technology skills, how to file their taxes, how to find a job, and other important skills, and offering mentorships for these girls to support their professional growth. Below is one selected quote

about the adult transition support. Another quote at the beginning of the section indicates the desire for mentorship from these girls,

“A better way of transitioning from high school to college, but I don’t necessarily just mean school. **Like transitioning from being that adolescent to being forced into the world of legal adult, learning how to file your taxes, learning how to get a job, that sort of stuff could be very helpful.**” (Emerging Adult Woman #1)



“I wish we had better parent teacher associations (PTA) programs, like, I wish more parents were able to come out and support, but if they aren’t, I feel like that’s where the school board is supposed to jump in and recognize the issue. But they fail to do that. So, I wish they would be more like, mindful of, you know how to use their time when complimenting all the school.”
(Adult Woman #5)

Build an inclusive and supportive school system

Participants emphasized the importance of having a diverse, inclusive, and supportive school environment for students, particularly for Black girls by highlighting how the school policies impact Black youth negatively in the history and suggesting increasing Black teachers’ representation, offering fresh and healthy food, providing sexual and reproductive health support, encouraging girls to learn both inside and outside of schools, and building better parent teacher relationships. See the quotes below,

“I would say that, um, **teacher representation is important** [for Black girls’ growth and development], **teacher relationships**, um, **validating the students’ voices**, for sure. **Giving**, um, **pantries in school, having fresh food pantries in schools, like with vegetables**, um, **clinic, sanitary napkins, tampons, uh, contraceptives, all of that. Things that actually help students understand how to coexist with their reality or the world**, and not try to shy it away in school, and things like that. I would say in school you could - or libraries you could use those as community hubs to implement that type of change. Oh, and **encourage students to read, um, outside of school, and get educated outside of school too.**” (Emerging Adult Woman #14)

Have more affordable and diverse transportation options

Participants expressed concerns about the transportation for girls to attend programs in different locations, especially at night time, and wish to have a better transportation system that provides more affordable and diverse options. See the quote from a parent below:

“**I just wish transportation was better.** Because there are some programs, there are some things you want to do, but they may be in the Far West End, or they may be in Short Pump, or they may be at night time, or something, where the bus -- or like, sometimes it



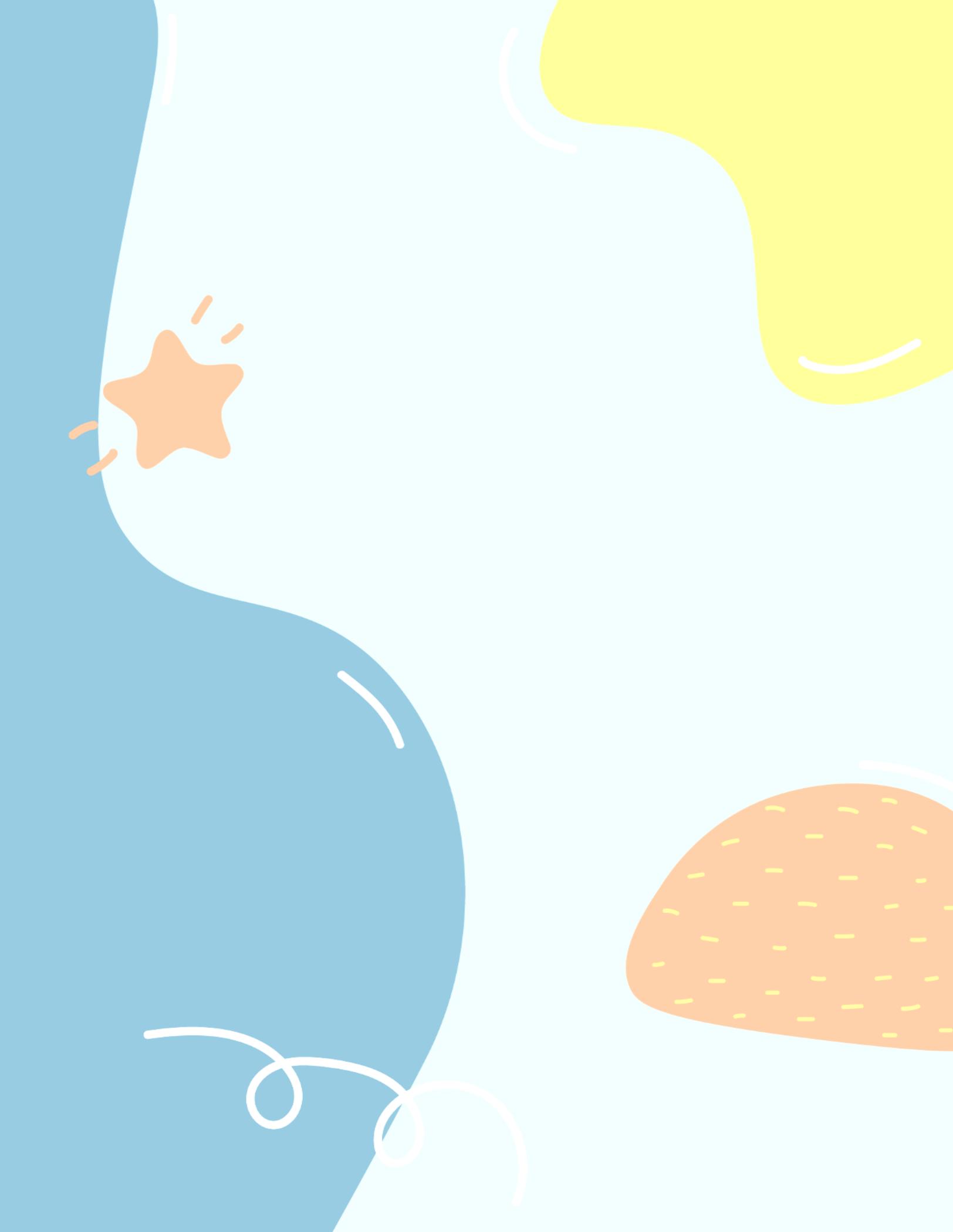
takes a minute to travel to things on the bus. I just wish we had more loads [modes] of transportation. Like, I know we got the bus. I know there's Uber, there's Lyft, but the Ubers and Lyft cost money. But I wish we had a better transportation system, like subway, busses, train, you know, just multiple ways. Or maybe, like, there are some organizations, like, Just See has a van, so they take -- but in some places, it be like -- or maybe I'm just saying, if you came to the program, if you got to catch your Uber or Lyft, we'll reimburse you, or we'll send your code for Uber so you can get there and back.” (Parent #7)

Expand programs' outreach for greater inclusion

Both parents and emerging adult women mentioned frequently that they were not aware of some of the existing programs that Black girls could attend and missed the support and services that could have made a difference in these girls' lives. They asked for more outreach and advertisements of these programs, especially among Black communities to increase their access to these opportunities, programs or services. One emerging adult woman mentioned the need for greater outreach of the programs in the City of Richmond in general; and one parent mentioned the need for more access to financial programs.

