girl scouts

The State of Girls:
Unfinished Business

Executive Summary

Acknowledgements

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"Kudos to the Girl Scouts of the USA for not only compiling a compelling portrait of girls in the United States, but also for reminding us of the many strengths and capabilities in these girls that are too easily overlooked in a culture that too often obsesses on young people's problems without recognizing, nurturing, and celebrating their gifts and contributions.

Anyone who doubts the strengths of today's young people needs to read this report. It reminds us about the many young women from all backgrounds who are already making positive contributions to their families, schools, and communities—and who are preparing to be a new generation of committed, inspiring, and powerful leaders."

Eugene C. Roehlkepartain
Vice President, Research and Development
Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota

The State of Girls: Unfinished Business is a groundbreaking report from the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) that stakes out key issues and major trends affecting girls' healthy development in the United States today. A report of this magnitude and breadth has never been conducted, making it a much-needed resource in the field.

This work is motivated by the desire to ensure that every girl has the opportunity to become a healthy and productive woman who can be a leader in her own life and in the world at large. We hope the findings will be used to drive policy and program decisions and that nonprofit organizations, government, and industry will connect what we know about how girls are faring to the resources that will best support them and their families.

Conducted in conjunction with the Population Reference Bureau, the report contains current national statistical indicators focused on key issues such as the health, safety, and educational achievement of girls, as well as demographic trends.

These data are grouped in a way that will be useful to a broad public audience that includes Girl Scout councils, educators, policy makers, nonprofit leaders, parents of girls, concerned community leaders, media, and girls themselves.

There is promising news for girls regarding their educational attainment; extracurricular, volunteer, and pro-social activities; reduction of risk behaviors; and connection to the digital world. However, the report also demonstrates that many girls are being left behind: they struggle in their everyday lives at school, at home, and in other social environments with issues such as relational aggression, bullying, depression, and even suicidal ideation.

As well, not all girls are faring the same. In particular, black/African American and Hispanic/Latina girls face significant challenges in making successful transitions to adulthood. Poverty and a lack of resources limit many Hispanic/Latina and black/African American girls from having access to good healthcare, nutrition, and general wellness; the opportunity to prioritize education; and the chance to explore constructive extracurricular activities. However, we know that "data is not destiny," and Girl Scouting is committed to ensuring all girls reach their full potential.

Setting the Stage: Millennial America

The number of girls in the U.S. population continues to increase, and the racial/ethnic composition of girls is changing rapidly. By 2020, nearly half of all girls ages 5 to 17 will be racial/ethnic minorities.

- In particular, **Hispanics/Latinas currently make up more than one in five girls ages 5 to 17, and by 2020 they are projected to make up 27 percent of girls in that age group**.

- Furthermore, **a growing number of girls today are living in immigrant families**. Nearly one-fourth live in immigrant families in which one or both parents were born outside of the United States.

Changing demographics in the U.S. indicate that girls will have different needs in the future. For example, foreign-born parents have fewer economic resources, on average, than U.S.-born parents. Language barriers in immigrant families can also affect children's school achievement and access to public benefits, including critical health services.

Distribution of Girls Ages 5 to 17 by Race/Ethnicity 2000–2030

Year	White*	Black*	American Indian*	Asian and Pacific Islander*	Two or More Races*	Hispanic or Latino
2000	62	15	1	4	2	16
2010	54	14	1	5	3	22
2020	51	13	1	5	3	27
2030	47	13	1	5	4	31

Legend: Hispanic or Latino · Two or More Races* · Asian and Pacific Islander* · American Indian* · Black* · White*

*Non-Hispanic
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and National Population Projections
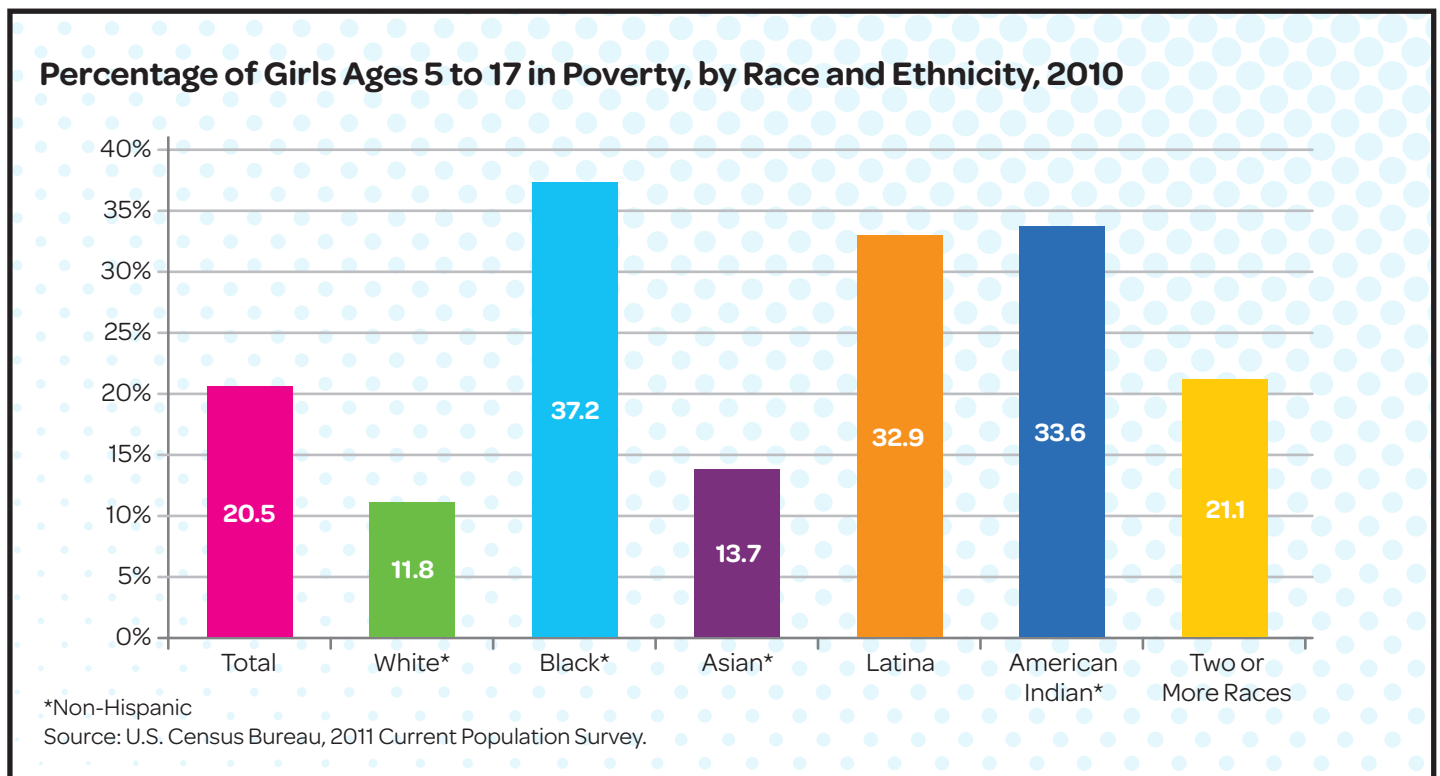
Notes: Percentages and racial/ethnic categories in the charts and graphs are reported in the same manner as they are in the sources. Percentages in the charts and graphs do not always total 100% due to rounding. In the narrative of the report the following categories are used: Asian American, American Indian, Black/African American, White, and Hispanic/Latina.

