

Youth, Gender and Violence: Building a Movement for Gender Justice

**Ms. Foundation for Women
Symposium Report**

Youth, Gender and Violence: Building a Movement for Gender Justice

On May 15, 2007, the Ms. Foundation for Women held a symposium entitled *Youth, Gender and Violence: Exploring the Connections* to present an important new framework for addressing gender-based violence. Proposing a gender-justice lens for understanding and preventing interpersonal violence, the Ms. Foundation brought together members of the philanthropic community, scholars and practitioners to share the latest thinking on the connections between sexuality, gender, youth and violence. The event generated discussion and debate about how these issues intersect and provided an opportunity to hear from practitioners about how this framework informs their activism. This report provides the rationale for a gender-justice approach to ending interpersonal violence, documents the symposium proceedings and offers recommendations to the philanthropic community moving forward.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary 3

Full Report..... 6

Violence Comes in a Box of Gender Norms 6

Gender Justice: A New Approach to Ending Gendered Violence 8

Updating the Gender Frame: A Funders Dialogue 10

Power and Privilege in a Gendered World: What the Research Tells Us 14

Action Strategies for Gender Justice: A Grounded View 17

The Road to Gender Justice: Strategies for Grantmakers 19

The Ms. Foundation Approach to Advancing Gender Justice..... 23

Appendix: “Let Me Tell You How to Talk to Me” 27

Symposium Speakers and Acknowledgements 28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a culture deeply flawed by the insistence that individuals live their lives according to very strict definitions of gender. As girls grow into women, and boys into men, they are provided with instructions on how to look, act, think and feel—all based on a set of societal beliefs about what is expected of their sex. These rigid gender norms are sadly limiting, narrowing the potential for both boys and girls to live rich and fully human lives. A glimpse around the schoolyard, a quick scan of the daily paper, or an hour or two in front of the TV, make it abundantly clear that there can be harsh consequences for those who don't abide by these “rules.”

Constricted ideas about gender create a culture of gendered violence. Boys receive encouragement for using aggression, and girls are barraged with messages about how crucial it is to place their sexual appeal to men at the core of their identities. Meanwhile, statistics remind us that men's violence toward the women in their lives is commonplace. Gender in the U.S. is also fiercely binary: gendered violence extends to any individual whose appearance or behavior does not conform to accepted ideas of masculinity or femininity. Individuals perceived by others as not sufficiently masculine or feminine are often targets of harassment, hostility and even brutal attack.

The Ms. Foundation for Women, long a leader in the struggle to end violence in the lives of girls and women, believes that to eliminate gendered violence, we must dismantle and discard these dangerous constrictions. We must re-conceptualize our definitions of gender to form a more inclusive and empowering set of beliefs that will allow individuals to express their humanity—fully, authentically and without fear.

We believe that **gender justice** is the most useful frame for thinking about this work. Gender justice promotes the idea that the freedoms of a just society—where dignity, autonomy and the right to human, social, economic and political capital are available to all people—are in no way limited by a person's gender, gender identity or expression, or the degree to which they conform to traditional notions of masculinity or femininity. At the center of this work must be a re-imagining of what it means to be masculine, since violence appears to be built into the very core of what it is to be a man in U.S. society. Our efforts must also focus on youth. Young people are on the forefront of defining and “living” gender in increasingly fluid ways, and they can bring enormous vitality and innovation to their roles as leaders in this work.

As a first step in this effort, the Ms. Foundation hosted *Youth, Gender and Violence: Exploring the Connections*, a symposium to bring funders together with scholars, practitioners and other stakeholders to join in a shared learning experience. We sought to introduce gender justice as an orientation for our work, deepen our understanding of the issues at hand, and start a meaningful conversation about the potential for the philanthropic community to have a significant impact in the field. Symposium panels examined the challenge this new

framework poses from the perspective of the funding community, reviewed the research on what sustains gender-based violence and shared action strategies from practitioners to make gender justice a reality.

Funders converged on several key points. Foremost was the consensus that the “gender-binary system,” by insisting on strict adherence to gendered behavioral codes, is oppressive and dangerous. The power relationships and privileges that derive from these enforced roles are the driving force behind gendered violence, and attempts to eliminate this violence must emphasize the shifting of gender dynamics. Doing this will mean acknowledging the interrelationships between race and gender norms, as well as understanding the role of the media and popular culture in sustaining narrow conceptions of gender.

The dominant theme of the research panel was that the roots of gendered violence lie in the efforts of the privileged and powerful—mainly, white middle-class men—to maintain their own status. The panel examined, in rich and nuanced detail, how race and class intersect with gender in creating the cultural atmosphere that both promotes and tolerates gendered violence, and the powerful and complex role played by the media and popular culture in cultivating this atmosphere.