“I feel like they [programs in the City of Richmond] could reach out a little bit more, diversity wise, so that people -- or, Black girls can be like, oh, there's something out there for me, and they can feel included, because that is one of the things I've had problems with, growing up, not being included in most things, especially at my predominantly white elementary and middle school. But if they reached out more, recruited more opportunities for people like me, I feel like that would be good.” (Emerging Adult Woman #8)

“Just making the programs more accessible...I hear there are a lot of grants and different things where people could access funds to start things, you know, for young Black girls. So, I guess like, having an idea and how to put it into action. Because a lot of these programs -- people could just start out with the idea, and they talk or they start, and they might be serving -- I'm just saying, serving sandwiches out the back of their car. And then next thing, somebody opens a space where they have, like, a little cafeteria, you know.” (Parent #7)





WHAT DOES STRENGTH LOOK LIKE?

The findings of this study demonstrated many strengths and assets of Black girls and their communities that could be leveraged to better support their growth and development. This section provides an overview of the key strengths and assets (see Table 4) highlighted by the girls themselves, their parents/guardians, and Black emerging adult women in a viable community that could help these girls thrive.

Black Girls' Individual Strengths & Assets

Black girls reported having many positive strengths and assets (see Table 4), such as altruistic, caring, confident, courageous, empathetic, family oriented, flexible, goal-oriented, health-conscious, independent, nurturing, persevering, resilient, supportive, studious, sociable, respectful, tech-savvy, and many more. Both emerging adult women and parents/guardians shared very similar strengths and assets of Black girls in the City of Richmond. For example, when asked about Black girls' individual strengths and assets, an emerging adult woman highlighted Black girls being persevering, friendly, inspiring, and supportive (see the first quote below), and a parent mentioned that her Black girl being sociable, studious, and independent (see the second quote below),

"I say knowledge and perseverance [are the strengths of Black girls]. Cuz I've met plenty of Black girls. A lot of them are my friends and just colleagues over the years, like being able to put their nose to the grind, get what they want done, just being inspiring and imaginative and very sweet and loving, like a lot of them will... You can ask them for help, and they will help you to the best of their ability. They'll be there to help you with critiques, like with homework, just anything. That's what I saw a lot of, especially with my graduating class. There were the top ten, I believe, and the majority of them were Black girls." (Emerging Adult Woman #1)

"Yes, she's an honor roll student. She is taking high school math this year. And she usually hangs around other kids that -- How do I put this, they're like academics, but she's friends with everybody. Like, she's very popular and friends with everybody, but she kind of just has her own lane." (Parent #9)

Additionally, both emerging adult women and parents/guardians mentioned similar additional strengths that were not reported by Black girls, including being ambitious, cultural pride, honest, inspiring, motivated, patience, organized and having leadership skills.

Family Assets

Family serves as a significant role in the lives of Black young girls who reside in urban communities like the City of Richmond. The majority of girls mentioned family members were very supportive and helpful for their growth and development through building positive relationships,



providing advice, emotional support, and encouragement, offering mentorships, building their confidence, and/or providing resources. They reported receiving these support frequently from their mothers, fathers, guardians, brothers and sisters, and extended family members such as cousins, aunts and uncles. Similarly, emerging adult women and parents/guardians agreed that family members were very important for Black girls' growth and development, and in addition to mothers and fathers, both of them also mentioned grandparents played a significant role in the process. For example, some parents mentioned grandparents provided great assistance to Black girls' growth, including financial support to their daughters such as school supplies and program fees, and transportation support to agencies and facilities, as well as encouragement, and mentorship to help them have a greater understanding of what is needed to be successful in their life.

“My mom [is the one who has played a significant role in Black girls’ growth]. Their grandmother lays the foundation of where they are now and where I am, just giving the extra assistance for me to have the mental ability to even have them in the space that they’re in now. So, I would say their grandmother is the foundation. We owe it all to her, just for her assistance in so many areas of life.” (Parent #10)

“My mom would pick her up from school for me for years, until I started, you know, working from home. She talks to my mom every single day, and my dad. So, yeah, they are a huge presence in my daughter’s life.” (Parent #1)

School Assets

Within schools, girls, emerging adult women and parents all mentioned that teachers were among the most influential in their lives throughout adolescence into adulthood. Other supportive individuals mentioned by participants were coaches and counselors at schools. Girls reported that their teachers often filled the role of a family member and supported them by providing advice when they reached out, helping them build confidence, offering mentorship, and providing emotional support and encouragement along their growth. Similarly, emerging adult women shared similar perspectives regarding teachers and counselors at schools. In addition to the support that girls mentioned, emerging adult women reported that teachers and counselors at schools also inspired them, helped them build pride in their culture and identity, cultivate their interests, and sometimes provide transportation for them. Parents or guardians had similar perspectives about the positive roles of teachers and coaches such as helping girls' career development, confidence building, community engagement, mentorship and resource connections, etc.

Community Assets

Community has played a significant role in Black girls' growth, both historically and today. Historically, a wide network of organizations, churches, nonprofits, and businesses have empowered Black women and girls to navigate life. Today, Black churches continue to remain central to community stability and support. During times of hardship, many Black people have



found solace in the church. These churches have been known to offer financial, spiritual, and emotional support. The shared faith has been effective in building a sense of community, racial pride, and empowerment that positively contributes to the overall wellbeing of Black girls and women at large.⁸⁶ Further, many businesses, non-profits, and community agencies in the City of Richmond have been successful in building trust with these girls and supporting Black girls to thrive. In the same manner, libraries and museums in the City of Richmond have been influential in the lives of many Black girls. The libraries have provided a place for Black girls to study, connect with others, and participate in events. The Main Library in the City of Richmond is known for their many events that support the community, for example, girls had the opportunity to learn about the menstrual cycle and create their own menstrual packages to take home during Menstrual Hygiene Day.⁸⁷ The important role of community was further supported by the findings from this study in which Black girls, their parents/guardians, and emerging adult women listed various individuals, agencies, programs, facilities, and spaces that have been an important part of Black girls' growth and development.

