

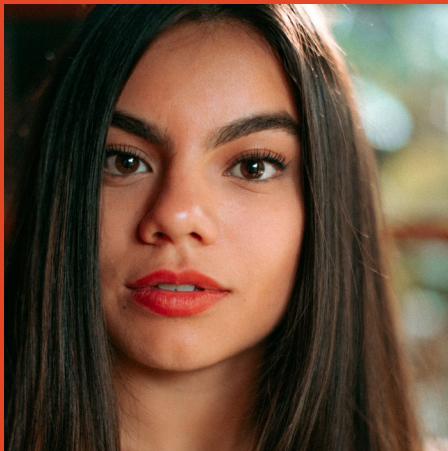


READY TO LEAD

Leadership Supports and Barriers
for Black and Latinx Girls



All kinds of powerful.



Report by Charlotte E. Jacobs, Ph.D.
Research Directed by
Simone Marean + Rachel Simmons

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To all the Black and Latinx girls who are using the power of their voices to talk about what is happening in our schools, we hope this report supports your call for systemic change and justice. This research is in honor of you, your courage, your strength, and your leadership.

This report wouldn't exist without the faith and vision of Kim Davis, who first believed in this research, and gathered our Advisory Board and initial partners. Thank you to Girls Leadership co-founder Rachel Simmons, who oversaw this work for many years and gathered this incredible Research Cabinet. Thank you to the girls of the Girls Justice League in Philadelphia, PA, for their contributions to the report.

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FOREWORD

FOREWORD FOR READY TO LEAD: LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS FOR BLACK AND LATINX GIRLS

Leadership is often explored through a scarcity model, of who doesn't have enough of it or who doesn't have the capacity for it. For girls of color, this routinely manifests in the failure to recognize their potential to lead. Instead of honoring the qualities and values that make their collective ability to navigate complex systems and communities accessible to so many, Black and Latinx girls often experience "leadership" as an exercise of privilege. Their readiness to lead is received with skepticism, particularly because the dominant frame of our own understanding of leadership is transactional and one-directional, rather than participatory. This narrow view of leadership functions to limit the ability of Black and Latinx girls to construct a practice of leadership that is dynamic, public, and in open celebration of their agency in the spaces where they spend most of their time.

This Girls Leadership report authored by Dr. Charlotte Jacobs elevates two important issues: first, that Black and Latinx girls are poised to step into leadership—at school and beyond; second, that the barriers girls of color confront are primarily associated with their lack of proximity to adults who recognize this potential and have the ability to mold and build from it. This finding is one, among many in this report, that speak to the importance of schools becoming locations where safety includes a rigorous assessment of an ability to dismantle racialized gender bias that deny Black and Brown girls an opportunity to practice public leadership. For example, this report's finding that teachers can inhibit or enhance expressions of leadership among girls of color elevates the importance of increasing the capacity of educators to actively engage in pedagogical practices that dismantle bias and promote the development of relationships that allow them to foster classrooms that are socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually safe for Black and Latinx girls.

Now more than ever, it is important that we address this question of leadership, particularly for girls of color. Racial disparities in school discipline and educational outcomes that were present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic risk being exacerbated if we do not heed this call to, and for, the leadership of girls of color. Black and Latinx girls who have been systematically excluded from opportunities to demonstrate and share their wisdom understand what is required to create a more capacious model of leadership. I read this report as an invitation to move from scarcity to abundance, and as an opportunity to breathe life into the observations of Black and Latinx girls who see themselves as capable of making a difference not only in their schools and home communities, but in the most expansive sense of the word, being the change they seek in the world. I hope that others will do the same.

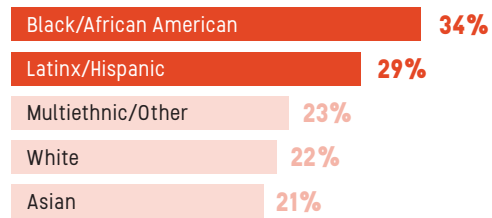
Monique W. Morris, Ed.D.

THE PATH TO LEADERSHIP FOR BLACK AND LATINX GIRLS

BLACK AND LATINX GIRLS ARE READY TO LEAD

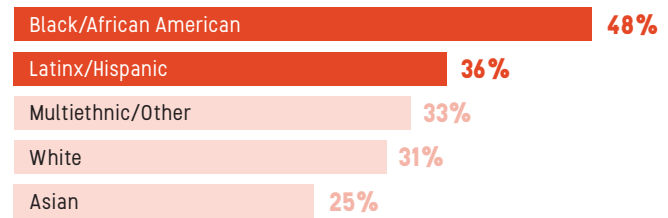
High leadership score

Black and Latinx girls scored significantly higher than other races on the Roets Rating Scale for Leadership.



I agree with the statement “I am a leader”

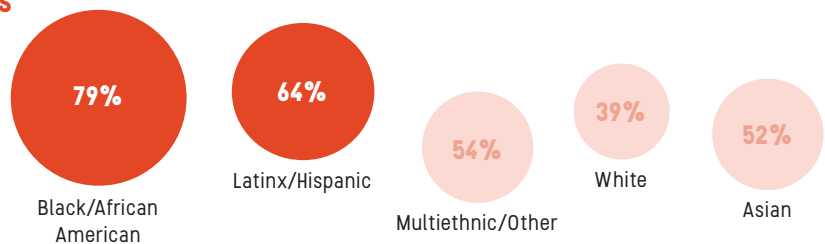
48% of Black girls are the most likely to self-identify as leaders compared to girls of other races.



FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES DEVELOP STRONG LEADERS

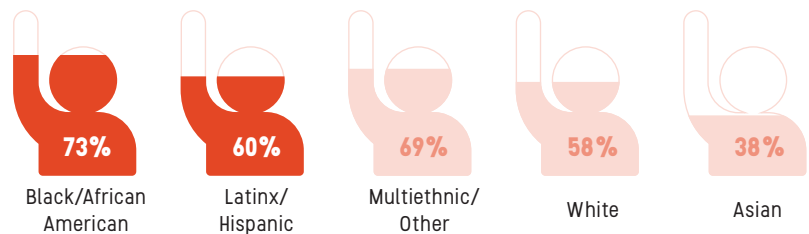
The importance of leaders as role models

Black and Latinx girls agree it is very important to have leaders as role models who are of the same race or ethnicity.



Parents identify as leaders

Black and Latinx parents are the most likely to identify as leaders.



TEACHERS’ BIASES ABOUT LEADERSHIP BARRIERS LEAD TO DEFICIT RATHER THAN STRENGTHS-BASED THINKING

Teachers’ perceived barriers to leadership for girls of color

1. Lack of Confidence
2. Lack of Parental Support
3. Low Socio-Economic Status
4. Lack of Adult Role Models of Same Race

Research Shows

- Black and Latinx girls have the highest levels of self-reported confidence.
- Black and Latinx parents have the highest rates of leadership identity and support of leadership.
- Income level makes very little to no difference in girls’ leadership.
- Black and Latinx girls report the highest rates of role models of their same race.

In the report, respondents who identified as Black/African American are referred to as Black, and respondents who identified as Latina/Hispanic are referred to as Latinx. See Glossary for further discussion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH METHODS

Girls Leadership has conducted groundbreaking new research on personal, societal, and structural factors that deeply impact Black and Latinx girls' leadership identity, aspiration, and skill development. This study of 2,012 girls interviewed the parents of the girls and 601 teachers to learn the systems of support that girls of color identify for their leadership development, and what barriers to leadership, both internal and external, exist for girls of color.

Girls Leadership engaged with Fluent, a research consulting firm, to develop the methodology for this research study. The study was conducted in two phases: Phase one was qualitative in nature and involved six focus groups with middle school and high school girls (including girls of color and White girls) in Los Angeles, CA; New York, NY; and Cincinnati, OH. Phase two was quantitative and consisted of an online survey with a national sample of 2,012 girls ages 12 to 18. Phase two also included an online survey with a national sample of 601 middle and high school teachers (See study appendix in full report for research methods details).

STUDY FINDINGS

Black & Latinx Girls Are Ready to Lead

Our study found that **Black and Latinx girls identify as leaders and have leadership aspirations. Black girls are the most likely to self-identify as leaders (48%) compared to girls of other races** (White 31%, Latinx 36%, Asian 25%, Multiethnic 33%), and that overall girls of color were more likely to report that they seek out leadership opportunities compared to White girls. Black and Latinx girls identified several different factors contributing to their interest in leadership and leading. Black and Latinx girls were more likely than girls of other races to consider leadership skills as critical for meeting their goals in life.