Practitioners presented powerful evidence of the creativity of youth-led work, and the vital role youth must play in movement building for social change and gender justice. They presented an array of youth-led and youth-focused responses to gendered violence. Several emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces for youth to gather, allowing youth to speak in their own voice, and using media and popular culture to engage youth and as key tools for spreading the message of gender justice.

Recommendations for Grantmakers

The insights gained at the symposium reinforced the Ms. Foundation’s commitment to creating and deepening linkages among funders, practitioners and scholars. And the dialogue and cross-pollination of ideas strengthened our resolve to combat gendered violence and to work toward gender justice. To begin, we encourage the philanthropic community to embrace the following recommendations:

1. See gender as relevant to all grantmaking areas and strategies.

Bringing gender consciousness to your programming will make visible a range of new issues and concerns as well as present potential solutions to seemingly intractable problems. A dedicated focus on gender as it relates to the every-day realities of people’s lives ensures that organizations and their funders are meeting the needs of their clients, members and constituents.

2. Recognize the fluidity of gender identity and sexuality.

Seek out opportunities to highlight the full range of gender identities and sexualities as a central rather than ancillary focus of your work. Examine hidden assumptions in your guidelines and consider how language can either reinforce gender stereotypes or create opportunities for freer expression. Expect gender awareness from your grantees.

3. Fully engage boys and men across race and class.

Deliver to men and boys a vision of manhood that frees them from the constraints of traditional masculinity and allows for expressions of manhood that center less on physical power and more on courage and compassion.

4. Ensure safe space for the queer community.

Fund queer-led groups and programs in all settings, and be vigilant in your efforts to create safe spaces—physically and conceptually—particularly for children and youth.

5. Fund the continuum of gender justice work.

Understand more clearly the way issues such as gender, race, violence and sexuality cut across each other. Recognize that working at these intersections won't necessarily fit neatly into one specific funding category. Fund a broad strategy that includes the use of media, art and popular culture, particularly in communities that face the most oppression and are the most marginalized and under-resourced.

6. Take back the media.

Philanthropic efforts to advance fair media or media justice must focus on strategies to hold media accountable for its over-reliance on gender-based stereotypes and glamorized images of gendered violence. Funders can support projects and organizations that are working to counter these trends, examine the media messages that contribute to gendered violence and promote discussion.

7. Support grassroots infrastructure to build a movement.

Youth-focused organizations are often small and unfunded, and need philanthropy to provide resources that will help them work effectively. Technical assistance and opportunities to develop partnerships with peers and mentors may be as important as providing grant money in helping these groups establish themselves.

8. Distinguish between sex, gender and sexuality.

Build public awareness around the difference between sex, gender and sexuality, and the ways they interact. Do this by highlighting the work of grantees, as well as funding theoretical and scholarly work and actively engaging the media to publicize these efforts.

9. View funding colleagues as allies for collaboration.

Collaborate with funding colleagues to create synergy across funding categories. Developing joint initiatives can minimize risk while leveraging impact. Partnering with funders who can work closer to the grassroots can build grantee capacity and advance movements.

The Ms. Foundation for Women believes that **gender-based violence is socially constructed and preventable**. We believe that preventing violence starts by building relationships in communities, engaging and empowering people in imagining a future without violence, and demanding real change. We intend to continue to share our learnings, to grow the numbers of those invested in dismantling the gender system, and to build a movement of youth leaders for gender justice.

YOUTH, GENDER AND VIOLENCE: BUILDING A MOVEMENT FOR GENDER JUSTICE

Violence Comes in a Box of Gender Norms

We live in astonishing times. For the first time, voters in this country seriously contemplated electing a woman to the nation's highest office. Yet, at the same time, young women at our malls and college campuses brandish T-shirts proclaiming, "Who needs brains when you've got these?" across their surgically enhanced chests. Gay men and lesbians can legally marry in the state of Massachusetts, and their wedding announcements are featured prominently in the *New York Times*, while at the same time scores of young people who don't conform to society's rigid gender norms have been brutally murdered in gender-based assaults. Women have made unprecedented achievements in the world of sports, yet their accomplishments can be marginalized and degraded by a radio shock jock—and a complicit audience—who consider racial slurs and female denigration rich sources of entertainment.

These are not isolated occurrences. They are emblematic of a deep societal flaw that demands that individuals live their lives according to strictly limited definitions of gender, and ensures harsh consequences for those who ignore gender boundaries. These definitions provide boys and girls, and men and women, with a set of instructions about how to look and act, what to value and aspire to, and how to judge their success in the world. They provide the cultural stamp of approval for how girls are to grow into women and how boys are to become men.