As shown in the Table 4, the majority of participants explained how certain community assets have helped them or their daughters build confidence, build a bigger network or sisterhood amongst themselves, have access to resources like supplies, grants for programs, and housing necessities, and cultivate new interests to help them gain a better understanding of what kind of career and college paths they would like to pursue upon graduation. Many parents also explained how these community assets provided their daughters with access to transportation to programs that helped support them academically and professionally. Parents explained how these girls had the ability to thrive within these programs by finding new ways to engage with the community, build long-lasting mentorships, and gain new interests they weren't aware of prior to being involved in these programs. These strengths and assets were associated with community assets such as YMCA, REAL Girlz, Peter Paul, Girls For A Change, Just C, Y Street, Pine Camp, Partnership for the Future, Victoria's Kitchen, Richmond Urban Dance. Similarly, emerging adult women mentioned that the same community assets provided them with long-lasting friendships, allowed them to feel more confident in their culture and identity, and provided them with resources that sustained them all the way through college. Table 4 also indicates a wide range of resources that have been viable to the Black community in the City of Richmond, namely with young Black girls aiming to find ways to support their learning, growth, and development.

In addition to agencies and programs, participants also mentioned that boyfriends, coaches, neighbors, program directors or advisors, friends, and even pets played important roles in their lives by helping them build confidence, providing emotional support, offering mentorship, connecting them with resources, cultivating their interests, and supporting their career development. In particular, girls, emerging adult women, and parents or guardians all agreed on the positive influence of friends in these girls' growth and development.

⁸⁶ Mohamed, B., Cox, K., Diamant, J., & Gecewicz, C. (2021). *A brief overview of Black religious history in the U.S.* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/a-brief-overview-of-black-religious-history-in-the-u-s/>

⁸⁷ RVA Library. (2025, May 28). *Menstrual Hygiene Day: PEP rally.* <https://rvalibrary.libcal.com/event/13372714>

Table 4. An Overview of the Assets and Resources for Black Girls in a Viable Community

Strengths /Assets	Girls (12-17)	Emerging Adult Women (18-22)	Parents/Guardians
Individual strengths	Altruistic, Athletic, Caring, Confident, Courageous, Creative, Empathetic, Encouragement, Family Oriented, Flexible, Friendly, Goal-Oriented, Hardworking, Health-conscious, Independent, Inspiring, Motivated, Nurturing, Optimistic, Persevering, Resilient, Respectful, Sociable, Studious, Supportive, Tech-Savvy	Altruistic, Athletic, Caring, Confident, Courageous, Creative, Cultural Pride, Empathetic, Family Oriented, Flexible, Friendly, Goal-Oriented, Hardworking, Health-Conscious, Honest, Nurturing, Independent, Inspiring, Leadership, Motivated, Patience, Persevering, Racial Awareness, Resilient, Respectful, Sociable, Studious, Supportive, Tech-Savvy	Altruistic, Ambitious, Athletic, Caring, Confident, Courageous, Creative, Cultural Pride, Empathetic, Encouragement, Family Oriented, Flexible, Friendly, Goal-oriented, Hardworking, Health-conscious, Honest, Independent, Inspiring, Leadership, Motivated, Nurturing, Observant, Organized, Patience, Persevering, Racial Awareness, Resilient, Respectful, Sociable, Studious, Supportive, Tech-savvy
Family Assets	Advising, Build Relationships, Confidence Building, Emotional Support, Empathetic, Encouragement, Nurturing, Offer Mentorship, Provide Resources, Supportive	Advising, Build Network, Encouragement, Financial Support Offer Mentorship, Supportive	Build Relationships, Career Development, Confidence Building, Cultivate Interests, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Engage with community, Extracurricular opportunities, Financial Support, Inspiring, Nurturing, Offer Mentorship, Patience, Provide Resources, Provide Transportation, Supportive
	Supportive Individuals: Mothers, fathers, Guardians, Brothers, Sisters, Cousins, Aunts, Uncles	Supportive Individuals: Mothers, Fathers, Grandparents, Family Members, Extended family,	Supportive Individuals: Mothers, Fathers, Guardians, Brothers, Sisters, Grandparents, Cousins, Aunts,

Strengths /Assets	Girls (12-17)	Emerging Adult Women (18-22)	Parents/Guardians
School Assets	Advising, Confidence Building, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Offer Mentorship, Supportive	Advising, Build Relationships, Build Pride in Culture & Identity, Confidence Building, Cultivate Interests, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Inspiring, Provide Resources, Provide Transportation, Supportive	Career Development, Confidence Building, Engage with Community, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Inspiring, Offer Mentorship, Provide Resources
	Supportive Individuals: Teachers, Coaches	Supportive Individuals: Teachers, Counselors	Supportive Individuals: Teachers, Coaches
Community assets	Advising, Build Friendships, Build Relationships, Build Network, Build Pride in Culture & Identity, Career Development, Confidence Building, Cultivate Interests, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Engage with Community, Extracurricular Opportunities, Leadership Development, Nurturing, Offer Mentorship, Provide Resources, Supportive	Advising, Build Friendships, Build Relationships, Build Network, Build Pride in Culture & Identity, Career Development, Confidence Building, Cultivate Interests, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Engage with Community, Extracurricular Opportunities, Financial Literacy, Financial Support, Goal-Oriented, Inspiring, Nurturing, Offer Mentorship, Provide Resources, Provide Transportation, Racial Awareness, Specialty Program, Supportive	Advising, Build Friendships, Build Relationships, Build Pride in Culture & Identity, Career Development, Confidence Building, Cultivate Interests, Emotional Support, Encouragement, Engage with Community, Extracurricular Opportunities, Financial Literacy, Financial Support, Inspiring, Leadership Development, Nurturing, Offer Mentorship, Provide Resources, Provide Transportation, Racial Awareness, Supportive
	Supportive individuals: Boyfriends, Coaches, Friends, Pets	Supportive individuals: Neighbor, Friends	Supportive individuals: Advisors or program directors, coaches, friends, doctors