Racial and Gender Bias are the Key Barriers to Leadership

Black and Latinx girls identified the external factors of racial and gender bias present in their schools and broader society as significant obstacles to their leadership aspirations and opportunities. **Over 1 in 3 Black and Latinx girls who score highly on the leadership scale have reported witnessing racial bias, with nearly 1 in 2 Black girls saying they have experienced unfair treatment because of their race from teachers and administrators.**

Parents and Mentors Contribute Significantly to Positive Leadership Aspirations for Black & Latinx Girls

Our study found that girls whose parents think of them as a leader are more likely to score high on the leadership scale. **Black and Latinx girls named their mothers as the biggest sources of support for their leadership aspirations.** Additionally, the presence of a mentor in girls' lives was positively correlated with higher scores on the Roets Leadership Scale as well as the earning of higher grades. **Almost half of the girls in the study reported having an adult mentor in their lives.**

Teacher Bias Limits Leadership Opportunities for Black and Latinx Girls

Over 1 in 3 Black teachers in our study noted that at their schools, students of color experienced bias and unfair treatment in the form of not having the same opportunity to get leadership roles, teachers having lower expectations for students of color compared to White students, and students of color experiencing harsher disciplinary actions than White students who exhibit the same behaviors.

Teacher Support in Black and Latinx Girls' Leadership is Important

Black and Latinx girls are more likely to score high on the leadership scale— especially if their schools have more teachers of color. Black and Latinx girls score higher on the leadership scale than girls of other races/ethnicities even if they are in schools with predominantly White teachers. However, in schools with predominantly teachers of color, Black and Latinx girls score even higher on the leadership scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness

With over half of the population of girls in the U.S. identifying as girls of color, schools, girl-focused organizations, and policymakers must shift the lens of their focus by moving away from relying on data that centers the experiences of White, cisgender, and often middle-class girls, and instead lead discussions, conduct research, and develop policy with the strengths of, needs of, and support systems for girls of color as drivers for their work. Black and Latinx girls, and their parents/caregivers, need to be positioned as experts, with their feedback, reflections, and questions about their experiences functioning as a valuable resource for curriculum, program, and policy changes moving forward.

Activation

In our study, more than half the teachers reported that they have never had professional development training in leadership or in gender equity in education. **In order to combat teacher bias and discrimination when it comes to Black and Latinx girls and their leadership development, investment in focused teacher training on anti-biased education, gender equity, and social change is needed.** Additionally, teacher training focused on culturally responsive girl-centered leadership development also needs to include curriculum support, where teachers have the time and space to not only develop curriculum, but to successfully implement it as well.

Action

Schools, community-based organizations, and girl-focused nonprofits serve as key touchpoints for Black and Latinx girls and their leadership development. **We believe that supporting Black and Latinx girls requires adopting a holistic approach that includes an anti-racist, healing-centered, gender inclusive stance towards leadership.** A commitment to organizational transformation requires focused reviews of current practices, policies, programs and procedures through intersectional and justice-centered lenses. It also requires a mission-driven commitment to ensure that leaders and decision-makers of all levels within schools or organizations engage in trainings and develop practices that examine and interrogate implicit and explicit systems of bias and oppression.



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Girls Leadership has conducted groundbreaking new research on personal, societal, and structural factors that deeply impact Black and Latinx girls' leadership identity, aspiration, and skill development. This study of 2,012 girls interviewed the parents of the girls and 601 teachers to learn the factors of support that girls of color identify for their leadership development, and what barriers to leadership, both internal and external, exist for Black and Latinx girls.

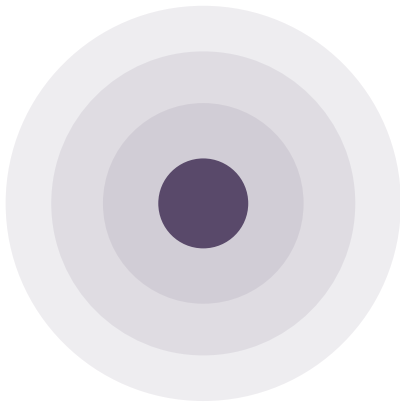
To date, a considerable body of research has sought to explore the qualities and experiences that contribute to women's leadership and roles as decision-makers in the corporate, political, and public service sectors. Importantly, the research reveals a gender imbalance in the corporate sector¹ that is also racialized, with women of color representing an even smaller percentage of women in leadership roles. Similarly, research reports illustrate how women of color are also underrepresented in sectors that range from the political sphere to Hollywood². While the prior research provides a number of important insights, it still tends to focus on women, rather than looking earlier in the leadership pipeline. Girls Studies, as a field of research that focuses on the lives of girls and the construction of girlhood, has historically focused on the experiences of White, cisgender, middle-class girls, leaving a significant number of girls outside of its scope³. With girls of color making up over 50% of the U.S. girl population⁴, it is imperative that research focusing on the experiences of girls and

girl-serving organizations shift their lens to one that is intersectional and centers the needs of girls of color. In the area of girls' leadership, current research does not provide an intersectional understanding of the factors that promote or hinder leadership aspirations of girls in adolescence, a critical developmental stage for identity and aspirations.

Our research study seeks to fill this gap in the research by examining factors that drive leadership aspirations and opportunities for girls of color. Our goal is that these findings permeate policy, culture, and practices to tell a new story about what happens to the power of the voices of girls of color and their leadership aspirations and potential in adolescence.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In our study we sought to identify and examine the internal and external factors that support and inhibit the leadership of girls of color— the factors that promote their leadership, and the factors that serve as barriers. The following questions serve as the foundation of our study:



INTERNAL FACTORS

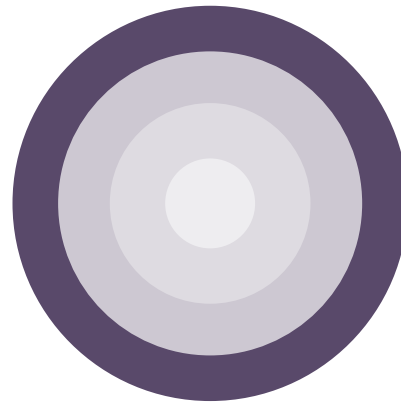
- **Definitions of Leadership:** How do girls of color define leadership? What qualities and skills are considered essential for leadership?

- **Attitudes towards Leadership:** What meaning does leadership have for girls of color? What do they find appealing and unappealing about leadership?

- **Self-Assessment:** How do girls of color rate themselves on the leadership scale?

- **Leadership Aspirations:** Do girls of color aspire to be leaders? What kind of leaders do they aspire to be?

- **Barriers to Leadership:** What holds girls of color back from leading or wanting to lead?



EXTERNAL FACTORS

- **Environmental factors:** What role do parents, peers, teachers, and community leaders play in influencing girls of color’s attitudes towards leadership?

- **Demographic factors:** What are the effects of race/ ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, geography, and parental education/occupation on girls of color’s perceptions and attitudes toward leadership?

- **Barriers to Leadership:** What holds girls of color back from leading or wanting to lead?

- **Leadership Experiences:** What leadership opportunities are available to girls of color?

RESEARCH METHODS



RESEARCH METHODS

Girls Leadership engaged with Fluent, a research consulting firm, to develop the methodology for this research study. The study was conducted in two phases. Phase one was qualitative and involved six focus groups with middle school and high school girls in Los Angeles, CA; New York, NY; and Cincinnati, OH. Included in the six focus groups were two focus groups of Black girls, two focus groups of Latinx girls, and two focus groups of Asian girls. Phase one also consisted of an online bulletin board with 30 participating middle and high school teachers.

Phase 1: 6 focus groups with middle school and high school girls



Phase two was quantitative and consisted of an online survey with a national sample of 2,012 girls (including girls of color and White girls) ages 12 to 18, with an oversampling of Black, Latinx, and Asian girls. The online survey for girls was developed both from the qualitative data from Phase one and the use of the Roets Rating Scale for Leadership⁵. Phase two also included an online survey with a national sample of 601 middle and high school teachers (See study appendix for research methods details).