Sadly, what is deemed acceptable allows for only a narrow band of the full spectrum of emotion and expression, limiting the potential of both girls and boys to live rich and fully human lives. Girls, for instance, are told that they can be anything they want and "have it all," yet in so many ways, both subtle and overt, they are reminded how very important it is to be thin, pretty and sexy in order to appeal to men; to check their ambition so as not to seem too aggressive and "unwomanly;" and to remember that care-giving and nurturing are their true and most natural calling. Boys, too, are encouraged to seek satisfaction both through work and family, yet they are assaulted constantly with demands that they be "rough and tumble," driven and competitive, and that the most natural and valued expression of their manhood is physical aggression. They must attract women (the thin, sexy ones) and "provide" for them and the families they will raise, but they are given few tools for the expression of tenderness, warmth or affection and indeed are cautioned about the threat to their manhood that a display of these emotions would provoke.

These constricted ideas about gender not only limit young people in fully experiencing the richness of life's potential and expressing their true selves, they lay the foundation for the culture of gendered violence that has nearly become an accepted right of passage in this country. Signs that the constricted gender roles dominating American society are dangerous and destructive are rampant. From the tolerance of schoolyard aggression that is dismissed as "boys will be boys" to the hyper-sexualized and blatantly violent imagery in video games targeted to teenage boys and young men, the message that manhood in the U.S. is about

violence and that womanhood is about sexual availability (which men can access through violence), is endemic.

The statistics on violence in this country further demonstrate the degree to which violence is “gendered.” Women are more than five times as likely as men to be the victim of an attempted or completed rape,¹ and 85 percent of all victims of intimate partner abuse are women.² Indeed, 64 percent of adult women who report being raped, assaulted or stalked since age 18 indicated that they were victimized by a current or former husband, boyfriend or date, while only 16 percent of men reported intimate partners as perpetrators of such crimes.³ According to the CDC, two of the key risk factors for perpetrating sexual violence include being male and being exposed to social norms that support sexual violence.⁴ It is impossible not to see the connection between the assigned roles society promotes to males and females, how faithfully they are carried out, and the destruction they cause.

Society’s insistence on strict gender conformity not only begets violence directed at women, but towards any individual male or female who does not conform to accepted versions of their assigned gender. Gender in U.S. society is not only constricted, it is fiercely binary. Mainstream U.S. culture is staunchly committed to the idea that gender unfolds neatly along two clear and distinct lines—male and female, masculine and feminine. Individuals who do not conform to this idea through their appearance or behavior are prime targets of intolerance, harassment, hostility and often brutal violence. Recent research indicates that young people who are not perceived to be masculine or feminine enough are routinely bullied or attacked.⁵ Mockery of men for behavior deemed effeminate is a staple of prime-time television humor and a sure-fire comedy hit at the multiplex. During the 2007 Super Bowl—a microcosm of popular taste—one of the coveted multimillion-dollar advertising slots included a Snickers commercial featuring two men who mistakenly kiss while sharing the candy bar; in complete disgust, they rip out their own chest hair in an attempt to recover their manliness. And it was nearly ten years ago that Matthew Shepard, a young gay man, was viciously murdered because his homosexuality was deemed offensive to his attackers. Despite the attention and near universal condemnation that this crime generated, violence against gender non-conforming individuals has continued unabated. Since 1995, some 50 young people—mostly of color and mostly low-income—who did not meet cultural norms for expected gender behavior, have been brutally murdered because of their lack of gender conformity.⁶ How can it be that in a decade’s time we have traveled so short a distance? If men are still convinced that they must brutally punish themselves for crossing established gender lines, how far a leap is it to assume that they might enact—or at least condone—the

¹ CDC, “Sexual Violence: Fact Sheet,” Washington: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; April 10, 2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/svfacts.htm>. Accessed February 16, 2008.

² Rennison, Callie Marie, “Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001,” Washington: National Institute of Justice; February 2003. Report NCJ 197838.

³ Tjaden, Patricia and Nancy Thoennes, “Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey,” Washington: National Institute of Justice; 2000. Report NCJ 183781. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>. Accessed February 16, 2008.

⁴ Op.cit., CDC.

⁵ Gender Public Advocacy Coalition, “50 Under 30: Masculinity and the War on America’s Youth,” December 2006.

⁶ Ibid.

violent policing of gender conformity among others? Girls and boys, women and men, are boxed in by gender and it is—literally—killing them.

Media and popular culture play an enormous role in perpetuating gender stereotypes and sustaining gender conformity. From the blatant misogyny and sexual aggression that is a defining quality of much of today's rap music, to the more manicured, yet equally noxious, mainstream fare on shows such as *America's Next Top Model*, where models, made up to appear beaten and bruised, competed in a “beautiful corpses” photo shoot, the media excel at promoting a culture of gendered violence. Yet, while mainstream media is a prime culprit in the marketing of constricted notions of gender, it also serves as a reflection of the dominant culture's concerns and prerogatives. So, although it is crucial to address the role that the media plays in sustaining the culture of gendered violence that currently defines U.S. society, it is not the sole answer to the problem. Rather, to eliminate the violence that erupts so readily from the narrow way that gender has been socially constructed in our society, we must dismantle and discard these dangerous notions altogether. In their place, we must establish a more vital, inclusive and empowering conception of gender, one that reflects more authentically the myriad and vibrant ways that sex, gender, gender identity and gender expression are lived everyday. Only by reconceptualizing gender can we build a safer and saner world for all.