Economic Well-Being

- **Poverty is a critical issue for girls in this country, as one in five girls lives below the poverty line, and fully 42 percent of girls live in low-income families**. The majority of low-income families include at least one full-time worker, so having a job does not always provide enough money to make ends meet.

- In 2010, poverty rates ranged from 12 percent among white girls to 37 percent among black/African American girls.

Girls growing up in poor families confront a number of significant physical, emotional, and behavioral risks that girls living in more affluent families do not. Policies need to be in place to minimize poverty and afford girls opportunities that optimize their healthy development.

Percentage of Girls Ages 5 to 17 in Poverty, by Race and Ethnicity, 2010

Category	Value
Total	20.5
White*	11.8
Black*	37.2
Asian*	13.7
Latina	32.9
American Indian*	33.6
Two or More Races	21.1

*Non-Hispanic
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 Current Population Survey.

Physical Health

- **While most girls have access to health insurance through their parents' employment or through public insurance programs, Hispanic/Latina girls are significantly less likely to be covered**. Seventeen percent of Hispanic/Latina girls were without health insurance coverage in 2010, compared with 11 percent of black/African American girls and 7 percent of white girls. Hispanic/Latina girls were also less likely to have care through their parents' employer compared with girls in other racial/ethnic groups.

- **Childhood obesity rates have risen sharply in recent years.** Black/African American girls were the most likely to be overweight or obese in 2010 (44 percent), compared with 41 percent of Hispanic/Latina girls and 26 percent of white girls.

Physical health and wellness is critical to girls' development, academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment, happiness, and overall well-being. All girls need access to health care, better access to healthy food, and opportunities for exercise and physical activity.