Phase 2: Online surveys



STUDY LIMITATIONS

The research study had the following limitations:

- Though we sought to oversample the number of Asian girls in our study, the number of Asian girls remained relatively small (11% of the national sample), with the number of Asian girls who identify as low-income being even smaller, and not statistically significant. Therefore, any study findings that we present about Asian girls, we do so tentatively, recognizing the need for more in-depth and focused research on adolescent Asian girls and their experiences. This will be the focus of Girls Leadership’s next study.
- We also recognize that under the umbrella term “girls of color” there are many intersectional social identifiers (such as socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and others) that contribute to a variation of experiences both within and among particular racial/ethnic groups within our study. More research beyond our study will need to be conducted to explore the more nuanced experiences of girls of color.

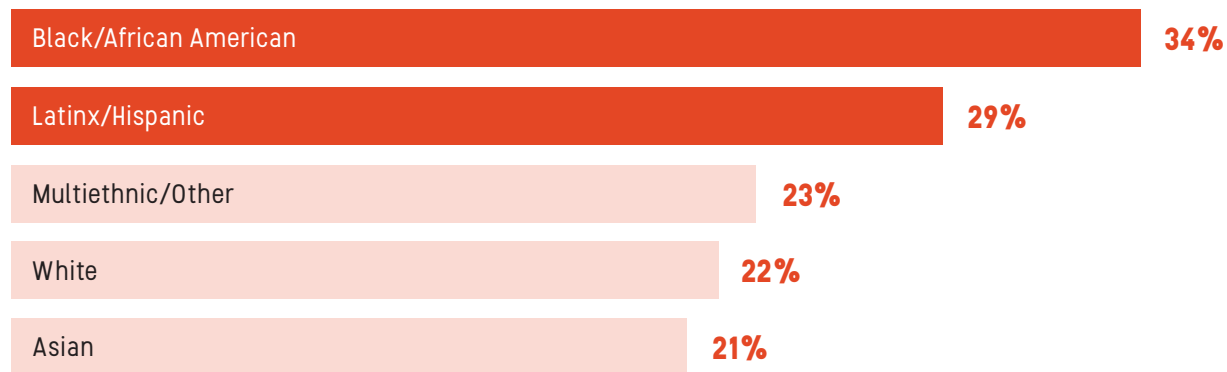
STUDY FINDINGS



BLACK & LATINX GIRLS ARE READY TO LEAD

High Leadership Score

See Figure 1 in appendix.



Though we set out to study the leadership aspirations and barriers to girls of color broadly, due to the small sample size of Asian girls in our study, and the themes that emerged from our study results, we decided to focus the report of our findings specifically on Black and Latinx⁶ girls.

One of the major findings from this study is that overall Black and Latinx girls identify as leaders and have leadership aspirations.

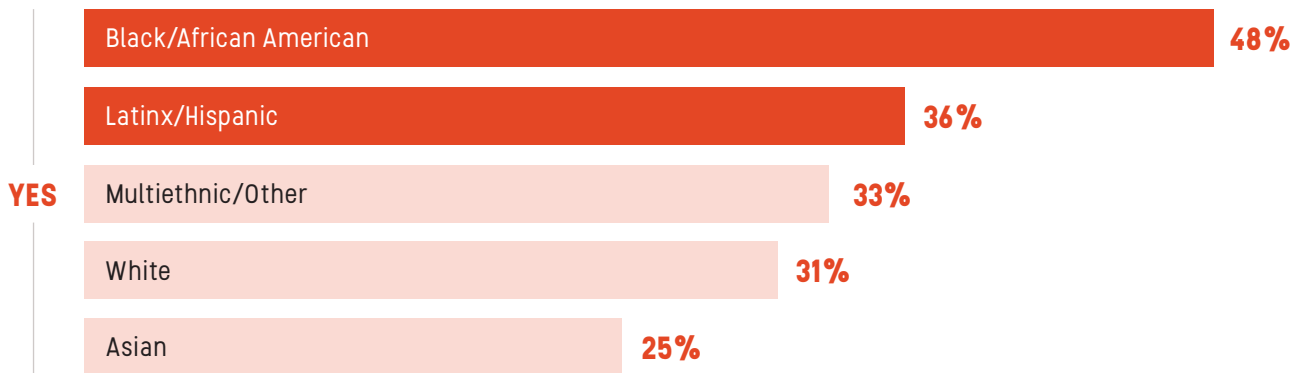
Black and Latinx girls scored significantly higher than White, Asian or Multiethnic girls on the Roets Rating Scale for Leadership⁷. Study findings also show that Black and Latinx girls are more likely to seek leadership opportunities and report having more leadership opportunities than White, Asian, or Multiethnic girls. This finding builds off a trend found in recent research reports focusing on girls and entrepreneurship in which Black and Latinx girls indicated a higher interest in starting their own business or being an entrepreneur compared to girls of other races and ethnicities⁸.

Additionally, the study found that across all income levels, Black and Latinx girls are the high scorers for leadership.

We found that income level makes very little difference in leadership scores for girls of color. There was no impact from parents' education level or family structure (single- vs. dual-parent households) on girls' leadership scores. Beyond leadership scores, we found that when considering the factors of leadership identity, aspirations, and identity, **Black girls are the most likely to self-identify as leaders (48%) compared to girls of other races/ethnicities** (White 31%, Latinx 36%, Asian 25%, Multiethnic 33%), and that overall girls of color were more likely to report that they seek out leadership opportunities compared to White girls.

Do you agree with the statement "I am a leader"?

See Figure 2 in appendix.



“

Leadership is about having a common vision and having the character and humility to guide, collaborate, and learn from your team/group/org. Leadership is about knowing the members of your team/group/org well enough to encourage and challenge them to grow into leaders themselves. Leadership is caring about the people you are leading and doing what you can to support them and represent them as genuinely as you can.

— High School Black Girl

“

You can be a leader in class, being the first to talk. Usually I have a group in class—they are quiet kids. I am always trying to bring them up. I talk to everybody no matter who you are. I always try to encourage them and make them talk.

— Middle School Latinx Girl

“

Leadership can be described as activism and taking control over something you are passionate about.

— High School Black Girl



REASONS FOR WANTING TO LEAD

Black and Latinx girls identified several different factors contributing to their interest in leadership and leading. **Black and Latinx girls were more likely than girls of other races/ethnicities to consider leadership skills as critical for meeting their goals in life.** High school students are particularly focused on demonstrating leadership skills on their college applications and for future career development. Significantly, all girls cited that their main motivation for being a leader is “helping other people.” Girls say that they want to be a leader in order to change the world for the better and to be successful in life. **Black and Latinx girls expressed that they aspire to be the type of leader who enacts leadership through moral authority, team-building, the support of others, and social change values.** They also aspired to tackle big societal issues and humanitarian needs, such as poverty, drug addiction, gun control, and immigration.

“

I want to be a leader because I want to make a difference in the world. I want to be able to help people in any way that I can.

— High School Black Girl

“

I want to be a leader to inspire hope and creativity but also give people courage and strength. To be a part of a team is an honor, but leading it is something so few people can do, and those who can do it well are even more scarce.

— High School Black Girl

“

I would fix problems that America has. Things like DACA and gun control. Just fix it.

— Middle School Latinx Girl

BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

Our study also illuminates that as much as Black and Latinx girls aspire to be leaders, there are both internal and external factors that serve as barriers to Black and Latinx girls seeing themselves as leaders and being able to engage in different forms of leadership.

BLACK & LATINX GIRLS HAVE FEWER INTERNAL BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

Notably, Black and Latinx girls are less likely than girls of other races/ethnicities (Asian girls, Multiethnic girls, and White girls) to cite lack of confidence or fear of failure as deterrents to leadership aspirations. However, the most significant internal barrier cited by Latinx girls was a fear of negative outcomes when presented with an opportunity to lead. For example, nearly one in three Latinx girls and nearly one in four Black girls fear being embarrassed or ridiculed as a result of taking on a leadership role.