Gender Justice: A New Approach to Ending Gendered Violence

As the first national foundation dedicated to building women's collective power to create and sustain a truly inclusive democracy, the Ms. Foundation for Women has long been a leader in the battle to end violence in the lives of girls and women. For over 35 years, we have responded to the evolving challenges of this work by questioning the nature of violence and injustice, reflecting on our experiences with our grantees and partners, bringing disparate groups together around a common purpose, and taking bold action to place women's experiences at the forefront of social-change efforts. In our passion to drive change we are constantly asking how we can accomplish more and make our work more responsive to those struggling at the margins of society to experience the freedoms that others take for granted.

In the 1970s, as women first began to speak out about the violence in their lives, our understanding of this violence as a socially constructed expression of male power over women began to take shape, and the idea of “gender-based” violence first entered the lexicon. Responding to women's urgent needs for safety and protection, the Foundation was a pioneer in funding domestic violence shelters and other services to ensure women's security. It also worked to make certain that men were held accountable for their actions as perpetrators of violence and counseled to change their behavior. Both social service and criminal justice strategies were necessary steps that were critical to improving women's lives and enhancing their safety, but they were not sufficient to end the culture of violence that continues to permeate our society. Searching for better ways to address the ongoing violence in women's lives and to get closer to rooting out its causes, the Foundation engaged more deeply with survivors; included communities as key stakeholders in our antiviolence work; actively reached out to include men as allies; and shifted the focus of our work to emphasize prevention.

These efforts led to a number of discoveries that allowed the Foundation to refine our understanding of how gender is constructed and lived. One of the key insights that emerged was how profoundly violence is built into the very core of masculinity in U.S. culture, and how this is reflected in the equating of strength, power and control with aggressive masculinity. Our country's beliefs about what constitutes success are also connected to these masculine ideals, such that masculinity across race and class lines becomes equated with what is valuable to society, and those lacking it—women, gay men, gender non-conforming individuals—are deemed society's losers. We came to understand that violence is one of the tools used by society's winners to stay on top.

That mainstream society implicitly aligns masculinity with aggression has an impact well beyond men's violence towards women—although that remains a core avenue for its expression. This alignment is also deeply embedded in homophobia and the intolerance and hostility that gender non-conforming individuals so regularly face. And it is bound up, as are all our perceptions and expectations around gender, power and violence, with dimensions of race and class. For the Foundation, this means that our work to eliminate violence against women is inextricably linked with the movement to end intolerance against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, as well as ongoing battles against racism, poverty and the myriad inequities that continue to divide our society. Central to our work, however, is the need to free men and boys from the gender box of traditional masculinity that leaves them with such a narrow, limiting and destructive vision of manhood. This means a re-imagining of what it means to be masculine, to encourage boys and men to shed the armor of toughness and invincibility that they have been persuaded to embrace, and to redefine manliness to include qualities such as compassion, warmth and loyalty, that affirm rather than diminish humanness.

For these reasons, the Foundation has identified “gender justice” as the framework for our ongoing efforts to eliminate violence in the lives of girls and women. Gender justice

Gender justice ensures that the freedoms of a just society—where dignity, autonomy and the right to human, social, economic and political capital are available to all people—are in no way limited by a person's gender, gender identity or expression, or the degree to which they conform to traditional notions of masculinity or femininity. Gender justice recognizes a multitude of masculinities and femininities, nuanced by history, culture, social class and other factors that shape our varied view of the world.

promotes the idea that the freedoms of a just society—where dignity, autonomy and the right to human, social, economic and political capital are available to all people—are in no way limited by a person's gender, gender identity or expression, or the degree to which they conform to traditional notions of masculinity or femininity. Indeed, gender justice recognizes a multitude of masculinities and femininities, nuanced by history, race, ethnicity and culture, social class and other factors that shape our varied view of the world. It is a construct broad

enough to help us understand the many intersecting strands that underlie the causes of gendered violence, yet precise enough to allow us to focus our efforts on the specific role played by society's insistence on gender constriction and conformity.