Percentage of Girls Ages 5 to 17 Who Are Overweight or Obese, by Race and Ethnicity, 2010
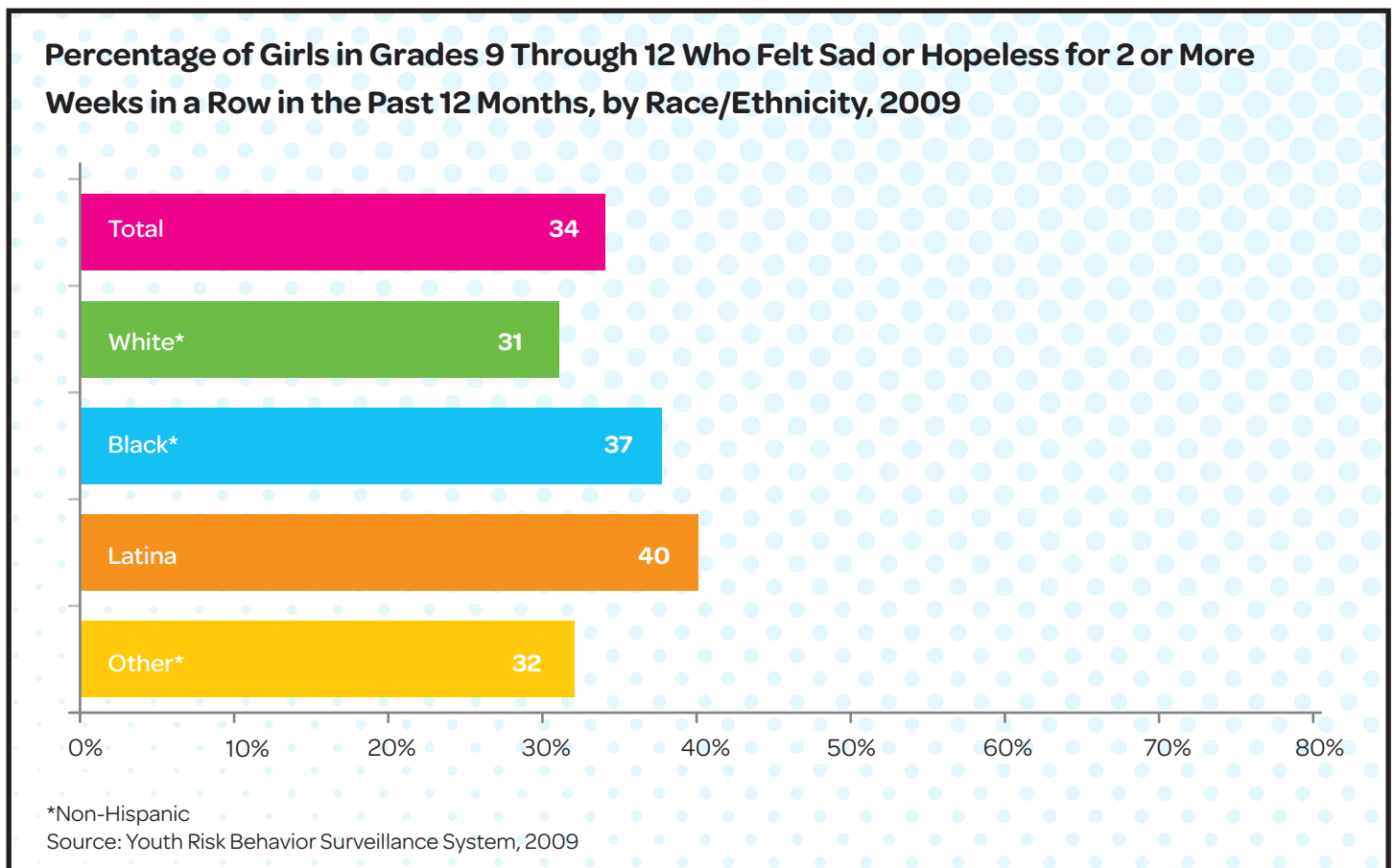
	Overweight	Obese	Total
Total	16	17	33
White*	13	13	26
Black*	18	26	44
Hispanic	21	20	41
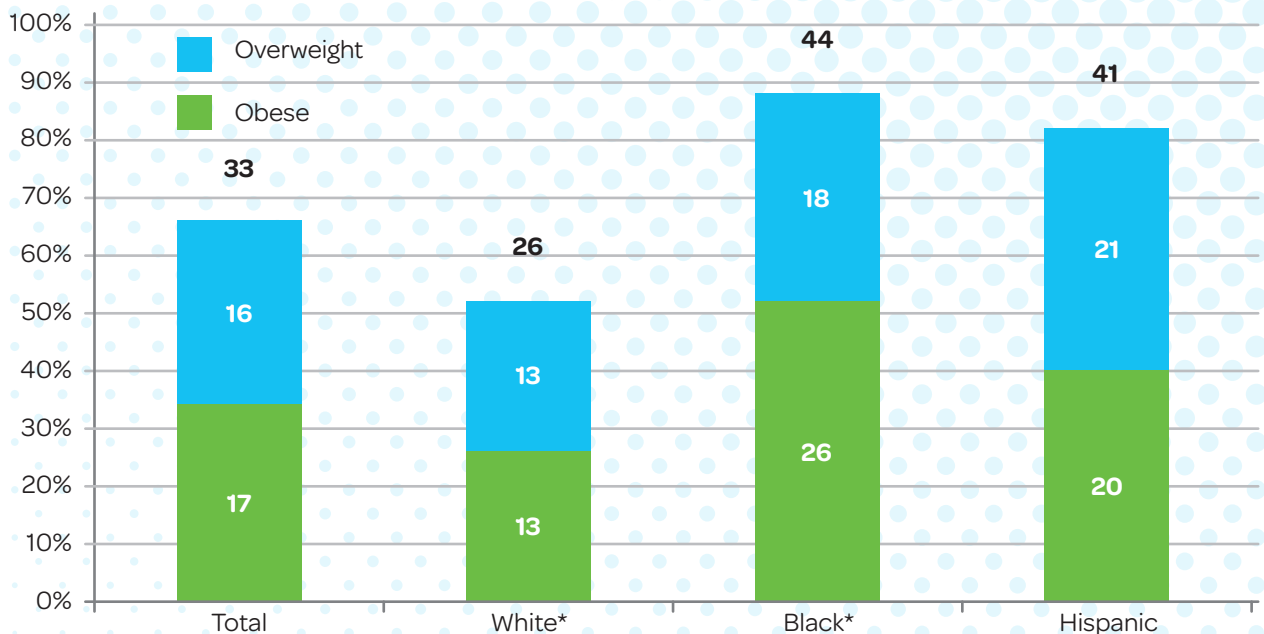
*Non-Hispanic
Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2009–2010

Emotional Health

- **Girls' self-reported rates of depression are higher than rates reported by girls' parents.** Thirty-four percent of high school girls had self-reported symptoms of depression during the past year.

- **Suicide among girls is relatively rare, but a moderately high proportion of high school girls *consider* committing suicide.** About 18 percent of all high school girls report that they have seriously considered attempting suicide in the last year.

- **Although many girls report that they have friends and adults that they can trust and turn to at school, about 30 percent of girls reported some sort of bullying or aggression from their peers.** Physical bullying is more common among boys, while relational aggression is more common among girls. These behaviors can have lasting effects on a girl's standing within her peer group and can be damaging to her self-esteem.

It is imperative to promote self-confidence and mental health at young ages and be able to recognize signs of depression or other mental health issues, as research has shown that mental health issues in childhood and adolescence persist into adulthood.