Nearly one in three Latinx girls fear being embarrassed or ridiculed as a result of taking on a leadership role



Nearly one in four Black girls fear being embarrassed or ridiculed as a result of taking on a leadership role

Additionally, fear of social repercussions, by exposing themselves to scrutiny or peer criticism, was another leadership deterrent for Black and Latinx girls. Specifically, 40% Black girls agreed with the statement, “If I were to speak out or disagree with a teacher, I would be more likely to get in trouble than a girl of a different race.” Black and Latinx girls’ fears of social repercussions, being misunderstood, or being seen in a negative light are not unfounded. Recent reports such as *Black Girls Matter*⁹ and *Girlhood Interrupted*¹⁰, and Dr. Monique Morris’s research¹¹ highlight how Black girls are often seen by teachers, administrators, and their White peers as being “loud,” “aggressive,” or “angry” when advocating for their needs or speaking out against experiences of discrimination, bias, or inequity. As a result, Black and Latinx girls are more likely to experience harsher disciplinary consequences than their White peers, and are six times more likely to be suspended from school than White girls¹².

“

They [Black and Latinx girls] are very strong for doing what they do, and even though it is hard sometimes, we never give up.

— High School Black Girl

“

The pressure of not failing weighs a lot more for Black and Latinx girls (mentally and physically) because a lot of times people are not expecting that much of you—even if you have a track record of getting things done and done well. In my own experiences, I’ve dealt with Imposter Syndrome, questioning if I was fit to lead even if I knew I was and others knew also.

— High School Black Girl

“

Our discouragers make us stronger and make us want to try harder.

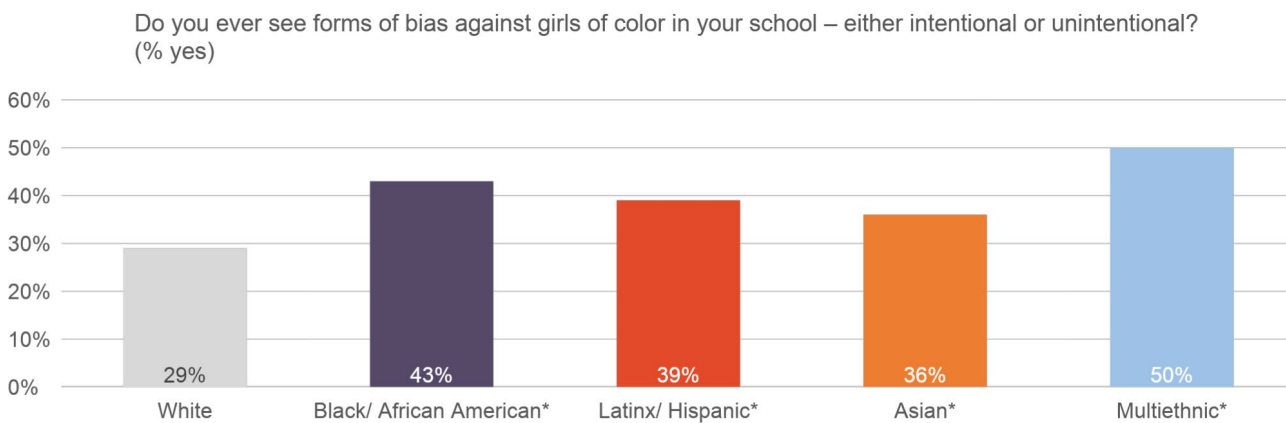
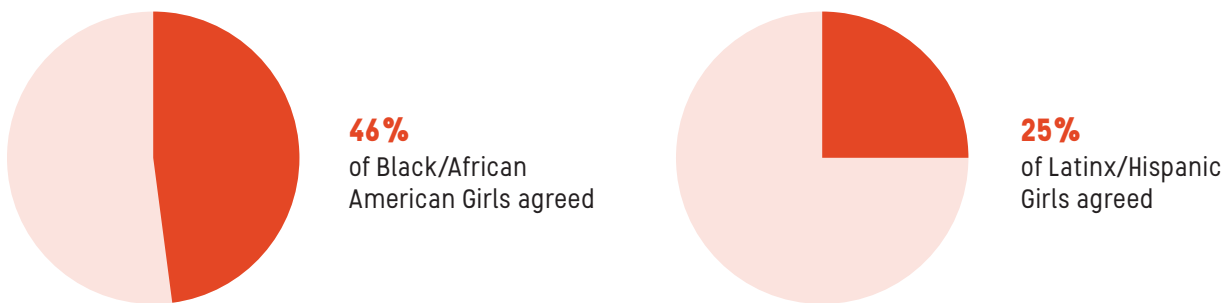
— Middle School Latinx Girl

RACIAL AND GENDER BIAS AS KEY BARRIERS

Black and Latinx girls also pointed to external and societal factors such as racial bias and gender discrimination as other obstacles to their leadership aspirations and opportunities. 64% of Black girls and almost half of Latinx girls (47%) agreed with the statement, “In our society, it is more difficult to become a leader for a person of color than a White person.” Our findings also show that **over a third of Black and Latinx girls who score highly on the leadership scale have reported witnessing racial bias, and nearly one in two Black girls said they have experienced unfair treatment because of their race from teachers and administrators.** Additionally, a little over a third of Black girls (35%) and a little over a quarter of Latinx (27%) girls agreed with the statement, “Teachers in my school favor students of some races more than others.” Lastly, a little over a quarter of Black girls agreed with the statement “Teachers in my school set lower expectations for students of color than White students.”

Do you ever witness racial bias towards students of color from teachers or school administrators in your school? (% yes)

See Figure 3 in appendix.



* Small sample size

While Black and Latinx girls more explicitly named racial bias as an obstacle to their leadership aspirations, underlying gender bias is still a part of the daily lives of Black and Latinx girls; their behaviors and interactions are often judged through a normative lens of White femininity. In U.S. society, the dominant norms of femininity are defined by expectations that girls and women are quiet, likeable, and accommodating in the majority of their interactions with others. When White girls and women push back against these norms by advocating for themselves, they are generally applauded for their assertiveness, and their display of leadership. However, when girls of color engage in similar behaviors of self-advocacy, they are often labeled as “loud,” “angry,” or “crazy,”—their strengths and leadership abilities being overlooked or minimized rather than celebrated by their peers and teachers¹³.

The barriers reported by Black and Latinx girls reflect larger societal trends of how racism and sexism shape the mindsets of Black and Latinx girls in their assessment of their ability to lead, and in the access and support they have to pursue leadership opportunities. Though it is clear that racial and gender bias do not deter the leadership aspirations of Black and Latinx girls, the fact remains that these are two significant obstacles they are forced to navigate as they develop their leadership identities and goals.

“

I believe that stereotypes are a major barrier. There is this perception that Latinx women are feisty and emotional, and some think that given that, it would not be a good idea for a woman to assume any leadership position whether it's [the] presidency, governmental positions, or anything along the lines of that. Another barrier is the lack of respect there is for women of color. Women of color are seen as 'not smart' and/or 'crazy' when that is truly not the case.

— High School Latinx Girl

“

Police automatically have an eye on us [Black and Latinx girls], in the workplace. They [Black and Latinx girls and women] are less likely to get hired for leadership positions.

— High School Black Girl

“

I think how people perceive us is a barrier to leadership. Being seen as bossy or irrational is a barrier for us. Black and Latinx girls also struggle with authenticity and staying true to themselves and their ideas. For me, moving through White spaces—the expectation to always be fun or entertaining when trying to lead has made people call me and other girls rude, too serious, and aggressive.

— High School Black Girl

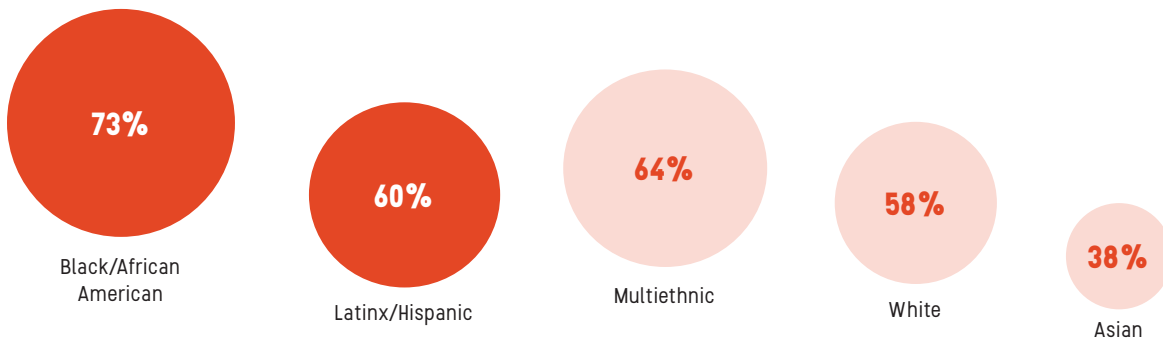


INFLUENCE OF PARENTS & MENTORS

THE IMPACT OF PARENTS

The impact of adult attitudes and support of leadership for Black and Latinx girls cannot be overstated. We found that girls whose parents think of them as leaders are more likely to score high on the leadership scale. Parents' own self-identification as a leader is also positively correlated with girls' leadership skills (73% of Black parents; 60% of Latinx parents; 64% of Multiethnic parents; 58% of White parents; and 38% of Asian parents). Notably, **Black and Latinx girls named their mothers as the biggest sources of support for their leadership aspirations.** Black and Latinx girls were also more likely to identify extended family members such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents, as supports for their leadership aspirations.