The Ms. Foundation for Women has taken several steps to move our gender justice work forward. One crucial decision, reached by reflecting on our previous work to identify where we might best leverage action for change, was to focus our efforts on youth. We have long believed in the power and potential of youth as leaders, and know that young people bring enormous vitality and innovation to their leadership work. Most importantly, youth are already at the forefront of defining and “living” gender in increasingly fluid ways and are thus naturally positioned to assume leadership roles in ending gendered violence and deepening the gender-justice lens of this work. The Foundation also conducted a field scan to gain greater insight into how youth-led and youth-focused social-change organizations were framing and responding to issues at the intersection of gender, sexuality and interpersonal violence. Key learnings from this examination included the need for leadership in crafting a youth-led response to gendered violence, the importance of articulating a clear framework for this effort, and the need to engage the philanthropic community in this work. Several challenges were also illuminated, chief among them being the fragmented approach to addressing gendered violence across philanthropy.

“Young people today are aware of what gender justice looks like and how traditional notions of gender can be dangerous. They see that these things are much more fluid over the course of a lifetime and that it’s not necessary to assign a fixed position. It’s that we must re-examine the paradigms that we have set up and live comfortably in.”

Alice Cottingham
Girls Best Friend Foundation

The Ms. Foundation for Women is well positioned to assume leadership in this arena. Over the last 35 years, we have funded a wide range of efforts in urban and rural communities across the country, addressing homophobic and gendered violence among adults and youth. We have also explored in depth issues of gender and masculinity and their profound intersection with violence.

The *Youth, Gender and Violence: Exploring the Connections* symposium covered three core topics, each of which is documented in the next section of this report. First, we examine the challenges this new framework poses to the funding community and how some foundations are already confronting them. Next we look at the research examining the forces that sustain gender-based and interpersonal violence. Lastly, we hear from practitioners, who are on the front lines of this movement, and share their strategies for making gender justice a reality in the lives of young people. We close with suggestions that emerged from the rich dialogue and cross-fertilization of ideas that took place at the symposium. And we highlight ways that the Ms. Foundation is already putting these ideas into action to support the next generation of activists who are advancing the cause of gender justice.

Updating the Gender Frame: A Funders Dialogue

In his keynote address, Don McPherson, former National Football League quarterback, former Executive Director of the Sports Leadership Institute at Adelphi University, and Ms. Foundation for Women board member, commented on how these various positions in his life reflected his embrace of the “wholeness of masculinity.” The roles and activities that he has chosen to engage in represent a range of attitudes, behaviors and emotional commitments that signal a life unconstrained by narrow gender definitions. In pursuing this diversity of masculine expression, McPherson came to understand some harsh truths about

how gender gets played out in U.S. society—namely, that “we make our sons better by degrading our daughters,” and that we don’t raise boys to be men, but rather, to “not be women,” with the implicit understanding that to be a woman is to be inferior. What motivated McPherson to start challenging some of these assumptions was his recognition that by remaining silent about them, he was in fact a perpetrator of the violence against women that these narrow gender attitudes allow and sustain. McPherson acknowledged that there is no simple solution to the problem of gendered violence, but he was quite clear that solutions will only emerge when we together refuse to remain silent, and instead engage in sustained dialogue to collectively work through tough issues.

“In anything else we do, more knowledge makes us better, and the better decisions we make. Yet when it comes to gender identity, we are narrower. [Our ignorance] makes us safer in a culture that is not comfortable talking about gender in a real way.”

Don McPherson
Keynote Speaker

A Conversation Among Funders

It is in this spirit that the Ms. Foundation opened the symposium on gender, sexuality and violence with a conversation among funders, all of whom work in one way or another toward the goal of a more just and inclusive society for girls and women. Representatives from three foundations—the Ford Foundation, the Third Wave Foundation, and the Women’s Foundation of California—reflected on how thinking about gender affects the way they frame their work and shared how they are addressing issues of gender and violence in their grantmaking.

Third Wave Foundation

The Third Wave Foundation shares with the Ms. Foundation for Women a core commitment to building and supporting the next generation of feminist leaders, and both foundations use grantmaking along with advocacy strategies to achieve their goals. Monique Mehta, Third Wave’s Executive Director, echoed the sentiments Don McPherson expressed in his keynote address, noting that the binary gender system our culture follows is a form of oppression that results in discrimination and violence toward those who do not behave according to society’s gender expectations. Mehta explained that Third Wave had reached a set of conclusions similar to those of the Ms. Foundation. They explicitly name gender justice as a frame for their work, and recognize that the goals of feminism are intrinsically linked with the struggles of transgender individuals, and others who are gender non-conforming, to be free from violence and other forms of intolerance.

In discussing Third Wave’s commitment to a gender justice framework, Mehta suggested that gender justice politicizes young people—especially young women and transgender

“Those whose gender behavior does not match up with society’s expectations face discrimination and violence.”