Percentage of Girls in Grades 9 Through 12 Who Felt Sad or Hopeless for 2 or More Weeks in a Row in the Past 12 Months, by Race/Ethnicity, 2009

Category	Percentage
Total	34
White*	31
Black*	37
Latina	40
Other*	32

*Non-Hispanic
Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2009

Teenage Pregnancy

- **The teen birth rate has declined over the past years and has reached its lowest recorded levels**. In 2009, there were 20 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 17 nationwide.

- **However, a higher share of black/African American and Hispanic/Latina girls become teen mothers, compared with white girls.** In 2009, there were about 41 births per 1,000 Hispanic/Latina girls ages 15 to 17, compared with 32 births per 1,000 black/African American girls and 11 births per 1,000 white girls in that age group.

Teen pregnancies are associated with higher poverty and unemployment rates and lower levels of educational attainment compared with the pregnancies of women who have their first child at later ages.

Number of Births and Birth Rates by Age of Mother and Race/Ethnicity, 2009

	10 to 14 Years		15 to 17 Years	
	Number	Births per 1,000 Girls	Number	Births per 1,000 Girls
Total, All Races	4,980	0.5	123,367	20
Total, Non-Hispanic	2,907	0.4	75,349	15
Non-Hispanic White	1,053	0.2	39,975	11
Non-Hispanic Black	1,705	0.2	31,560	32
Latino	2,073	1.0	48,018	41

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 2009

Risk Behavior

- **Girls engage in less criminal behavior than boys**. Thirty percent of juvenile arrests are females under the age of 18.

- **In 2009, about 46 percent of high school girls had ever tried cigarettes, 74 percent had tried alcohol, and 34 percent had tried marijuana.** Patterns of substance use were similar across different racial/ethnic groups, but black/African American girls were slightly less likely than other groups to report that they had ever tried alcohol or cigarettes and more likely to report marijuana use.

It is important for girls to avoid risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and using illicit drugs. Alcohol abuse among youth can lead to risky sexual behavior, problems in school, and higher risk of drug use.

Percent of Girls Who Have Tried Cigarettes, Alcohol, or Marijuana in Their Lifetimes, by Race and Ethnicity, 2009

	I've tried cigarettes.	I've tried alcohol.	I've tried marijuana.
Total, all races	46	74	34
White*	47	76	34
Black*	43	70	38
Latina	48	78	35
Other*	39	64	28

*Non-Hispanic
Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2009
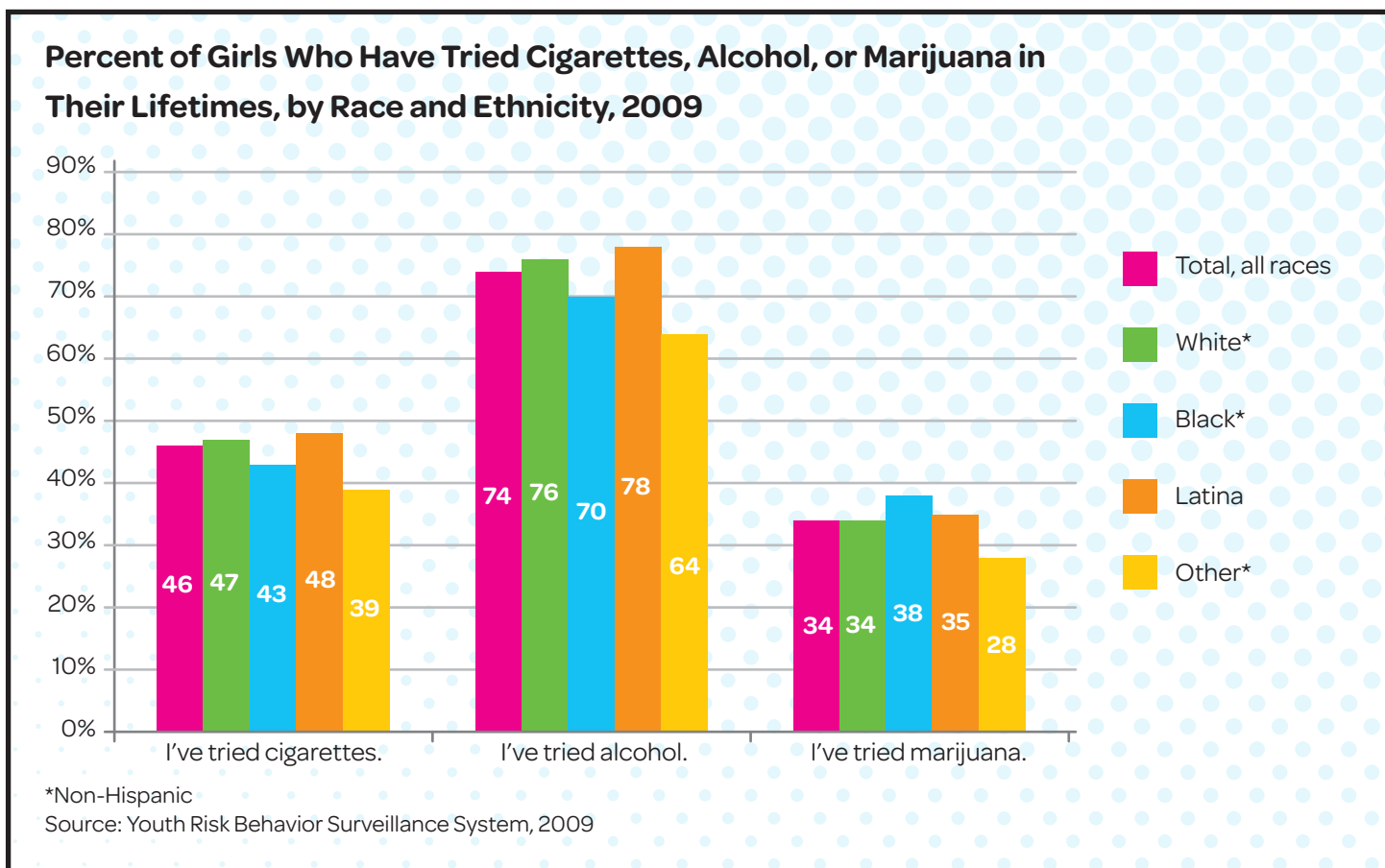
Education

- **Girls are more likely than boys to graduate from high school, and women now outnumber men on college campuses.** In 2009, 7 percent of girls ages 16 to 24 were high school dropouts compared with 9 percent of boys in that age group. In 2010, there were 130 women enrolled in college for every 100 men.