Parents' own self-identification as a leader

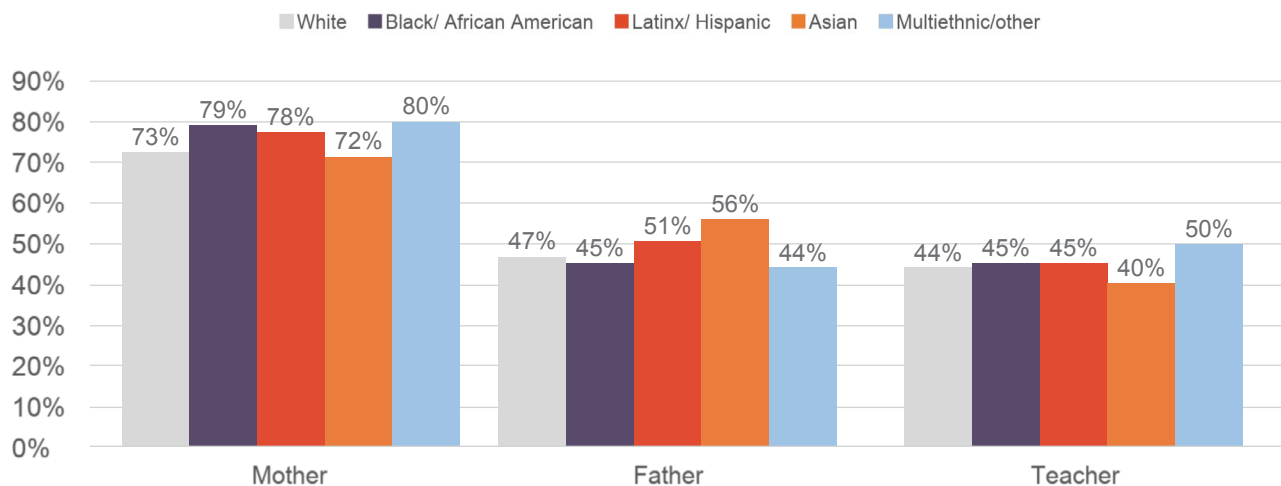


“

I think the adults in my life have encouraged me to become a leader. They have never let my ethnicity, age, or gender be an obstacle to being a leader. My mom has always taught me to go be the best person I can be. So, I think many adults have encouraged me.

– High School Latinx Girl

Which of the following people have encouraged you or helped you to be a leader?



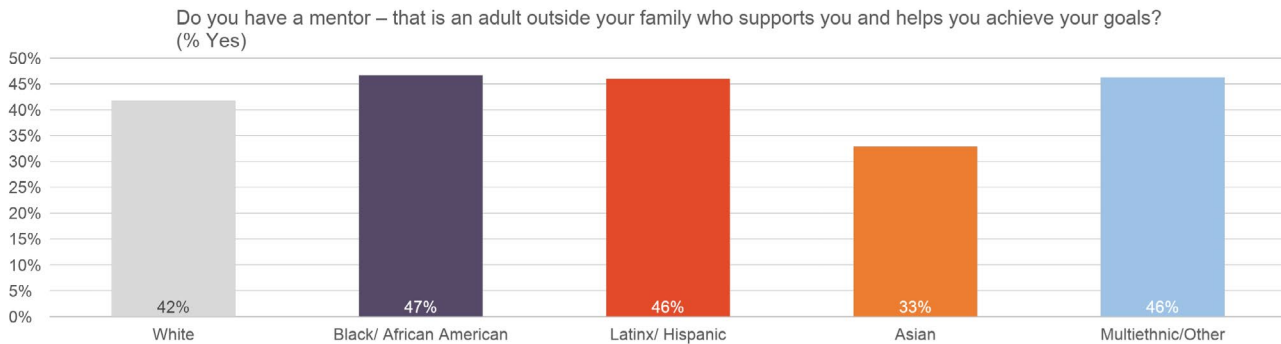
THE IMPACT OF MENTORS

Almost half of the girls in the study reported having an adult mentor in their lives. Black and Latinx girls named their teachers, coaches, and religious leaders as adult mentors in their lives. Black girls were more likely than girls of other races and ethnicities to name religious leaders as supporters of their leadership aspirations. The presence of a mentor in girls' lives was positively correlated with higher scores on the Roets Leadership Scale as well as earning higher grades.

“

I have met so many great role models through my leadership. They teach me how to handle tough situations and they teach me how to be vulnerable. They also always give great advice.

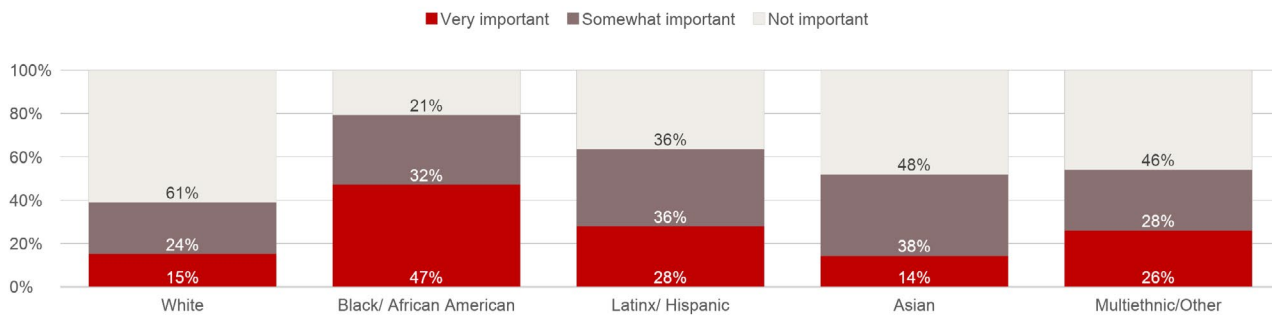
— High School Black Girl



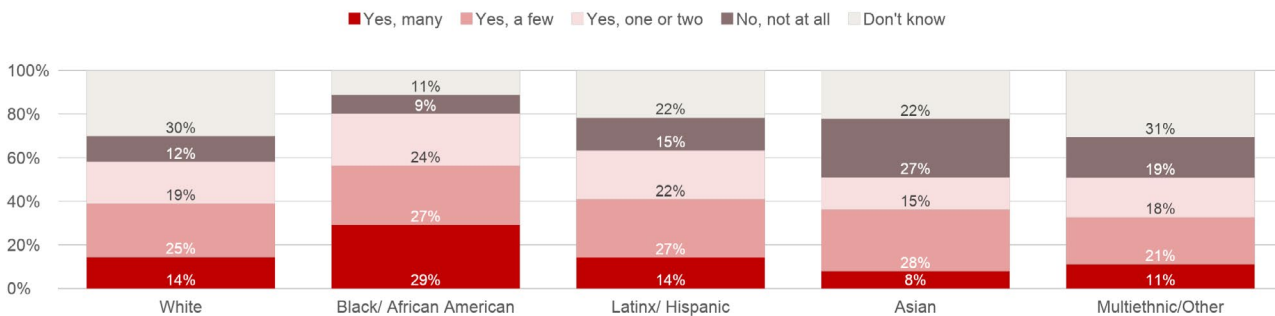
THE IMPACT OF REPRESENTATION

Black and Latinx girls’ definitions of leadership, and their interest in being leaders, stem from observing others in positions of leadership in their communities, schools, churches, and social organizations. **When Black and Latinx girls reported that they could identify leaders of their same race/ethnicity who they admired, they scored higher on the leadership scale.** Black and Latinx girls also identified that the racial representation of leaders was important to them. Black girls were the most likely to say that having Black leaders as their role models is very important. They were also the most likely (80%) to report that they have Black leaders as their role models. These findings illustrate not only how Black and Latinx girls are thinking about leadership, but also that they are specifically attuned to noticing the identities of different leaders and are actively seeking out leadership role models who share their racial/ethnic background.