Monique Mehta
Third Wave Foundation

youth—who are spurred to become agents of change in response to their own experiences of violence and discrimination. Third Wave uses a two-pronged approach to pursue its mission within a gender-justice framework. The first strategy focuses on reproductive health as the intersection of issues related to women’s freedom, health and justice and in particular, to the empowerment of young women of color and transgender youth. The second strategy is to leverage through grantmaking the potential of young people to translate their own experiences of violence and discrimination into social

action. The foundation funds feminist, transgender and youth-led organizing and advocacy work on a range of related social-justice issues. Through these strategic efforts, Third Wave seeks to build leadership and help create the next generation of social activists dedicated to gender justice. Recent grants have targeted the education and empowerment of incarcerated pregnant and post-partum women to improve the quality of reproductive health care within the prison system, and helped to build a health and wellness collective—for young women of color who have experienced trauma, violence or self-injury—that offers both healing services and an environment for organizing against violence and injustice.

Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation has been a staunch supporter of the Ms. Foundation for Women and an important partner in our work to eliminate gendered violence and promote feminist leadership across race, class, and age lines. Loren Harris, a Program Officer for Sexuality and Reproductive Health within the Ford Foundation’s Asset Building and Community Development Program, spoke to how critical the gender-justice framework is as a guide to eliminating interpersonal violence. Harris pointed out that first, gender is the frame for understanding the ways that power in relationships is expressed through physical dominance. Unpacking the causes of interpersonal violence is to first understand gender and the power dynamics that come with roles and identities. Even in same-sex relationships, he noted, there are assumed roles which are critical in determining how power becomes a tool for dominance and control. Second, a gender-justice framework helps us understand that in order to craft solutions to interpersonal violence, we have to address gender. We have to examine the roles, behaviors and attitudes that people assign to themselves as masculine and feminine, and we have to identify those that contribute to violence, such as hyper-masculine notions of manhood that promote violence, especially against those who break gender norms.

Harris explained that this gender framework is especially crucial to working with low-income men and men of color, pointing to one of the day’s most important themes—the interrelationships between race and conceptions of gender. After viewing with the symposium audience a segment from Byron Hurt’s film, *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, which examines how masculinity is represented in hip-hop culture, Harris pointed out how unattainable these hyper-masculine images of manhood are, how much aggression is required to demonstrate maleness, and how few other choices currently exist for expressing masculinity across race and class. The options for a healthy expression of manhood are even slimmer among marginalized male populations such as men of color and low-income men.

Harris explained that his work at the Ford Foundation focused strongly on reproductive rights and justice, but demonstrated how it was informed by a gender-justice framework. Men’s ability to express their masculinity in healthy ways is intimately related to women’s reproductive health and their ability to control their own fertility and childbearing. This means that the Ford Foundation approaches its work in reproductive health from the perspective of male as well as female involvement. By engaging men as partners

“These notions of gender and masculinity are not attainable or sustainable over time for most men. The aggression required in demonstrating their maleness is a substitute for expressing their masculinity in other ways.”

Loren Harris
Ford Foundation

with women in promoting reproductive health and at the same time addressing men's core needs (for jobs, for developing alternatives to violence), the foundation is working to help men reframe their perceptions of masculinity and expand their perceptions of the roles they can assume to express their manhood. The gender justice framework encourages men to see beyond the roles of provider, protector and procreator, and to embrace as well their roles as friend to women and responsible partner.

Women's Foundation of California

Maya Thornell-Sandifor, Program Officer at the Women's Foundation of California, touched on another theme that would be addressed again and again at the symposium—the role of the media and popular culture in sustaining narrow and defeating gender conceptions. The foundation's own research revealed how profoundly images in popular culture influence young women's identities and self-perceptions, and how persistently young women were confronted with imagery that promoted stereotypical choices—sexy, thin, beautiful, focused on getting a man—and how it was these images, rather than those associated with professional accomplishments, that were tied to female success. Thornell-Sandifor reiterated how the work of the foundation revealed not only that this type of gender-constructing imagery was confining for women, but dangerous for them as well. For example, she explained that girls and young women who are victims of violence or exploitation often feel that they are responsible for their own victimization because the way they dressed or behaved made them vulnerable to attack. In effect, Thornell-Sandifor explains, the gender box that encourages girls' focus on sexual availability also provides a shield for the perpetrators of gendered violence who are relieved of the responsibility for their actions because they are simply responding in accordance with their masculine identity.

The Women's Foundation of California focuses its grantmaking on programs that address the experiences of girls and young women struggling against these kinds of limitations. The foundation recently announced a new initiative to challenge the way traditional ideas of gender get disseminated. The *Youth, Media and Social Change Institute* was developed to counter the torrent of media messages that focus on sexuality as a means to acquire status and that endorse rigid gender roles for women and men. The institute will work to educate and empower media consumers and promote a cultural shift toward healthier gender representations.

