



# Role Models Matter: Black Girls and Political Leadership Possibilities

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# A Project Born of the Political Moment



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# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND



## Research Question:

- Focused on girls of color's political efficacy, we ask,

**“Are girls of color more inspired to see themselves as political or grassroots leaders given increases in descriptive representatives in leadership roles?”**

## Literature on Role Models & Political Leadership

- Women and politics scholars suggest that the absence of role models negatively impacts girls' leadership potential and that their political efficacy increases with women in leadership roles (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Girl Scouts of America 2008).
- However, this literature fails to account for the effects of **intersectional identity markers** inclusive of race, class and sexuality and intersectional issues impacting vulnerable communities.



# Introduction & Background



- ▶ As a corrective, we *center the life experiences of girls of color* (Brown 2014; Leadbeater & Way 2007; Morris 2016) and examine their reactions to leaders who share demographic markers; and leaders who share commitments to issues that centrally impact their communities.
- ▶ We argue that the combined presence of leaders with whom the girls share demographic markers and who speak to relevant issues in their lives will inspire girls of color's interests in formal and grassroots politics and increase their leadership potential.

# Methodology

- ▶ 6 focus groups in Summer 2017
- ▶ Girls of color ages 8-14 in economically vulnerable neighborhoods across Columbus, OH
- ▶ Community partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Columbus
- ▶ Discussed with girls their ideas, concepts and aspirations regarding movement or community leadership and formal electoral politics.



# Challenges to Envisioning Leadership Possibilities

- ▶ Girls of colors' self-representations are full of contradictions
- ▶ Girls prioritize and embrace culturally-grounded conceptualizations of leadership
- ▶ Girls of Color 'Get the Message': What they have to offer is *not* what is valued by society, adults, and educational institutions

# Role Models that Matter: Nurturing Black Girls' Leadership Possibilities

- ▶ **Significance of Role Model Alignment: Who are you? & What do we share?**
- ▶ **Representation matters: The Obama factor in Black girl leadership formation**
- ▶ **Role models are most powerful when they are packaged right**
- ▶ **'You Can't be What You Can't See' rings true for black girls--Readily accessible and recognizable Black women political role models impact girls' abilities to see their future selves—**



# Significance of Role Model Alignment: Who are you? & What do we share?

Marley Dias #1000 Black Girl Books Campaign

Black queer women  
leading global social  
movement


Hilary Clinton's presidential  
bid



# Representation Matters: The Obama Factor & Black Girl Leadership Formation

- Girls constructed what it means to be a leader through the Obamas
- Visions for girls' leadership possibilities emerge from that which they "see."





Role models are most powerful when they are packaged right

AVAILABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY OF BLACK POLITICAL WOMEN LEADERS IS CRITICAL TO FOSTERING BLACK GIRLS' LEADERSHIP POSSIBILITIES







# You Can't Be What you Can't See Rings True for Black Girls

*"I'm also thinking about all of the young people, particularly girls and girls of color, who, in years ahead, will come to this place and they will look up and they will see an image of someone who looks like them hanging on the wall of this great American institution," Obama said. "And I know the kind of impact that will have on their lives because I was one of those girls and when I think about those future generations and generations past, I think, again, wow. Wow, what an incredible journey we are on together in this country. We have come so far."*

-Michelle Obama , Portrait Unveiling at  
National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian  
Institute Washington, DC Feb. 12, 2018



## Next Steps in the Research: Crafting Culturally Relevant Leadership Programing Centering Black Girls

Curricular Leadership Development Programs Must:

- ▶ **Connect and translate girls' values and sensibilities (community care) to definitions of leadership**
- ▶ **Incorporate what girls believe leaders ought to do (fix things; clean up messes) into definitions of leadership behaviors**
- ▶ **Understand, see and affirm Black girls' natural aptitude as leaders**
  - ▶ ***Nurture* rather than *Reform* their leadership styles and performances;**

## Next Steps in the Research: Crafting Culturally Relevant Leadership Programing Centering Black Girls

Curricular Leadership Development Programs Must:

- ▶ **Center identity- based cultural affirmations of their young womanhood that is **unapologetically** Pro-Black/Pro-Girl of Color**
- ▶ **Build upon and critically engage Black girls' deep interests in celebrity and embrace the predominance of popular culture in their lived experiences.**



# Black Girls' Leadership Futures & Role Model Possibilities





# Black Girl Role Model Possibilities Emerge: You Can't Be What You Can't See



# Conclusion- Questions?

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