Strengths /Assets	Girls (12-17)	Emerging Adult Women (18-22)	Parents/Guardians
	<p>Supportive agencies/programs: Agencies: Boys and Girls Club, Girls For A Change (GFAC), Girls on the Run, Girl Scouts, Metro Business League (MBL), Peter Paul, Richmond Ballet, Richmond Community (SPARC), REAL Girlz, School of the Performing Arts in the Teen Center, Upperground, YMCA Clubs: Band, Black Mentorship Program, Modeling Facilities: Parks & Recreation, Theme Parks Programs: Early College Academy, Edible School Yards, Specialty Program, Summer works, Youth Academy Programs, Young Entrepreneurs, Youth Life Program Sports: Basketball, dance, football</p>	<p>Supportive agencies/programs: Agencies: ARC, Boys and Girls Club, Girls For A Change (GFAC), Girl Scouts, HandsOn Greater Richmond, Mayor's Youth Academy, REAL Girlz, Peter Paul, Richmond Ballet, Space Program (STEM), SOAR, YMCA Churches: Mentioned but not specified Clubs: Band/Orchestra, Debate Club, Language Club, Robotics Team Facilities: Art Gallery, Libraries, Jamestown, Monticello, Parks & Recreation Centers, Pine Camp, Williamsburg Museums: Children's Museum, Science Museum of Virginia Programs: Art 180, Budding Black Incubator Program, Camp Diva at GFAC, Early College Academy, Next Up, Tutoring, UP RVA Sports: Archery, dance, fencing, horseback riding, soccer, volleyball</p>	<p>Supportive agencies/programs: Agencies: American Heritage Girls, Boys and Girls Club, Community 50/50, Girls For A Change (GFAC), Girls on the Run, REAL Girlz, Peter Paul, YMCA Churches: Speaking Spirits, No Limit Global Clubs: Just C, Theater, Others Facilities: Parks & Recreation, Public Libraries, Pine Camp, Southside Community Center, Others Museums: Black History Museum and Cultural Center, Children's Museum, Science Museum of Virginia, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Programs: A Better Day Than Yesterday, Camp Diva at GFAC, ChildSavers, Communications Program, Game on Girl, Headstart Program, Next Step, Partnership for the Future, Richmond Urban Dance, Teen Summit, Victoria's Kitchen, Y Street Sports: Volleyball, wrestling, tennis, track, fencing, horseback riding, archery, softball</p>

Note: the words are in color based on their shared themes.

- **Assets in RED** relate to Emotional and Personal Support
- **Assets in PURPLE** relate with Academic & Career Development
- **Assets in BLUE** relate to Networking and Cultural Empowerment
- **Assets in GREEN** relate to Mentorship, Guidance, and Communal Support
- **Assets in ORANGE** relate to Skill Development and Personal Interest
- **Assets in PINK** relate to Personality Strengths
- **Assets in YELLOW** relate to Leadership-oriented Strengths
- **Assets in BLACK** relate to Intelligence
- **Assets in BROWN** relate to Extracurricular Strengths



WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

There are still many challenges and barriers that hinder these girls' development and prevent them from thriving. Some of the major obstacles include deep-rooted discrimination and social stigma against the Black community, limited access to resources and opportunities for personal growth, insufficient mental health support, and the pressures of social media and the internet.

Deep-Rooted Discrimination and Social Stigma

The long history of racial discrimination and segregation has created systemic inequities that still persist today toward the Black population.⁸⁸ Participants frequently mentioned the ongoing effects of historical discrimination and social stigmas against Black people—particularly Black girls—and how environments such as schools have not always been welcoming. These conditions can foster biases and discriminatory behaviors toward Black girls. For example, one young woman described the environment as one of the obstacles as follows,

“Some obstacle I have observed is the environment not being ready for them. Cuz there’s always this stigma with Black girls about us being too loud or just angry all the time or having a lot of sass that people do not like, and the thing is, a lot of that’s not true. It’s just how you respond to us that makes the perception continue to be in this bad light, like we’re just normal people expressing ourselves. For you to say we have an attitude is to belittle that, even if we were having an attitude, that’s not an emotion that you should always constantly think that this is going to be an issue. Cuz we can talk rationally to anybody, but always having these extra pressures or these stigmas attached to it makes it even harder for us to actually express to people what’s upsetting, what’s not upsetting us. It’s just this big tight rope of teetering between showing emotion, not showing emotion, and just trying to get through society without being just stigmatized all the time.” (Emerging Adult Woman #1)

Limited access to resources and opportunities for personal growth

Participants frequently reported the lack of access to resources and opportunities that could help them thrive. Even though there were resources available, sometimes they were unaware of them and missed opportunities. Some emerging adult women expressed people they wished to know and said they could have used these resources to make their lives easier and different. Girls specifically indicated the lack of access to leadership programs, even though they frequently mentioned leadership skills as one of their individual strengths. For example, when asked about

⁸⁸ Greene, S., Turner, M., & Gourevitch, R. (2017). *Racial residential segregation and neighborhood disparities*. US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.
<https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/file/944616/L5cUOKLd.pdf>



access to leadership development programs, only 31.2% reported having access; over two-thirds of girls reported not having access. Additionally, tying into social media and the new age of technology, some emerging adult women described their experiences as adolescents having to endure a pandemic and solely rely on virtual and online communication. A concern was being overly dependent on social media communication and lacking the skills to communicate in real life and in the workforce when transitioning into adulthood. When asked for suggestions for better supporting Black girls, an emerging adult woman highlighted the importance of teaching girls real-life skills and soft skills:

*“Definitely teaching us real-life skills and also soft skills. Especially in an environment where it’s hard to communicate, it’s so important to really hone in on those soft skills as a young person. **And experiencing COVID at the ripe age of 14, and kind of having that block of communication with other students my age, it definitely has affected my communication throughout the rest of my high school experience until about senior year, where I was actually able to be, you know, mature enough within myself to know how to grow out of that. But for younger people who are going through it in middle school and in late elementary school and early high school, it’s really important for them to be nurtured and to learn how to communicate with each other, and not through social media and not through apps, you know, and texting. Because when you do get a real job in the real world, you know, you can’t rely on that form of communication.**”* (Emerging Adult Woman #20)

Insufficient mental health support

During the conversations with Black emerging adult women, many discussed the implications of not having enough mental health support that was targeted to the young Black community. Black young girls have experiences that differ from the majority due to their intersectionality. They are known to be more adultified in schools and struggle with their image due to the negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with this population. This particular participant mentioned how young Black girls are portrayed differently due to social constructs that are associated with young Black women. When they are bullied at school or outside of school, it becomes harder for them to find mental health professionals or a trusted adult who understands their lived experiences and struggles related to their identities.