How important is it for you to have leaders as your role models who are of the same race/ethnicity as you?



Are there any leaders of your race/ethnicity who you admire or who are your role models?



“

Another barrier is that we don't 'look' like or 'think' like or 'talk' like what qualifies one as a good leader. Expectations of 'good' leadership counter a lot of our own tendencies and thinking as Black/Latinx girls. So, our leadership style is not taken seriously or not received as openly as others.

- High School Black Girl

“

I think that Latinx and Black women are underrated and they should be given the recognition they deserve because they've endured many things and still continue to throughout the years. It is important to recognize that we cannot mistake their loudness as 'craziness' or anything along the lines of that. They're strong and powerful just like anybody else. Fears should not determine anything.

- High School Latinx Girl

“

Girls of color need to see other girls of color, girls like them, so they can better imagine themselves as those leaders. This only breeds more of the 'I want to be like her' type of thinking. 'If she can do it, I can do it.'

- High School Teacher, White Woman



INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS

In our study, over half of Black and Latinx girls named their teachers as a mentor and supporter of their leadership aspirations, indicating the importance of teachers in the lives of Black and Latinx girls. The racial/ethnic demographics of the sample of teachers¹⁴ in our study closely resemble the racial/ethnic demographic trends of the U.S. teaching force¹⁵, with the majority of teachers identifying as White women. We believed it was important to explore teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and potential influence on the leadership development of Black and Latinx girls given the interactions of support, and also encounters of bias that girls experienced with their teachers.

EXPLICIT TEACHER BIAS LIMITS LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACK AND LATINX GIRLS

Black teachers are more likely than White teachers to see evidence of unfair treatment of students of color in their school and in our society as a whole. 79% of Black teachers (compared to 48% of White teachers) agreed with the statement “In our society, it is more difficult to become a leader for a person of color than for a White person.” Additionally, over a third of Black teachers noted that at their schools, students of color experienced bias and unfair treatment in the form of not having the same opportunity to get leadership roles, teachers having lower expectations for students of color compared to White students, and students of color experiencing harsher disciplinary actions than White students who exhibit the same behaviors.

“

I see forms of bias against girls of color in my school. Girls of color are looked at as problematic because of behavior seen as bad...It is easy to write off something or someone as bad when you cannot relate to their actions.

— Middle School Teacher, Black Woman

IMPLICIT TEACHER BIAS UNDERMINES POTENTIAL FOR BLACK AND LATINX GIRLS TO DEVELOP AS LEADERS

Teachers identified significant external barriers to leadership for Black and Latinx girls, including lack of parental support, low socioeconomic status, and lack of adult role models of the same race/ethnicity. A lack of confidence was cited as one of the internal barriers to girls’ of color leadership aspirations. In contrast, our overall study findings show that parents are the main supporters of Black and Latinx girls’ leadership aspirations, more than half of Black and Latinx girls are able to identify a role model of the same race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and lack of confidence have no influence on Black and Latinx girls’ interest in being leaders. The disconnect between what teachers perceive as obstacles to Black and Latinx girls’ leadership development, and the fact that Black and Latinx girls identify these same factors as assets or as non-factors, suggests that some teachers are viewing the leadership potential of Black and Latinx girls through a deficit-oriented, rather than asset-based lens—an active form of implicit bias.

“

I think some barriers have to do with poverty, fewer resources, and of course the fact that racism is still extremely prevalent amongst our nation today. With funding for education and community programs constantly being cut, their resources have become even fewer over the years. A lot of the time girls of color do not begin at the same starting line as Caucasian girls because they are economically disadvantaged or don't have the same parental support and expectations at home.

– Middle School Teacher, Multiracial Woman

The barriers identified by teachers, along with deficit-oriented thinking about Black and Latinx girls' leadership potential, reflect societal and systemic structures of inequity, not the individual faults of Black or Latinx girls or their parents/caregivers. The perception that Black and Latinx girls do not seek leadership opportunities; that their parents are not able to support their daughters' leadership; that girls lack adult role models of the same race/ethnicity; and that these are the effects of low socio-economic status demand a deeper interrogation of how racism, sexism, and classism manifest in our schools and in larger society.

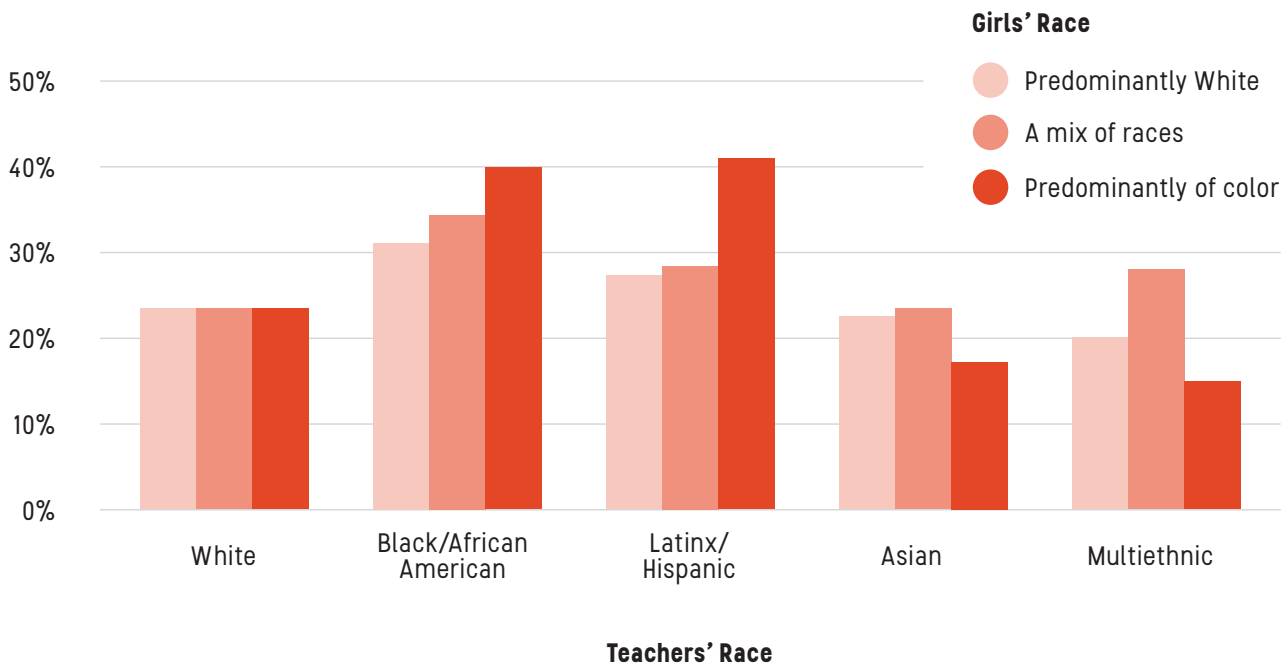
Which barriers for leadership development do girls of color in your school face?



THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF TEACHERS ON BLACK & LATINX GIRLS' LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The majority of teachers surveyed in the study (71%) stated that it is very or extremely important that their students develop leadership skills. Significantly, 90% of Black teachers agreed with the importance of their students developing leadership skills. Additionally, over half of teachers (59%) believe that leadership skills are important for students' success in life. Teachers believe that the development of leadership skills for students could have the benefits of gaining confidence, getting important experiences, learning organizational skills, and becoming a role model to other students. We also found that **Black and Latinx girls are more likely to score high on the leadership scale – especially if their schools have more teachers of color.** Black and Latinx girls score higher on the leadership scale than girls of other races/ethnicities even if they are in schools with predominantly White teachers. However, in schools with predominantly teachers of color, Black and Latinx girls score even higher on the leadership scale. These findings further underscore research that has highlighted the significant positive impact of the presence of teachers of color on students' sense of well-being, achievement, and overall academic outcomes¹⁶.