- **Asian American girls have better outcomes on education measures, followed by white girls, multiracial girls, black/African American girls, and Hispanic/Latina girls.** The dropout rate for Asian American girls is less than half the national average.

- **Many girls are graduating from high school and going to college, but Hispanic/Latina girls are at risk for early school dropout**, as the high school dropout rate for both Hispanic/Latina girls (16 percent) and Hispanic/Latino adults (36 percent for women, 40 percent for men) is high.

An emphasis on girls' education, from enrollment in high-quality early childhood education programs to completion of high school and college, is key to their financial success and economic security in adulthood.

Percentage of People Ages 16 to 24 Who Are High School Dropouts, 2009

	Girls	Boys
All Races	7.0	9.1
White*	4.1	6.3
Black*	8.1	10.6
Hispanic or Latino	16.1	19.0
Asian American	3.4	3.3

*Non-Hispanic
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, October 2009
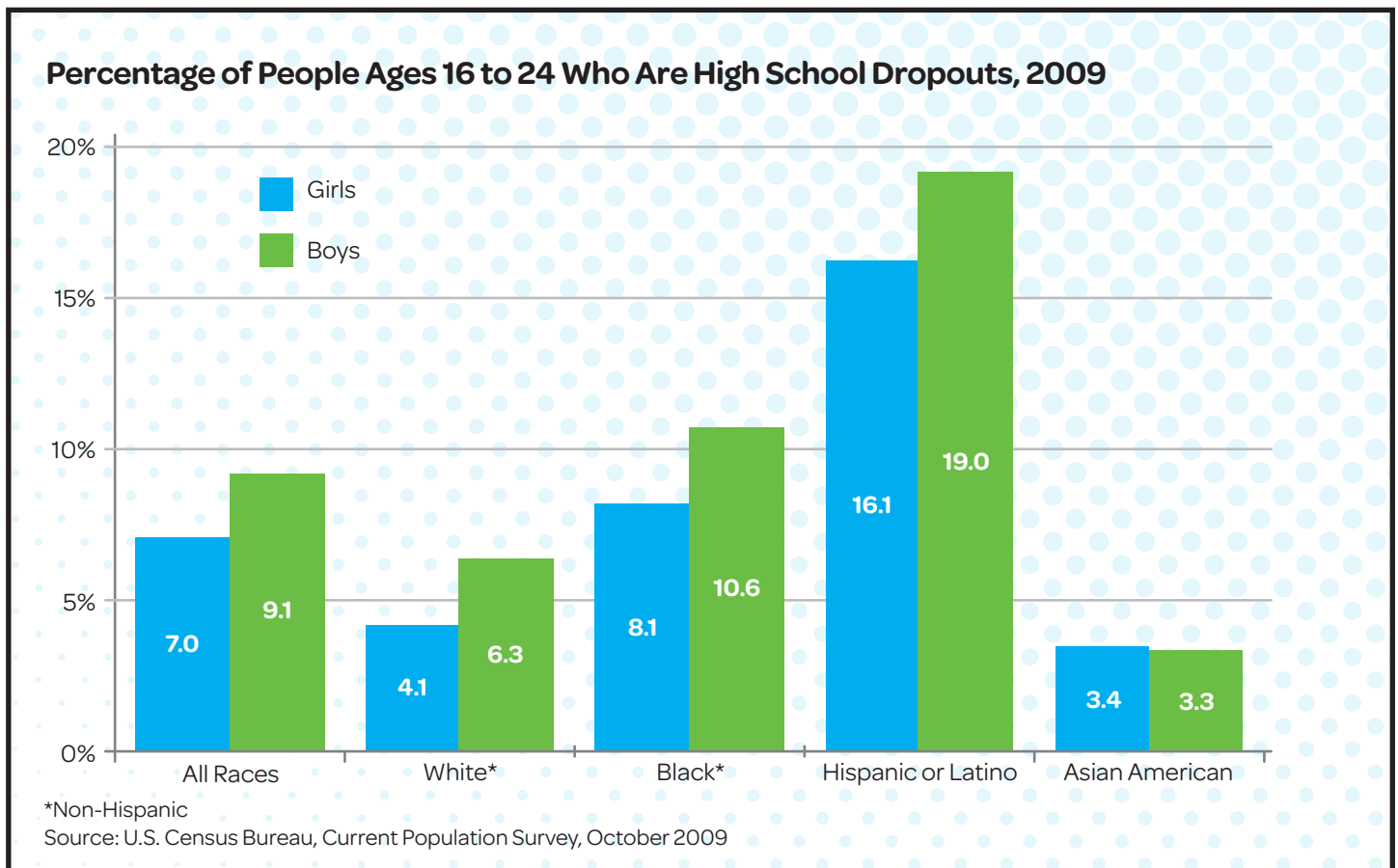
Out-of-School Time

- **Many girls are engaged in sports and extracurricular activities.** About 35 percent of twelfth-grade girls were involved in school sports; 27 percent were involved in the performing arts; and 18 percent participated in academic clubs.