*“Um, yeah, I would say access to education that is centered around their experience, as well as something they could apply to their lives. **Um, groups, support groups for people to feel empowered to educate themselves outside of school, like mental health groups, counseling, holistic health, yoga, things like that...Um, yeah, safe spaces for girls who get bullied, um, because sometimes when girls are getting bullied, Black girls, it’s not seen as bullying sometimes, because the ways in which we express ourselves is - is different. Talk to them, listen to them, encourage them.**”* (Emerging Adult Woman #14)



The Promise and Peril of Technology for Black Girls

Technology plays a widespread role in these girls' lives. While the data collection tools—both quantitative and qualitative—did not explicitly ask about technology use, some participants mentioned it in their responses. Several of them explained how they incorporate technology into their daily routines, including academics, creative activities, and gathering information, alongside social media use. For example, one girl mentioned her phone when discussing factors that support her well-being. She explained how the content she accesses on her phone can help improve her mental health and cope with daily events. Additionally, one emerging adult woman shared how she uses online sources to find resources for her life, both material and social. For her, online forums serve as an outlet for expression.

*“...then my phone. And my phone, **my phone is like, it's like my coping skills.** Most everybody have a coping skill but my phone, **my coping skill is keeping me out the way and keeping my head straight depends on what I'm going through.**” (‘A.W.’, age 15, Focus Group #3)*

*“**There were a lot of online groups and online forums based here in Richmond or the metro area that provided resources** -- not only tangible resources like food, shelter, and clothing, but also more abstract concepts like support and just kind of a shoulder to cry on, but also not as extreme as that. Also, somewhere you could express yourself and not feel as judged.” (Emerging Adult woman #7)*

Social media has also become a tool to find out about various programs and events in the City of Richmond. One parent explained how her daughter discovered an event directly through social media on Instagram, instead of relying only on paper flyers.

*“Because one of the guys that was there, he's in Just C and then my other daughter was, so, like I said, yeah, so, I don't know if Miss Anna knew about the program before then, but my daughter actually found on Instagram, but I guess -- but I was just like, really -- because that's why, like I say, I'm not big into social media. I do have Instagram, but I didn't know how instrumental social media is -- Because, **you know, sometimes you get flyers, but now people mostly put stuff on social media platforms.**” (Parent #7)*

In contrast, another parent expressed concern about phone usage. She restricted her daughter's use in order to ensure she got enough sleep.

“She definitely likes her cell phone, so I try to give her time limits on that, especially towards the night, so that she can get enough sleep for the next day.” (Parent #1)

Some conversations with parents referenced the pressure from social media expectations and the dangers of internet use. Parents described how young adolescents are exposed to new technology that urges them to act, look, and speak in certain ways. They also noted that the



internet and social media raise concerns that young girls might become too dependent on these platforms and that it can distort how they see themselves and their assets, particularly for young Black women. This difference is seen as a generational gap, as parents try to navigate how their daughters are growing up in a world that is very different from the one, they experienced as young Black women living in Richmond.

*“Life is different, especially with the internet, social media. Some of us as parents, **we don’t understand how social media and how peer pressure going to school really affects our kids, because it’s different now, and it’s a lot.** It’s a lot to go -- safety issues with going to school, a lot of worries that kids, that our kids have. Or just fitting in.” (Parent #7)*

Taken together, these discussions show a complex influence on the lives of girls and the efforts parents make to mitigate negative impacts. Participants provide examples of how technology and online resources like forums and social media offer ways to enhance their lives. These include accessing information about resources and events of interest, opportunities for self-expression, and connections to information that helps maintain their peace of mind. However, participants, especially parents of Black girls, also discussed the negative effects of technology and media, such as reinforcing negative stereotypes and peer pressure.



IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the lived experiences of Black girls in the City of Richmond and the assets and strengths that they and their communities possess. From the insights obtained, we outline the following recommendations for community nonprofits and government agencies and schools, and provide toolkits and resources for the communities.

Centering Black Girls' Voices

One key takeaway from this project is the importance of acknowledging and centering Black girls' voices in initiatives designed for them, including research, programs, services, and support. Researchers across various fields have emphasized that involving participants in their work at all stages of a study can improve the relevance, impact, and usability of their findings.⁸⁹ In this study, incorporating Black girls' perspectives through their participation in the Young Advisory Board was essential to ensure the study was meaningful and reflected their lived experiences. Black girls are experts in their own lives, and sharing their experiences enabled the researchers to capture a fuller picture of their realities. Additionally, emerging adult women and parents of Black girls were involved in the data collection procedures to strengthen connections with local communities and better reach target populations. Therefore, we recommend that researchers involve Black girls at all stages of the study through approaches such as a youth advisory board, community activities, data walks, and seeking their opinions in multiple ways, and centering their voices when writing final research products related to these populations.

Similarly, involving Black girls in the development of programs, services, and supports designed for them is essential to ensure these initiatives are truly relevant, responsive, and empowering. They possess firsthand knowledge of the challenges they face and valuable insight into the types of resources and supports that can help them navigate school and life and reach their full potential. When their voices are included throughout program design and implementation, these efforts are more likely to foster trust, encourage meaningful engagement, and address their real needs. Moreover, centering their voices promotes an asset-based approach that challenges historical

⁸⁹ Maurer, M., Mangrum, R., Hilliard-Boone, T., Amolegbe, A., Carman, K. L., Forsythe, L., Mosbacher, R., Lesch, J. K., & Woodward, K. (2022). Understanding the influence and impact of stakeholder engagement in patient-centered outcomes research: A qualitative study. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 37(Suppl 1), 6-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-021-07104-w>; Collins, S. E., Clifasefi, S. L., Stanton, J., The LEAP Advisory Board, Straits, K. J. E., Gil-Kashiwabara, E., Rodriguez Espinosa, P., Nicasio, A. V., Andrasik, M. P., Hawes, S. M., Miller, K. A., Nelson, L. A., Orfaly, V. E., Duran, B. M., & Wallerstein, N. (2018). Community-based participatory research (CBPR): Towards equitable involvement of community in psychology research. *American Psychologist*, 73(7), 884–898. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp000167>; Katsonis, M. (2019). Designing effective public engagement: The case study of future Melbourne 2026. *Policy Design and Practice*, 2(2), 215-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2019.1621032>



patterns of exclusion and misrepresentation. Listening to and elevating Black girls' perspectives not only strengthens program effectiveness but also validates their experiences and supports their overall well-being and growth. All of this requires that leaders initiating these efforts develop an in-depth understanding of Black girls' experiences and perspectives. They should actively listen to Black girls during the design process to ensure that programs and services are truly responsive to their needs. In addition, it is important to continue soliciting feedback after implementation to capture changes over time and ensure the initiatives remain relevant and effective.