Funders Discussion

In a dynamic discussion with the symposium audience, the funders' converged on several key points. Foremost was the consensus that our society's commitment to a gender-binary system that narrowly defines roles for men and women, denies the existence of a queer community, and insists on strict adherence to gendered behavioral codes, is oppressive and dangerous. The power relationships and privileges that derive from these enforced roles are the driving force behind gendered violence that primarily targets women and non-gender-conforming individuals. As such, an effective attempt to eliminate this violence must place the shifting of gender dynamics at its center. The panelists endorsed a gender-justice framework as a guide for the work of violence prevention because it directly addresses the roots of the problem, and also incorporates issues of race and class that are so intimately related to our gender expectations.

In turning their attention to how philanthropy can best pursue gender justice, panelists agreed that **the potential for youth leadership in this area is immense**. This is especially true as it is young people who are increasingly comfortable with defining gender in more fluid ways and are thus well poised as agents of change. To mobilize youth to advocate for gender justice, panelists and participants agreed that media and popular arts and culture are critical tools for engagement, education and advocacy.

The panelists were reminded by practitioners in the audience that this type of engagement across advocacy and popular culture was often made more difficult by the traditional funding approaches adhered to by many in the philanthropic field. Grassroots change efforts are often complex, they said; they incorporate many different ideas that arise organically from people's real needs and draw from a variety of responses. Philanthropies, on the other hand, tend to be narrowly focused on specific issues, making it difficult to raise funds for efforts that incorporate a range of approaches and cut across various fields—exactly the type of creative programming that making headway toward gender justice will require. Funders don't yet fund work the way it happens on the frontlines, practitioners asserted. The panelists agreed that this was a key challenge facing the field, but also one that the Ms. Foundation, by putting together this cross-disciplinary symposium and by giving voice to these concerns and supporting movement building, was already taking steps to address.

Power and Privilege in a Gendered World: What the Research Tells Us

Power—and who wields it—was the dominant theme for the panel of researchers, scholars and activists examining the forces that sustain interpersonal and gender-based violence. Taken together, the presentations offered a powerful argument that the roots of gendered violence lie in the efforts of the privileged (i.e. white, male, middle class) to maintain their own status. The presentations drew attention to how race and class issues intersect with gender in creating the cultural atmosphere that both promotes and tolerates violence.

Mark Anthony Neal, Associate Professor of Black Popular Culture at Duke University and author of the book, *New Black Man: Rethinking Black Masculinity*, examined the theme of power and privilege to explore a gender analysis of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop culture, in particular rap music and rap music videos, is often sharply criticized for its portrayals of highly aggressive and sexualized images of black men and women. Rightly so, Neal agrees, as these images are highly corrosive in their cartoon-like depiction of glamorized “gangstas” and oversexed “hos,” seeming to suggest that these are the only roles available for men and women of color. Yet, as Neal's scholarship about hip-hop culture makes clear, these images are, in many ways, the result of choices made by media companies, record labels and radio stations—in short, by white corporate America—about what aspects of black culture will be widely circulated. Neal described a process through which members of the dominant class, namely elite white males, co-opt images and messages from subcultures and subvert them toward their own ends, which is typically the continuation of their own privilege and power. In this way, corporate entities such as record companies profit—financially and through the continuation of their elite position in society—by selling to white audiences portrayals of black culture and gender relations that sustain class and race-based anxieties about their “dangerousness.” This argument strongly makes the case that issues of gender and sexuality

can only fully be examined within the larger framework of race and class in which they get played out.

Lyn Mikel Brown, Professor of Education at Colby College and co-author of *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing our Daughters from Marketer's Schemes*, explained how a similar phenomenon is at play in the sexualization and trivialization of girls' empowerment by the media and consumer culture. Brown has studied girls' experiences extensively and in particular has examined what she refers to as "girlfighting"—girls' anger, aggression and violence towards other girls. She views girlfighting as an acting out of "justified anger at a world that devalues girls" as well as the "safest and easiest outlet for girls' outrage and frustration," a frustration borne of the constraints of sexism. In the hands of the media and corporate purveyors of consumer culture, these powerful expressions of authentic anger have been subverted into eroticized images. The sexy, catty diva or shopping-addicted "gossip girl" is a far more prominent image in popular culture than the angry girl activist. Instead of transforming the world, the power of girls' anger is dampened; rather than mobilize for social action, girls are implored to use their "girl power" to transform themselves through shopping and by becoming sexual objects.

Brown also describes how these media- and market-driven representations are scripted along clear racial lines. While white girls are mean or bitchy, and their girlfighting is portrayed as sexy, African American girlfighting is portrayed as dangerous and criminal. As well, the promotion of these denigrating and racially charged images encourages girls to expend their energy fighting each other for male approval rather than against inequality and violence. Brown implicates the media and the corporate world in successfully derailing girls' anger, which might otherwise be channeled into social action that could threaten the power and privilege of media and corporations.