- **The majority of teen girls volunteer.** About three-quarters of teen girls volunteer at least once a year. Volunteerism increases as girls get older.

- In terms of **participation in extracurricular activities**, **white girls are slightly more engaged than black/African American and Hispanic/Latina girls**. For example, participation in school athletics is highest among whites (59 percent), followed by blacks/African Americans (52 percent) and Hispanics/Latinas (48 percent).
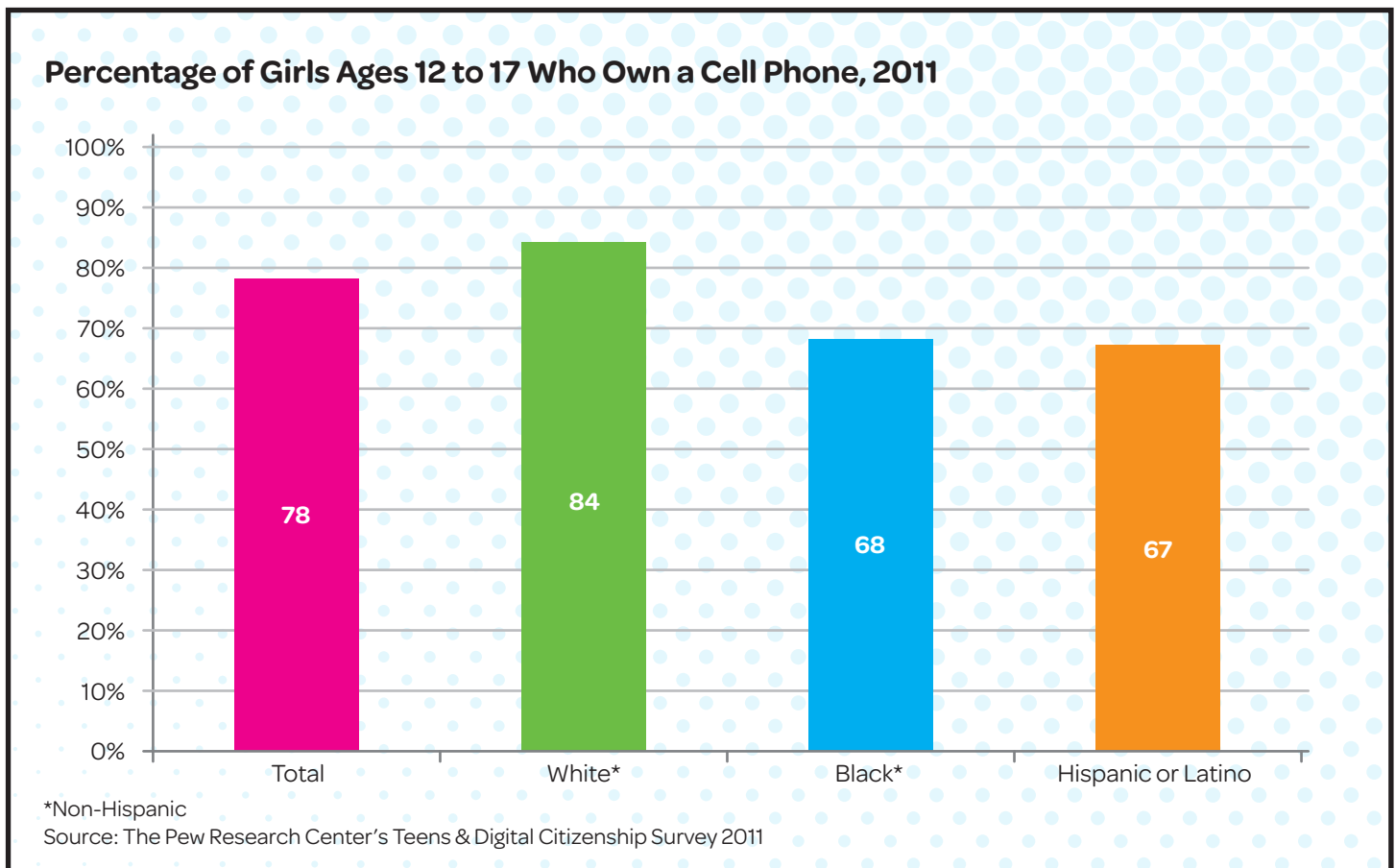
Participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, and other structured activities has a positive influence on girls' development and leadership skills. These activities should be readily available in all communities to lessen the burden of child care after school.

Percentage of Twelfth Grade Girls Participating in Extracurricular Activities, 2009*

Activity	Percentage
School sports	35
Performing arts	27
Academic clubs	18
Student government	12
School newspaper or yearbook	11