Percentage of Girls Scoring High on Leadership Scale (RRSL) by Teachers' Race



“

When I was leading my school’s Multicultural Club our new moderator gave me the space to do whatever it was that I needed to lead effectively—during meetings, she rarely said a word unless it was to support me or other students or to contribute as a member. She always checked in with the club and then me alone when she had to report/represent the club as a moderator during faculty meetings. Adults who just offer support/protection/allyship to me however they can whether by listening, offering insights, or providing resources (financial or otherwise), are supporting my leadership, not overshadowing it or undermining it.

— High School Black Girl

“

My social studies leader: She believes in DACA, she is a Dreamer, she encourages us to be leaders, she knows I like to debate in class—it’s not rude to debate; she encouraged me.

— Middle School Latinx Girl

RECOMMENDATIONS





PROMOTING OPTIMAL CONDITIONS FOR BLACK & LATINX GIRLS TO LEAD

Our study findings point to the need for interventions in the areas of **awareness, activation, and action** in order to support Black and Latinx girls and their leadership potential and aspirations. Though Black and Latinx girls demonstrate an interest in being leaders in their schools and communities, they reported experiencing racial- and gender-biased interactions with teachers and peers, as well as broader societal messages that communicate to them that they are not meant to be leaders. The following recommendations are essential to nurturing the leadership skills and accomplishments of Black and Latinx girls:

AWARENESS

With over half of the population of girls in the U.S. identifying as girls of color, schools, girl-focused organizations, and policymakers must shift the lens of their focus by moving away from relying on data that centers the experiences of White, cisgender, and often middle-class girls, and instead lead discussions, conduct research, and develop policy with the strengths of, needs of, and supports for girls of color as drivers for their work. Black and Latinx girls, and their parents/caregivers, need to be positioned as experts, with their feedback, reflections, and questions about their experiences functioning as a valuable resource for curriculum, program, and policy changes moving forward.

“

Things people should know about Black and Latinx girls' leadership would be that it is not an easy thing to be a leader, but it is harder when society is against you. This is why Black and Latinx girls need encouragement from people in their lives that tell them, 'Yes you can do it,' instead of, 'No you can't.' I think we need more role models that look like Black and Latinx girls in their youth.

— High School Latinx Girl

ACTIVATION

In our study, more than half the teachers reported that they have never had professional development training in leadership or in gender equity in education. However, 41% of teachers reported being very or extremely interested in participating in professional development sessions focused on leadership development for students. To combat teacher bias and discrimination in Black and Latinx girls' leadership development, we must invest in teacher training in anti-biased education, gender equity, and social change. Additionally, teacher training focused on culturally responsive girl-centered leadership development must also include curriculum support, where teachers have the time and space not only to develop curriculum, but successfully implement it as well.

“

I would like my students to become future leaders and to gain this experience while in school. I believe it is important for them to start now, having responsibilities, dealing with authority, as well as delegating responsibilities to others. The experience gained in school can help them get jobs where they are in leadership positions.

— High School Teacher, Black Woman

ACTION

Schools, community-based organizations, and girl-focused nonprofits serve as key touchpoints for the leadership development of Black and Latinx girls. Supporting Black and Latinx girls requires adopting a holistic approach that includes an anti-racist, healing-centered, gender inclusive stance towards leadership. For many organizations, moving toward this perspective would be a fundamental shift in practice. A commitment to organizational transformation requires focused reviews of current practices, policies, programs, and procedures through intersectional and justice-centered lenses. It also requires a mission-driven commitment to ensure that leaders and decision-makers of all levels within schools or organizations engage in trainings and develop practices that examine and interrogate implicit and explicit systems of bias and oppression.

“

I think that we have to know that it is important to create spaces that advocate for the importance of Black and Latinx girls in regards to leadership because it is not as common as we think in society. There are still underlying issues that come to affect Latinx and Black women in the U.S whether it's through job processes, education, or even day-to-day things such as getting groceries. Those are the issues we have to bring up and talk about. Because if you don't, it goes unnoticed and the next thing you know, you're probably involuntarily feeding into it without even knowing.

– High School Latinx Girl

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

Black and Latinx girls have the power to lead and be influential decision-makers in our society. Schools, girls-centered organizations, and policymakers have the ability to push back against and dismantle the internal and external barriers that prevent Black and Latinx girls from fully activating their potential. We call on you to join us in continuing to build a leadership pipeline for Black and Latinx girls that begins in girlhood and creates a path for growth and development throughout adolescence and into young adulthood.

“

From my experiences in watching Black and Latinx girls lead, having been led by Black and Latinx girls, and having led as a Black girl myself—I think we lead with authenticity, candor, and heart in a way that we don’t see from a lot of other leaders. I feel like we don’t put on airs in our leadership—we lead with our whole selves. This leaves us very vulnerable, but also makes us very valuable.

— High School Black Girl

FOOTNOTES & REFERENCES

FOOTNOTES

¹ Catalyst (2020); LeanIn (2019); McKinsey (2019)

² Warner, Ellman, & Boesch (2018)

³ Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula (2016)

⁴ Girl Scouts (2017)

⁵ Roets (1986)

⁶ Though Fluent uses the term “Hispanic” as a reference to a racial/ethnic category in their graphics, we have decided to use the term “Latinx” to be more inclusive of those individuals who may not identify as Hispanic. Please see the Glossary at the end of the report for further explanation.

⁷ Since Asian girls were only 11%, or 220 of the participants, the participant pool is too small to represent larger patterns. We recommend that another study be conducted to focus on Asian girls and disaggregate the data to better understand cultural correlations and implications.

⁸ Girl Scouts (2019)

⁹ African American Policy Forum (2015)

¹⁰ Epstein, Blake, & González (2017)

¹¹ Morris (2016)

¹² African American Policy Forum (2015)

¹³ Epstein, Blake, & González (2017)

¹⁴ Research Study teacher demographics: Gender: 68% female, 32% male; Race: 89% White, 5% Black/African-American, 5% Hispanic/Latinx, 2% Asian, 3% Multiethnic

¹⁵ U.S. teacher demographics: Gender: 76% female, 23% male; Race: 80% White, 6% Black/African-American, 9% Hispanic/Latinx, 2% Asian, 1.7% Two or More Races (Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2020)

¹⁶ Egalite & Kisida (2018); Wright (2015)

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APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

BLACK / AFRICAN-AMERICAN

In this report, we work under the understanding that although “Black” is a term that is often attributed to race, and not ethnicity, Blauner (1992) points out that as a result of the legacy of racism within the U.S., “Black Americans” form both a race and an ethnic group—an ethnic group being defined as “a group that shares a belief in its common past” and a group whose members “hold a set of common memories that make them feel that their customs, culture, and outlook are distinctive” (p. 7). In this report we use both terms of “African-American” and “Black”; we use the term “Black” to be more inclusive of those participants who may not particularly identify as “African-American”, yet feel that they identify under the larger umbrella of the term “Black”.

GIRL

For the purposes of this study, we define a girl as any female-identified individual between the ages of 12 and 18, including cisgender girls, femmes, and transgender girls.

GIRLS OF COLOR

In this report, we define girls of color as any individual who identifies as a girl and identifies as not White. This includes girls who identify as African-American or Black, Asian or Asian-American, Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latinx, Multiracial, or Native American or Alaskan Native.

HISPANIC / LATINX

Quoting Dr. Monique Morris in her book, *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues* (2019), “The U.S. Census collects and reports data for “Hispanic” populations as an ethnicity, rather than as a racial group. As such, people of Latinx/Hispanic descent may also be included among populations characterized as Black, White, Asian, Indigenous, or Other.” (p. 9). For the purposes of this study, we asked participants to self-identify as Hispanic or Latinx, and use that identity as a separate category of racial/ethnic demographic analysis for our study sample.

LEADERSHIP

At Girls Leadership, leadership is defined as making others and situations better as a result of your presence, and making that impact last in your absence. We practice this at interpersonal, intrapersonal, and societal levels.

ROETS RATING SCALE FOR LEADERSHIP (RRSL)

Developed in 1986, the Roets Rating Scale for Leadership (RRSL) is a 26-item self-reporting instrument for young people ages 10–18. Participants are asked to rate themselves on a 5-point scale (almost always, quite often, sometimes, not very often, never) in different areas of leadership aspiration and experiences.