Access and Investment in Community Supports

The girls, emerging adult women, and guardians interviewed all emphasized the importance of youth programs in the City of Richmond. While many opportunities offered by government and nonprofit organizations exist, there is a need for more targeted programming to foster interest, support mental health, and provide education and career resources for Black girls.⁹⁰ With over 120,000 youth living within city limits, increased funding for summer and after-school programs is crucial to create safe spaces and provide opportunities for extracurricular learning and development. Information about these opportunities should be communicated to parents and guardians through various methods, both digital and print, such as mail, email, and social media, to ensure it reaches them.

Black girls have a range of interests, but they need more exposure to new activities and creative opportunities within the city. Community nonprofits and government agencies should collaborate with organizations in nearby counties that offer unique experiences such as horseback riding, archery, and other activities not typically available in urban settings. Additionally, it is impossible to predict all the activities these girls consider important for their communities and well-being. Organizations could provide spaces and resources for Black girls to form their own community groups to address issues they see in their neighborhoods. This would empower youth to become change agents for the public good, facilitate collective problem-solving, and help develop the soft skills needed for civic engagement.

The mental health needs of Black girls was another prominent theme throughout the study. Community nonprofits and government agencies should provide more funding for mental health support for Black girls. Youth have been experiencing an escalating mental health crisis, which is particularly apparent for Black girls.⁹¹ There are resources available in the Richmond area, such as Bacon Street Youth and Family Services, ChildSavers, Metro Community Ministries, and the RBHA⁹². However, they may not have the necessary capacity to respond to the level and

⁹⁰ The Success Foundation of Virginia. (2024). *RVA Community Resource Book (CRB) 2024*. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f720dcb72bd342e90f3b17b/t/65e723d2edf7b62170c9498d/1709646802692/TSF+-Community+Resource+Book+2024+V6.1+Final.1.pdf>

⁹¹ Sheftall, A. H., Vakil, F., Ruch, D. A., Boyd, R. C., Lindsey, M. A., & Bridge, J. A. (2022). Black youth suicide: Investigation of current trends and precipitating circumstances. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 61(5), 662–675. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.08.021>

⁹² More information about these examples are available below:

Bacon Street Youth & Family Services: <https://baconstreet.org/>



complexity of Black girls' intersectional needs. Partnering with the City of Richmond Public Schools, Richmond private schools, and youth-serving organizations to embed mental health resources, training, and support is needed to begin meeting the mental health needs of Black girls. Moreover, to explicitly understand the experiences of Black girls that lead to poorer mental health outcomes, organizations should develop and host an annual event for Black teenage girls and emerging adult women to express their feelings about growing up and living in the City of Richmond. These annual events should be used to discuss their ideas for addressing the problems they experience.

Finally, community nonprofits and government agencies should expand upon the education and career opportunities available to Black girls in the City of Richmond. Although there are existing resources for youth (e.g., Nurturing Minds, Youth Life Foundation of Richmond, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Richmond, and NextUp RVA), more targeted opportunities for Black girls are needed.⁹³ These programs should be designed to equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed for employment and career advancement. This could look like creating free or low-cost events where Black professional women across a variety of fields talk to teen girls and young adults about their work and educational journeys. Career development programs should be provided to Black girls, helping them learn skills that could translate into opportunities for small-business entrepreneurship. For high school-age girls especially, programs should be provided that outline existing academic and college resources that could lead to scholarships for higher educational attainment. Moreover, organizations should expand upon the mentorship programs available to Black girls (e.g., Girls Like Me, Girls For A Change) to provide opportunities for relationship building and holistic guidance.

The implications for community nonprofits and government agencies regarding expanded programming for Black girls are transferable to other City of Richmond youth. However, as Black girls' experiences are more likely to be ignored, intentional development of programs for this population of City of Richmond youth is needed in order to avoid continued neglect of their needs.⁹⁴

ChildSavers: <https://www.childsavers.org/services/childrens-mental-health-services/>

Metro Community Ministries: <https://mcmserver.org/>

Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA): <https://www.rbha.org/services/adult-services/mental-health-services.aspx>

⁹³ More information about these examples are available below:

Nurturing Minds: <https://nurturingminds.info/>

Youth Life Foundation of Richmond: <https://www.ylfr.org/>

Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Richmond: <https://www.bgcmr.org/>

NextUp RVA: <https://nextuprva.org/>

⁹⁴ Crenshaw, K., & Evans-Winters, V. E. (2024). Black girls youth participatory action research & pedagogies. *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*, 3(2), 114-118. <http://doi.org/10.21423/jaawge-v3i2a165>

Box 1. Recommendations for community nonprofits and government agencies

Expand and Communicate Youth Programming

- Increase funding for summer and afterschool programs;
- Improve communication with families through multiple channels (mail, email, social media, flyers);

Broaden Access to Creative and Novel Opportunities

- Partner with surrounding counties to expose youth to activities not available in Richmond (e.g., horseback riding, archery);
- Support spaces for Black girls to form community groups, identify needs, and lead local initiatives;

Provide more targeted funding for Black girls' mental health services

- Embed mental health training and resources in schools and youth-serving organizations;
- Host annual forums for Black girls to express experiences, challenges, and solutions;

Expand career and education programs specifically for Black girls

- Create mentorship and networking opportunities with Black professional women;
- Provide workshops on entrepreneurship, college resources, and scholarships.

Leveraging Black Girls' Strengths to Inform School Practices

The assets and strengths identified by Black girls and their parents, along with the desired services they highlighted, provide valuable guidance for schools to adapt teaching strategies and school activities in ways that leverage these strengths, address their needs, and respond to their concerns. For example, schools can incorporate course materials and role models that reflect Black girls' identities and experiences. Also, having teachers who share aspects of students' identities, serve as mentors, or inviting Black women professionals to speak about their career journeys can help these girls recognize their own values, foster a stronger sense of belonging, and greatly inspire their motivation for success.