*Includes those participating to a great or considerable extent.
Source: *Monitoring the Future*, 2009
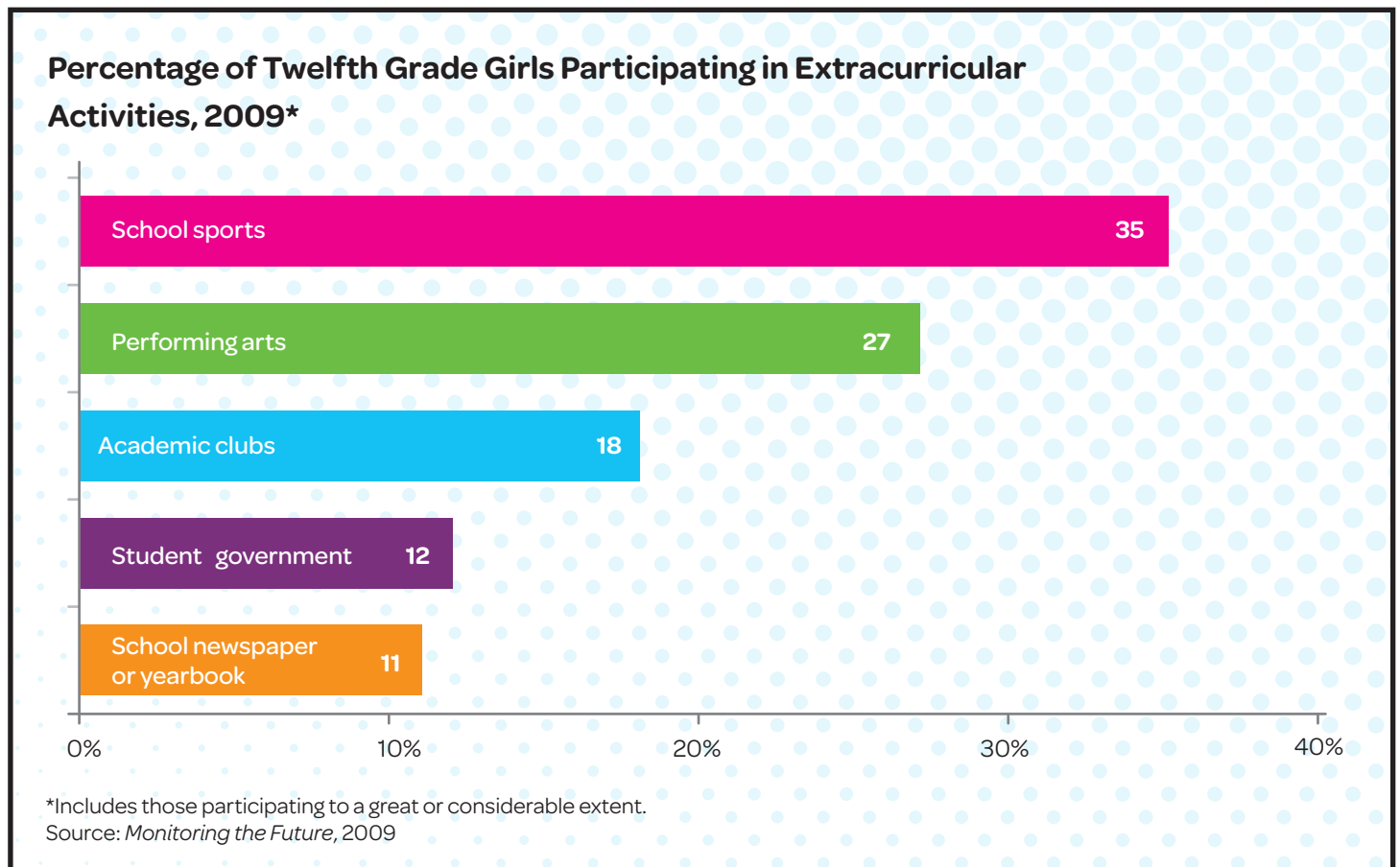
Access to Technology

- **Most girls in this country are connected digitally**. More than three-fourths of girls ages 12 to 17 have a computer in their home, have a cell phone, and play video games.

- **While the majority of teenage girls have access to many types of electronic technology,** only two-thirds of black/African American and Hispanic/Latina girls have cell phones, compared with 84 percent of their white peers.

- **Despite increased use of electronic media, girls still value spending time with their friends.** Nearly 60 percent of all girls spend time doing social activities in person with their friends at least several times a week.
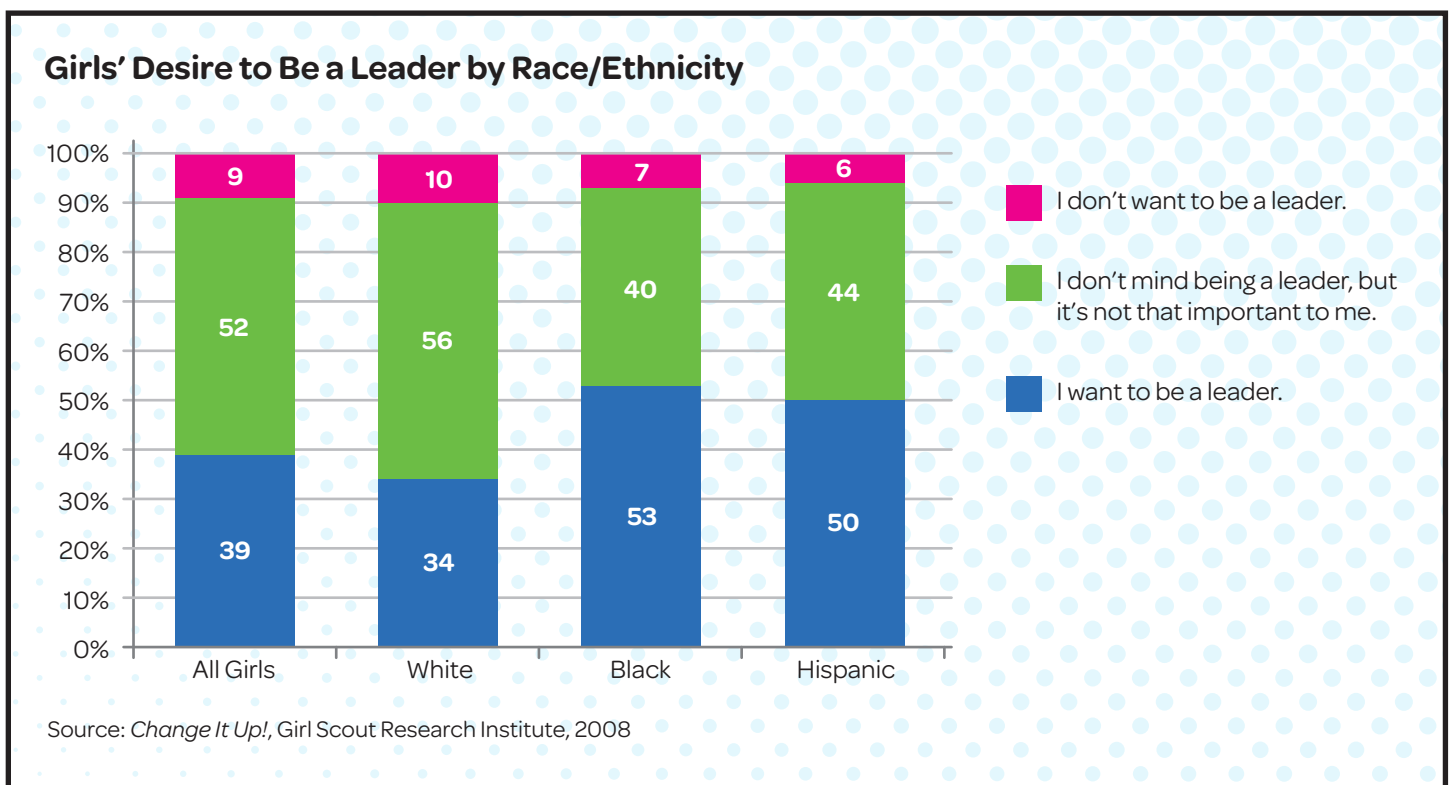
Differences in use and access to technology should be taken into account when working with and reaching out to girls, since it cannot be assumed that technology is universally available for girls in the U.S. Adults should encourage in-person communication and create safe spaces and opportunities for girls to connect face-to-face.

