

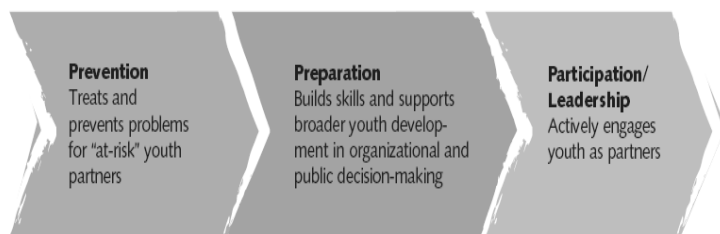
The Girl Scout Research Institute has released a major report which explores girls' leadership—what it means to girls, what kinds of experiences are most beneficial to them, and how best to provide the most meaningful leadership experiences for girls.

### I. Introduction

- Most people think of individuals in hierarchically defined positions when they think of leadership—this is often described as the 'male model.'
- The youth leadership field is moving from that idea to a more participatory and inclusive approach with a focus on a commitment to changing communities or the world at large.

### II. What is a youth leadership approach?

While traditionally, youth programs have sought to “serve” youth as passive recipients, young people are now taking an active role in their personal and leadership development in organizations with a youth leadership approach.



Continuum of Broad Approaches to Youth Development

#### A. Common Misperceptions About Youth Leadership:

**Misperception:** Adults are open to youth participation

**Reality:** Many adults have misgivings and negative biases about youth in general, especially doubting their commitment or ability to make a significant impact.

**Misperception:** Young people aren't motivated or skilled enough to get involved in community action.

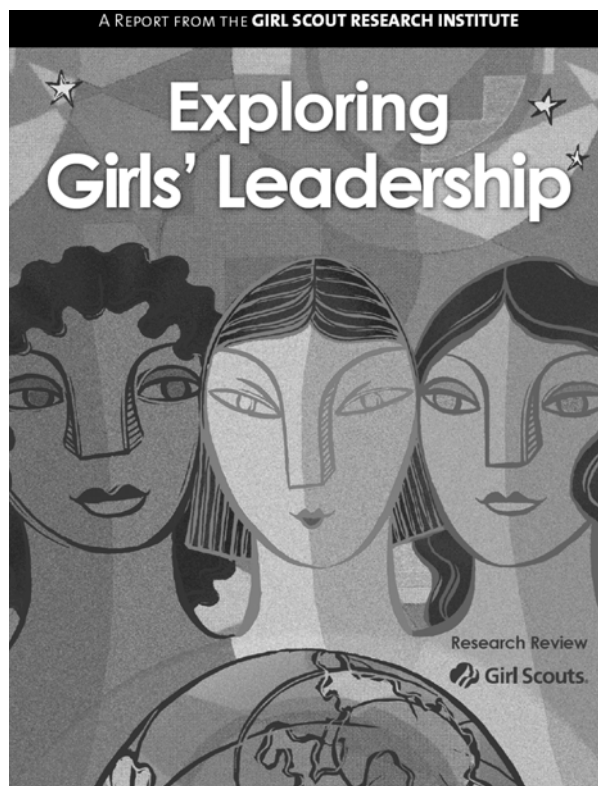
**Reality:** Studies show they have a strong interest in community and political issues, especially when they believe they can make a difference.

**Misperception:** Effectively engaging youth means asking a few to participate.

**Reality:** Placing a few youth on adults boards or committees is oftentimes just a token representation.

**Misperception:** Youth leadership requires little adult involvement

**Reality:** Adults play an important role in youth leadership programs.



#### B. Ingredients for Youth Leadership:

1. Meaningful participation opportunities
2. Meaningful youth-adult partnerships
3. Organizational commitment to youth leadership principles
4. Community support

#### C. Youth Leadership Outcomes:

1. Benefits to youth include:
  - Improves attitudes related to school and work
  - Positive effects on interpersonal skills, social development
  - Becomes a gateway to future civic action
  - Decreases the likelihood of participation in risky behaviors
2. Benefits to adults working with youth include:
  - Adult attitudes about youth ability can change
  - Deeper understanding of the needs, concerns, and issues affecting youth today
3. Benefits to organizations include:
  - Recruiting and retaining older and more “at risk” youth
  - Providing support for young people at the same or greater level than traditional youth-serving organizations
  - More clarity about the organization's mission
  - Increased legitimacy to funding agencies' commitment to promoting youth development

4. Benefits to the community:

- Youth make a significant community impact

### III. What Leadership Means to Girls

Specific conditions promote girls' growth and positive development:

- Safe and supportive space to develop their voice and values
- Opportunities to develop critical thinking skills to analyze the world around them
- Opportunities to connect with other girls, young women, and adults

#### A. Single-Sex Environments

Girls-only "safe spaces" promote:

- A greater "can do" attitude
- Greater impact on young women's social self-confidence
- More leadership opportunities

#### B. Girls' Voices on Leadership

According to girls, the actions a good leader takes are:

- Gaining consensus
- Making decisions
- Listening well
- Preparing and organizing
- Resolving conflicts
- Speaking in front of others
- Taking charge
- Taking responsibility
- Teaching others
- Serving as a role model

#### C. Girls, Leadership, and Relationships

- Girls will often sacrifice their own voice for the sake of "saving relationships" with their friends
- Many girls fear for their emotional safety (being teased, speaking up in class, trying new things) than their physical safety
- Many girls choose not to become leaders because they fear making decisions, having different ideas, or appearing too achievement-oriented
- Girls fear "getting judged" by their peers

#### D. Lessons in Leadership from Girls

- In general, girls say that there are no differences in a male or female's ability to be a good leader
- 52 percent of girls admire "the same number of men and women" for being a good leader
- 28 percent of girls admire mostly women leaders

However, girls have concerns about leadership including:

- Being in charge all of the time (61%)
- Getting a lot of attention (51%)

- Having a lot of power and authority (45%)
- Having a lot of responsibility (36%)

### E. Leadership Changes with Age

1. Elementary School—Girls lead with action
  - Help younger children
  - Be a good friend/role model
  - Teach other children
2. Middle School—Girls lead with voice
  - Good communication skills
  - Speaking up for themselves
  - Resolving conflicts
  - Influencing others
3. High School—Girls lead with vision
  - Resolving conflicts
  - Being clear on values/actions
  - Comfortable making decisions
  - Communicating with others
  - Planning and organizing
  - Having a sense of purpose
  - Positive attitude toward change

### F. Girls' Leadership Approaches

Both the "being in charge" and the collaborative activity are beneficial and one approach does not exclude the other. Three strategies were identified that reflect aspects of both approaches:

1. Leadership through voice and culture: building girls' ability to use their voices in celebrating their culture
2. Leadership through social action/change: community action that affects the environments girls participate in
3. Leadership through traditional achievement: building girls' competencies, skills and qualities so that they can advance in the world.

### IV. Ideas for Future Research include:

- The aspirational gap
- Broadening the definitions of leadership
- "Healthy" leadership and balance
- "Defining moments" in leadership
- Relationships and leadership

### V. Conclusion

With ongoing research and a renewed leadership development program for girls, Girl Scouts is capitalizing on the opportunity that exists in the youth and girl development field to promote the kinds of programs and opportunities that speak specifically to girls on issues of personal growth and leadership development.