In addition, schools can focus on students' strengths, such as leadership and goal orientation, by supporting them in leadership roles across different settings and by celebrating their accomplishments both inside and outside the classroom. They can also build partnerships with community agencies identified by these girls and their parents as valuable to co-create after-school programs and extracurricular activities. Finally, integrating discussions of mental health, identity, and cultural pride into the curriculum, while ensuring timely and easy access to mental health services, can provide the necessary support for Black girls to thrive.

Box 2. Recommendations for schools

Provide Black girls with role models

- Incorporate course materials and role models that reflect Black girls' identities and experiences;
- Have more teachers who share their identities;
- Invite Black women to speak about their successful career journeys in classrooms.

Support and leverage Black girls' strengths

- Support them in leadership roles across different settings;
- Celebrate their accomplishments both inside and outside the classroom.
- Co-create after-school programs and extracurricular activities with girls and their parents;
- Integrate mental health, identity, and cultural pride into the curriculum

Building Positive Digital Habits for Black Girls

Technology is ubiquitous and essential for many daily activities, and has been associated with adolescents' interests and well-being. Social media presents positive ways for these adolescents to access information, connect with peers, strengthen social relationships, and improve their sense of well-being.⁹⁵ However, social media could cause adverse outcomes, such as poorer relationships with family members, bullying, lower life satisfaction, exposure to depictions of harmful activities, and poorer sleep during an important developmental period.⁹⁶

Since social media and technology are deeply integrated into daily life, girls and their parents must be empowered to navigate these media in healthy ways with an understanding of potential adverse effects and with consideration of how not all screen time is going to have the same effect on the girls.⁹⁷ Support for girls as they navigate the complexity of social media should focus on encouraging them to substitute time spent on social media for other activities, including sleep, other types of social interactions, and media consumption outside of social media sites, and supporting parents to provide input and moderation on the media the girls consume.⁹⁸ Further, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends “helping young people develop digital literacy skills, promote healthy online behaviours and provide support for those at risk of problematic

⁹⁵ Ricci, R. C., de Paulo, A. S. C., de Freitas, A. K. P. B., Ribeiro, I. C., Pires, L. S. A., Facina, M. E. L., Cabral, M. B., Parduci, N. V., Spejiorin, R. C., Bogado, S. S. G., Chociay, S., Jr., Carachesti, T. N., & Larroque, M. M. (2023). Impacts of technology on children's health: A systematic review. *Revista Paulista de Pediatria*, 41. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-0462/2023/41/2020504>

⁹⁶ *Popular and Pervasive Stereotypes of African Americans*. (n.d.). National Museum of African American History and Culture. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-african-americans>

⁹⁷ Tadpatrikar, A., Sharma, M. K., & Viswanath, S. S. (2021, April). Influence of technology usage on family communication patterns and functioning: A systematic review. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102595>

⁹⁸ Tadpatrikar, A., Sharma, M. K., & Viswanath, S. S. (2021, April). Influence of technology usage on family communication patterns and functioning: A systematic review. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102595>



use.”⁹⁹ For the WHO, this includes supporting school programs for critical thinking, social interactions, and healthy online habits, expanding mental health services, and training and promoting interactions with community members, including educators, family members, and other community leaders.¹⁰⁰

Deliverables/Toolkits for the communities

This project produced two important toolkits for communities interested in supporting Black girls’ individual strengths and community assets for Black girls in the City of Richmond:

- 1) The Story Map provides an overview of the historical context and culture where Black girls grow up and the individual strengths and community assets reported by our participants.
- 2) The Asset Map produced a series of maps based on Google Map and ArcGIS Pro that captured all the important resources for Black girls in the City of Richmond, including those reported by our participants and those our researchers considered as important resources for Black girls.

Story Map

Storymaps are a digital storytelling tool by ESRI that combine text, images, video, and interactive maps. By presenting qualitative and quantitative data in an engaging, easily digestible format, storymaps can facilitate community participation in research and improve access to its deliverables. This study created a storymap as both a visual narrative of the research conducted as well as an asset mapping tool.

This story map first reviews the study's core themes and approaches, defining quality of life and explaining the benefits of an asset-based approach. It then briefly outlines the methodology before presenting some key takeaways of the study. Based on the findings, the story map provides an overview of the City of Richmond, Virginia, focusing on historic, cultural, and demographic factors that make it an ideal location for this research. Finally, it provides an interactive asset map.

Specifically, this storymap contains the following sections:

- Quality of Life - Provide the definition of quality of life
- Asset-Based Approach - Introduce the asset-based approach and why it is important to use this approach to understand the experiences of Black girls
- Project Focus - Why we wanted to focus on Black girls in the City of Richmond and how we collected data

⁹⁹ World Health Organization. (2024, September 25). *Teens, screens and mental health: New WHO report indicates need for healthier online habits among adolescents*.
<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/25-09-2024-teens--screens-and-mental-health>

¹⁰⁰ World Health Organization. (2024, September 25). *Teens, screens and mental health: New WHO report indicates need for healthier online habits among adolescents*.
<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/25-09-2024-teens--screens-and-mental-health>

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- Findings: Individual Strengths - Summarize the key individual strengths from participants
 - Community Assets - Summarize the key community assets reported by our participants
 - Richmond Context - An introduction to the history, culture, Black women leaders and activists, historical spaces, and other important elements in the City of Richmond where these girls grow up
 - Resource Map Tool - an interactive map with different types of resources/assets for Black girls and racial distribution across the city.

To make the findings more digestible, the storymap divides them into Individual-level and Community-level sections and includes graphics and contextualizing maps of Richmond. A final section links to the Asset map described below for easy access.

Asset Map

Online maps are an effective way to disseminate public information and to evaluate spatial relationships. These tools use both Google Maps and Geographic Information Systems to help the public situate themselves both in their environment and in relation to the data and resources presented.

This Asset Map we designed compiles several types of resources, informed by the interviews, and spatially locates them throughout the City of Richmond to help users find amenities in their communities. These include

- Racial demographic information (e.g., where people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds live across the city of Richmond)
- Churches
- Community centers
- Grocery stores
- GRTC bus stops and routes
- Hospitals, healthcare, and social service centers
- Museums
- Parks
- Public libraries
- Schools (including public and private schools)
- Youth served community agencies (especially those reported by our participants)

Users can activate different layers based on their areas of interest, then click features to view additional information when available, including addresses, website links, phone numbers, and responsible authorities. Data sources included the City of Richmond, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, the National Center for Education Statistics, and Open Street Map.