Percentage of Girls Ages 12 to 17 Who Own a Cell Phone, 2011

Category	Percentage
Total	78
White*	84
Black*	68
Hispanic or Latino	67

*Non-Hispanic
Source: The Pew Research Center's Teens & Digital Citizenship Survey 2011

Leadership

- **Leadership is not a top goal for girls**, as only a third (39 percent) say they want to be a leader. Girls value a social and collaborative approach to leadership, as opposed to the traditional top-down, command-and-control style.

- **Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina girls are more likely to have leadership aspirations than white girls**. Fifty-three percent of black/African American girls and 50 percent of Hispanic/Latina girls want to be leaders, compared to 39 percent of all girls. Compared to white girls, black/African American and Hispanic/Latina girls rate themselves more highly on leadership skills and dimensions.

- **Girls' leadership experiences are limited to responsibilities and opportunities that exist in their family and social circles**, such as babysitting, taking care of a pet, or helping a friend. Girls have fewer experiences with leadership in volunteerism, community service, school sports, clubs, student government, and neighborhood, social, and political activism.

Youth development organizations need to work to help girls foster their interests and continue to build skills around effecting change in themselves, the community, and the world at large.

Girls' Desire to Be a Leader by Race/Ethnicity

	All Girls	White	Black	Hispanic
I don't want to be a leader.	9	10	7	6
I don't mind being a leader, but it's not that important to me.	52	56	40	44
I want to be a leader.	39	34	53	50

Source: *Change It Up!*, Girl Scout Research Institute, 2008

Call to Action

We know that "data is not destiny," and as the premier leadership development organization for girls, with 3.2 million girl and adult members worldwide, Girl Scouts is committed to ensuring that all girls develop to their full potential. The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE) sets forth a bold and aspirational model of leadership that encourages girls to discover their values, interests, and skills; connect with others locally and globally; and take action to create sustainable solutions to issues of concern to them. We know that no single organization can tackle all of the challenges girls are facing, but together, we can mobilize resources to address the most pressing issues impacting girls, especially those in underrepresented and vulnerable populations.

Together, we can leverage the findings in the *State of Girls* report to:

- collaborate with Girl Scouts to raise awareness and educate the public about the state of girls today;

- fund programming and further research that address the issues impacting girls and youth;

- improve the lives of girls and youth by sharing and promoting the findings at the local, state, and federal levels;

- work with policymakers to address the issues that are most critical to the healthy development of girls and youth; and

- partner with Girl Scouts to fund opportunities that can help remedy some of the most pressing challenges girls and communities face today.

"The new report from the Girl Scout Research Institute demonstrates the compelling need to improve the status, well-being, and prospects of the nation's girls. In many ways, girls are our future, and the new report shines a spotlight on unequal opportunities for this population... This report does the country a valuable service by starting a conversation we need to have about how best to ensure that every girl has the best possible chance to succeed in school and in life."

Jodi Grant, Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance

About the Girl Scout Research Institute

The Girl Scout Research Institute (www.girlscouts.org/research), formed in 2000, is a vital extension of Girl Scouts of the USA's commitment to addressing the complex and ever-changing needs of girls. Composed of a dedicated staff and advisors who are experts in child development, academia, government, business, and the not-for-profit sector, the institute conducts original research, evaluation, and outcomes-measurement studies; releases critical facts and findings; and provides resources essential for the advancement of the well-being and safety of girls living in today's world. The GSRI also informs program, public policy, and advocacy for Girl Scouting.

About Girl Scouts

Founded in 1912, Girl Scouts of the USA is the preeminent leadership development organization for girls, with 3.2 million girl and adult members worldwide. Girl Scouts is the leading authority on girls' healthy development, and builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. The organization serves girls from every corner of the United States and its territories. Girl Scouts of the USA also serves American girls and their classmates attending American or international schools overseas in 90 countries. For more information on how to join, volunteer, reconnect, or donate to Girl Scouts, call (800) GSUSA 4 U or visit www.girlscouts.org.

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