



## RESEARCH SUMMARY—WHAT AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS SAY

*Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* brings the voice of girls ages 8 to 17 to the forefront on a broad spectrum of issues related to leadership: how they define it, their experiences, and their aspirations. (Boys were also included for comparison purposes.)

What follows is what African American girls are clearly saying: We need to “change it up” in how we define and think about leadership.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

## INSIGHT #1

### GIRLS ARE REDEFINING LEADERSHIP IN MEANINGFUL TERMS

**For African American girls, preferred definitions of leadership imply personal principles, ethical behavior, and the ability to effect social change.**

- Being a leader is important to 70% of African American, 66% of Latina, and 56% of Asian American girls compared to 49% of Caucasian girls.
- Primarily, African American girls want to be the kind of leader who stands up for her beliefs and values (88%), brings people together to get things done (87%), and tries to change the world for the better (83%).

**African American youth are driven to leadership for different reasons. African American girls are more likely to be driven by altruistic motives, whereas African American boys are more likely to be driven by power and money.**

- African American girls cite wanting to help other people (41% vs. 32%), be a role model for others (38% vs. 27%), share knowledge and skills with others (35% vs. 30%), and change the world for the better (32% vs. 17%) more than African American boys as reasons why they might want to be a leader.
- Even though African American girls believe that being a leader will help them to help others, they also believe it will help them develop useful skills and qualities (37% vs. 26%) and to be successful in life (38% vs. 30%) more so than African American boys.
- African American boys, however, more so than African American girls, say that being a leader will help them be their own boss (28% vs. 24%), be in charge (26% vs. 21%), and make more money (25% vs. 21%).

## INSIGHT #2

### SELF-CONFIDENCE + SKILLS = NEW GIRL LEADERS

**African American girls report high self-regard on a number of leadership skills and qualities and are likely to aspire to leadership.**

- The desire to be a leader is higher among African American (53%), Asian American (59%), and Latina girls (50%) compared to Caucasian girls (34%).
- Nine out of ten (90%) of African American girls agree that no matter who they are, girls can learn to be good leaders, and 72% believe that girls can be leaders whether or not they are in positions of authority.

**At the same time, the greatest single barrier to leadership seems to be low self-regard about certain skills and qualities.**

- For the small percentage of African American youth who are not interested in leadership, African American girls cite fear of speaking in front of others (32%) less than Latina (43%) and Caucasian girls (47%); shyness (32%) more than Latina girls (29%) yet less than Caucasian girls (46%); and fear of people not liking them (25%) more than Latina girls (10%) yet less than Caucasian girls (29%).
- African American boys cite fear of speaking in front of others (28%) more than Latino boys (21%) yet less than Caucasian boys (45%); shyness (28%) more than Latino boys (24%) and Caucasian boys (25%); and fear of failure (28%) more than Latino (21%) and Caucasian boys (24%).

## INSIGHT #3

### OPPORTUNITIES + EXPERIENCES + SUPPORT = NEW GIRL LEADERS

**Families, particularly mothers, are a major positive influence on African American girls' leadership aspirations. So are their fathers, relatives, teachers, and friends. Classmates and peers, on the other hand, tend to play more of a negative role.**

- More than eight in ten (82%) African American girls say their mothers encourage them to be leaders, followed by fathers and teachers (59%), friends (51%), and older relatives (50%). However, 44% of African American girls report having been discouraged or put down, usually by peers and classmates (60%), when they were trying to lead.
- More than three-quarters (78%) of African American girls have had an opportunity to be a leader, largely at school (86%), home (42%), church (31%), and as part of a club or organization (26%). Of these girls, the large majority (89%) says their most recent experience being a leader was a positive one.

**Yet, African American girls relate that environments in which they can develop leadership skills are scarce and do not empower them to effect change.**

- Fewer than one-quarter (22%) of African American girls feel empowered to effect change at school, followed by at home (20%), in their neighborhoods (15%), and in their peer groups (14%). After-school environments rated significantly lower at 6%.

## INSIGHT #4

### GIRLS HAVE A RANGE OF LEADERSHIP IDENTITIES

The proportion of youth with high leadership motivations and self-perceptions is greater among African American and Latino youth, and Asian American girls than among Caucasian youth, as seen in the following leadership identity categories. (The subsample of Asian girls is too small to make the results conclusive.)

- **LEADERSHIP VANGUARD: 49% African American, 47% Latina, 31% Caucasian, 50% Asian American girls.** These youth already think of themselves as leaders and actively desire to be leaders. They have the highest self-confidence, higher focus on academic, personal, and career success, and high social change values.
- **AMBIVALENT LEADERS: 25% African American, 24% Latina, 26% Caucasian, 16% Asian American girls.** These youth think of themselves as leaders and would not mind being leaders, although leadership is not expressly a goal for them. They share most of the attributes and behaviors of Vanguard leaders, only to a lesser degree.
- **HOPEFULS: 4% African American, 3% Latina, 4% Caucasian, 9% Asian American girls.** These youth want to be leaders but do not think of themselves as leaders. They are not as confident as the Vanguard leaders, or even the Ambivalent leaders.
- **UNMOTIVATED: 15% African American, 20% Latina, 22% Caucasian, 22% Asian American girls.** These youth would not mind being leaders but do not think of themselves as leaders. They have relatively low self-confidence and are unmotivated in pursuing leadership opportunities.
- **REJECTERS: 5% African American, 5% Latina, 10% Caucasian, 3% Asian American girls.** These youth do not want to be leaders and do not think of themselves as leaders. This group has the lowest self-confidence, feels powerless to change the world, and is more likely to believe that leadership cannot be learned.

## METHODOLOGY

The study combined qualitative and quantitative research from the Girl Scout Research Institute and Fluent, a New York-based research firm. In January of 2007, researchers conducted focus groups and ethnographies with 165 girls, boys, and mothers in four regions across the country. Upon completion of the qualitative research, a nationwide online survey was administered to a national stratified sample of 2,475 girls and 1,514 boys between the ages of 8 and 17 years. The online survey was fielded from June 22, 2007 to June 29, 2007. The margin of error did not exceed 1.5%. The sample was weighted to reflect the U.S. Census representation of racial/ethnic groups among the target-age population.

In addition, due to the underrepresentation of African American and Latina households with lower income in online panels, supplementary mall-intercept interviews were conducted. A total of 649 African American and Latino preteen and teen youth were interviewed at 15 locations across the country in urban, suburban, and rural localities. The data from this sample were used to provide additional insight into correlations between race and various aspects of attitudes toward leadership and leadership aspirations.

**GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA (GSUSA)** is the preeminent organization for and leading authority on girls, with 3.6 million girl and adult members. Now in its 96th year, Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

**GIRL SCOUT RESEARCH INSTITUTE (GSRI)**, formed in 2000, is a center for research and public policy information on the healthy development of girls. Through conducting groundbreaking research, the main goal of the GSRI is to elevate the voices of girls on key issues that affect their lives—such as their emotional and physical health and safety. The GSRI originates national projects and initiatives, synthesizes existing research, and conducts outcomes evaluation to support the development of Girl Scout programs and to provide information to educational institutions, not-for-profits, government agencies, public policy organizations, parents seeking ways to support their daughters, and girls themselves. The GSRI includes staff and advisers who have expertise in child development and also includes advisors from academia, industry, government, and not-for-profit organizations.

**GSUSA'S PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY OFFICE**, located in Washington, D.C., educates representatives of the legislative and executive branches of federal, state, and local government and advocates for public policy issues important to girls and Girl Scouting.

Source: *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008)