In particular, we included racial demographic information at the block group level using American Community Survey 2023 5-year estimates. This includes the African American Population as a percentage of the overall population per block group, the predominant racial/ethnic group per block group (utilizing data from Policy Mapper), as well as a dot density layer showing the population amount per block group for five selected racial groups (Black, White, Asian, Two or



More Races, and Some Other Race). The inclusion of this data shows where certain amenities may be accessible for Black communities in Richmond, but it also highlights the disparities in resource access for areas for different racial groups. For example, this data shows that Health Worker Services and Community Centers tend to be clustered in areas where the predominant racial is Black, while Supermarkets and Museums tend to be clustered in areas where the predominant racial group is White.



REFLECTIONS FROM OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The experiences shared by Black girls, emerging adult women, and parents/guardians of Black girls in their local communities provide valuable insights into effective participant recruitment. Throughout the project, we employed a variety of approaches to reach out and engage community members and recruit participants. The following section outlines our reflections on the recruitment process, including strategies we used and the adaptations we made in response to challenges, to inform stakeholders who are interested in supporting or working with this population.

Build Comfort and Rapport with Participants

Building comfort and rapport with participants is the key to the success of this project, especially for the Black girl population in this study. For example, for the focus groups with the Black adolescent girls, we adopted strategies such as short icebreaker activities at the beginning to make them feel comfortable with us. This approach included interactive drawing activities during the focus groups to help them structure their ideas, providing small incentives (e.g., snacks, treats, buttons, eGift cards) after their participation, using plain language to ask the questions in different ways to help them understand the questions, having Black girl to facilitate the group discussions, and dressing causally to make them feel that we were part of them. These small strategies helped participants feel valued and fostered stronger connections, which made them more comfortable to share their perspectives and engage with our activities and conversations. All these findings suggest the significance of building comfort and rapport with target populations, especially minority populations and youth populations, at the early stage of the programs/services to ensure the smooth delivery of the services and outcomes of the programs/services.

Partnering with Community Agencies and Navigators

One effective strategy for improving community engagement is partnering with local agencies and community navigators who already have established relationships and trust within the community. These partners bring valuable experience and insights that can enhance outreach efforts—for example, by identifying relevant activities and spaces for recruitment, sharing study information, and encouraging participation. In our project, for example, our partner, Girls For A Change effectively connected us with local communities and reached out to eligible participants. Community navigators introduced our initiative to families and encouraged parents to participate in interviews, thereby accelerating recruitment, making it more effective, and making it more culturally responsive. For other organizations, these approaches can similarly improve access to hard-to-reach groups, enhance trust, and increase participation in programs or services. Moreover, as community members learn about available resources and opportunities through



these interactions, organizations can foster greater awareness and empowerment, ultimately supporting the growth and well-being of communities such as Black girls in urban environments like the City of Richmond.

Accommodating the Needs of the Community

This study revealed one of the key lessons, accommodating the needs of the community, that could be valuable for other programs and services working with this population. Our research process indicates that it is critical to understand the needs and life circumstances of these girls and their parents to effectively support Black girls. First, it is important to ensure that recruitment strategies must meet girls where they are. RISE increased participation by placing study information in locations familiar to Black girls—both online (such as social media) and through community organizations they already engage with. Second, RISE engaged girls and women who reflected the study population or worked closely with Black girls during the planning phase. Their guidance strengthened outreach strategies, broadened awareness of the project, and more importantly, ensured that information was shared in innovative and culturally responsive ways that accommodated the needs of the community. Third, data collection procedures must accommodate the realities of girls' and families' day-to-day lives. Many parents in Richmond work service jobs and do not frequently check email unless it is school-related, so scheduling required flexibility. RISE staff prioritized community presence, introduced the study and research team directly to families, and offered data collection at times and locations convenient to participants. These approaches enabled RISE to gather rich insights into the experiences of Black girls in Richmond and to inform current and future programs and services. By centering Black girls' needs and voices, these efforts help ensure more responsive services and stronger outcomes.

Informing Community Members of Resources

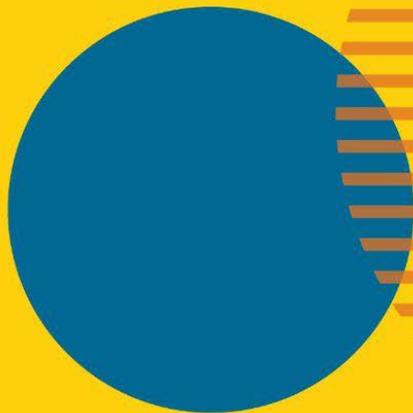
Interviews with parents and emerging adult women in the City of Richmond revealed that many community organizations and facilities struggle to reach Black families with information about available programs and resources that support girls' growth and development. Although the city offers a range of services, they are often not shared in ways that connect with the communities that could benefit most. Other organizations can learn from this by adopting more inclusive and accessible outreach strategies. For example, sharing flyers at public spaces—such as recreation centers, libraries, and community hubs—can help bridge communication gaps. Creating or expanding social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can also help reach younger parents and residents.

At the same time, it's important to recognize that not all parents rely on digital media. Public facilities such as libraries can play a key role by hosting informational sessions and community events where families can learn directly about local opportunities. Distributing flyers at local universities, coffee shops, and neighborhood grocery stores—like Kroger—can further increase visibility. By combining in-person and online outreach, organizations can better connect families with the resources they need and strengthen trust within the community.



Engaging Community Events

Partnering with local organizations can provide valuable opportunities for direct outreach. With our partnership at Girls For A Change, we were able to attend community events such as the annual Black Girl Rally events, where we set up activities at a table to engage the youth population with questions regarding individual strengths and community resources they utilize. The events create opportunities to connect with parents and caregivers, share research information, and recruit participants. Connecting with parents and caregivers with this population can sometimes be challenging as they are usually occupied with work. However, putting together events that require attendance of parents and guardians can invite them to understand the mission and purpose of project and organization goals. Inviting parents and guardians to engaging events opens the opportunity to build more trust, rapport, and interest in the work that is being done to support this population; in this case young Black girls in urban environments. Similar approaches can be applied directly to broader events; We attended Teen Summit, which attracts a more diverse youth population. Even when events are not specific to a target demographic, they can expand outreach, increase visibility, and build relationships with potential participants and their families.



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