GRAPHS

Figure 1

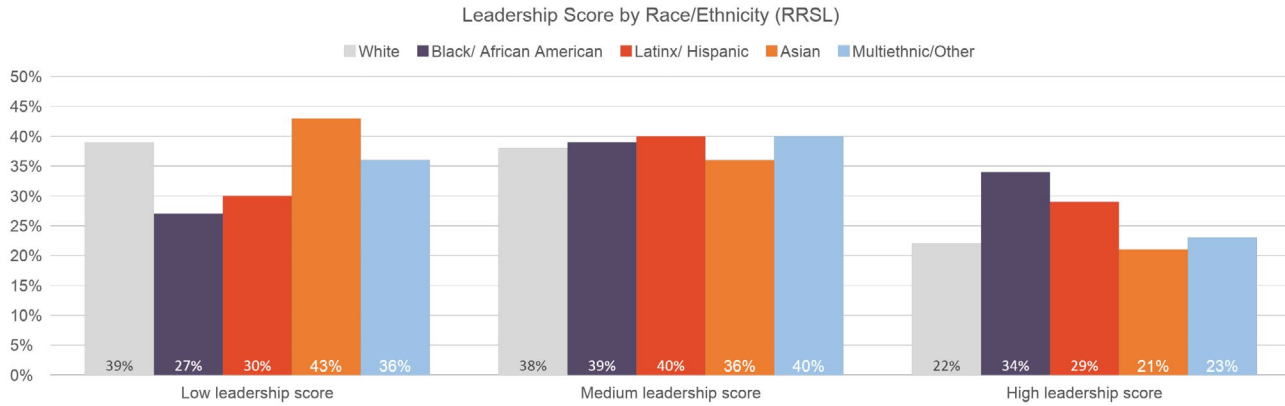


Figure 2

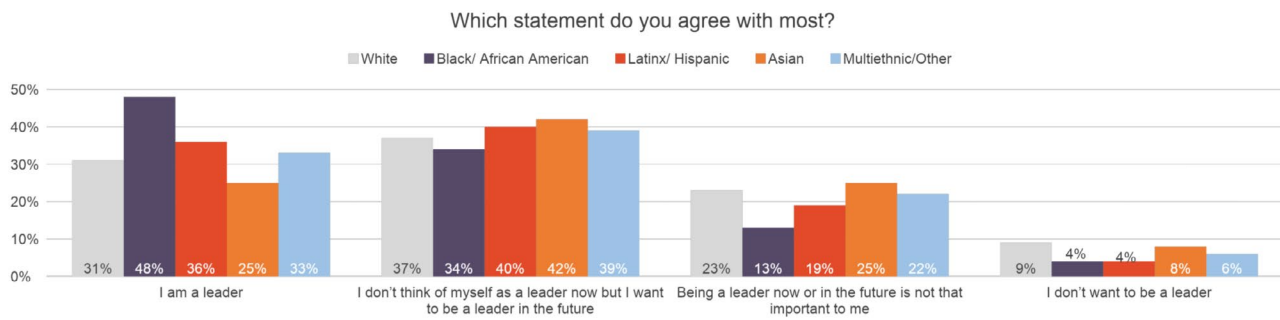
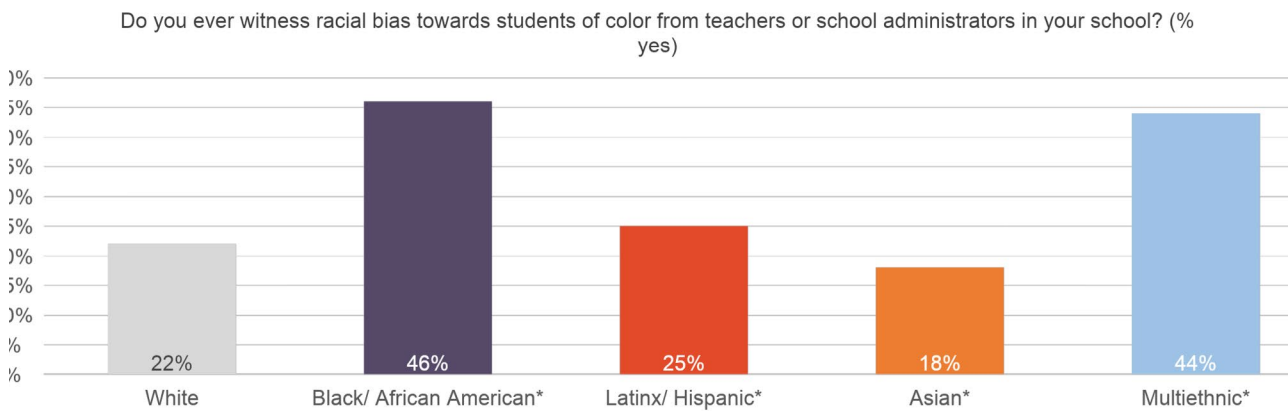


Figure 3



STUDY SAMPLE DESCRIPTIONS

GIRLS SAMPLE: 2,012 GIRLS

Age:

12-13 - 32%

14-15 - 31%

16-18 - 37%

Grade:

Middle school - 40%

High school - 60%

Race/ethnicity:

White - 30%

Black/African-American - 25%

Hispanic/Latinx - 19%

Asian - 11%

Multiethnic/Other - 15%

Regions:

Northeast - 16%

Midwest - 18%

South - 41%

West - 25%

Asian Girls' ancestry

China - 31%

Philippines - 21%

India - 15%

Korea - 13%

Japan - 11%

Vietnam - 8%

Latinx Girls' ancestry

Mexico - 57%

Caribbean - 13%

Cuban - 6%

South America - 6%

Central America - 5%

Other - 14%

Born in the US: 96%

TEACHER SAMPLE: 601 TEACHERS

Gender:

Male - 32%

Female - 68%

Grades:

Middle school - 36%

High school - 48%

Other (e.g., K-12) - 16%

School Type:

Public non-charter - 77%

Public charter - 8%

Private - 15%

Co-ed - 99%, all-girls - 1%

Subjects:

ELA - 33%

Math - 30%

Social studies - 23%

Science - 20%

Government/history - 8%

Regions:

Northeast - 22%

Midwest - 23%

South - 37%

West - 17%

Location:

Urban - 35%

Suburban - 33%

Rural - 31%

Title 1 Eligible:

Yes - 58%

No - 27%

Don't know - 14%

Schools' Student Body:

Predominantly White - 45%

A mix of races - 24%

Predominantly of color - 31%

Schools' Faculty:

Predominantly White - 75%

A mix of races - 16%

Predominantly of color - 9%

Teachers' Tenure:

5 years or less - 15%

6-10 years - 17%

11-20 years - 33%

More than 20 years - 35%

Teachers' Race:

White - 89%

Black/African-American - 5%

Hispanic/Latinx - 5%

Asian - 2%

Multiethnic/Other - 3%

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM ROETS RATING SCALE FOR LEADERSHIP

Below is a list of sentences that describe how people feel or act. Read each phrase and indicate how often you feel or act that way.

1 Almost always **2** Quite often **3** Sometimes **4** Not very often **5** Never

- ___ I have strong convictions about things.
- ___ When I believe in something, I work to promote it.
- ___ I listen to both sides of the issue before I make up my mind.
- ___ I have self-confidence.
- ___ I am able to say my opinions in public.
- ___ I usually am satisfied with the decisions I make.
- ___ When I am criticized for some action I have taken, I can usually go about my work.
- ___ I like to be in charge of events.
- ___ I am able to see what materials are needed to complete a project.
- ___ I am able to see the sequence of steps necessary to complete a project.
- ___ When I am convinced of something, I have courage to act for it.
- ___ I often lead in projects.
- ___ When I see somebody who is a leader, I think that I could do as well as that leader.
- ___ I can speak to persons in authority.
- ___ I have energy to complete projects that I am interested in completing.
- ___ I can understand the viewpoints of others.
- ___ I am willing to change my mind if new facts suggest that I should change my mind.
- ___ I get anxious and excited and am able to use this energy to complete a task.
- ___ I am able to work with many types of persons and personalities.
- ___ I usually understand the plot of a story or play or the main point in a conversation.
- ___ I am willing to try new experiences when these seem wise.
- ___ I know when to lead, to follow and to get out of the way.
- ___ I admire people who have achieved great things.
- ___ I dream of the day and time when I am able to lead myself or others to great accomplishments.
- ___ I feel at ease asking people for help or information.
- ___ I can be a “peacemaker” if I want to be.

GIRLS
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