Indeed, evidence of the sexualization of girls is rampant. Through magazines, television, toys and video games, and by way of consumer goods that are marketed to them, girls are flooded with a constant stream of messages focused narrowly on sexual attractiveness. More and more, products marketed to young girls are imbued with an aura of adult sexuality (thongs marketed to pre-teens, "Flirt" T-shirts sold to five-year olds), while representations of adult women as sexy, child-like playthings help blur the distinction between girlhood and adult sexuality. Deborah Tolman, Director of the Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality, and a member of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, discussed how girls, exposed to this onslaught of sexualized imagery and messaging, begin to think of and experience themselves and their own bodies as objects of desire and to evaluate themselves in terms of how closely they match these sexualized gender norms. This "self-sexualization" has dire consequences for girls: it affects their ability to concentrate; undermines their self-esteem, confidence and comfort in their own bodies; promotes feelings of shame and anxiety and hampers their own sexual development. Self-sexualization has also been linked with eating disorders and depression. Not surprisingly, the task force found that girls and young women who had had more exposure to mainstream media placed a greater emphasis on physical attractiveness as a priority for women, and were more comfortable with stereotypical depictions of women as sexual objects.

In her presentation, Tolman described the overlapping forces that establish heterosexuality as the societal norm, a phenomenon she refers to as "compulsory heterosexuality."

Compulsory heterosexuality is a reflection of the values of the dominant middle class, and according to Tolman, the institutionalization of traditional notions of gender is one of the key vehicles that sustain it. Familiar notions of femininity—passivity and self-sacrifice, the need for protection and an emphasis on nurture—align perfectly with an insatiable sex drive, the acceptance of coercive behavior and other traditional notions of masculinity to sustain the norm of heterosexuality. The sexualization of girls, continually reinforced through popular culture, is a part of the process of preparing them to embody these inevitable characteristics and roles. As girls and boys assume and play out these roles into adulthood, compulsory heterosexuality, and with it gender inequity, is reproduced again and again. The institutionalization of compulsory heterosexuality makes the adoption of non-traditional gender roles a threat to mainstream values and renders invisible or dangerous those who choose to take on other gender identities. Homophobia, Tolman asserts, is the natural consequence of this progression, borne of the need to sustain the prominence of heterosexuality as the center of social life.

The presentation by Brett Stoudt, a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, demonstrated how our society’s acceptance of homophobia ensures that the fear of being branded “gay” remains a powerful force in the lives of boys and young men. As Stoudt discovered in his research, this fear leads boys to police each other’s behavior to ensure that the rules of accepted masculinity are strictly enforced. Stoudt studied these behaviors among boys living at the very center of male privilege—students at an elite private school. What Stoudt found was a highly evolved system in which the “white noise” of violence—ridiculing, teasing, bullying and intimidation—functioned to discipline boys into behaving in accordance with standards of behavior for their race, class and sex. What Stoudt also discovered, though, was that these same strategies were used by the boys to develop friendships and intimacy. In this way, the taunting and pervasive, yet subtle, violence that homophobia inspires is the backdrop for creating the peer networks that ultimately give rise to the “good old boys club” of male privilege.

“Violence is a rational practice.”

Brett Stoudt, City University of New York

In the context of the elite boys’ school, the policing of masculine behavior through attenuated forms of violence becomes part of the fabric of everyday life for these privileged young men. In other contexts, intolerance takes a much more brutal turn. Riki Wilchens, Executive Director of Gender Public Advocacy Coalition, described the extreme violence that befalls those at the other end of the spectrum of privilege who don’t conform in their gender identity and expression. Wilchens described a tide of alarmingly vicious murders against gender nonconforming young people that have taken place over the last ten years. While white boys of means use verbal harassment to police masculinity among themselves, the victims of these more brutal and violent gender enforcement tactics are largely poor young men of color. Wilchens made the point that these crimes are a logical, if extreme, manifestation of the acceptance of using violence to enforce gender conformity. It is, tragically, a surprisingly short distance from being bullied in the schoolyard to being assaulted in the street.

What this all means is that the gender system that currently exists in our society represents an assault on basic human rights. If individuals cannot express a fundamental part of who they are—the very core of their identity—without fear; if they must face humiliation, pain,

or even murder, as the price of simply being themselves; if that “self” does not fit neatly into the gender boxes accepted by society’s privileged and powerful, then it is because they lack the fundamental freedoms that others take for granted. The time is now for those who stand against injustice to act. In ways large and small, the participants on this symposium’s practitioner panel are already leading the way.

Action Strategies for Gender Justice: A Grounded View

In his introduction to the practitioner section of the day, Rickke Mananzala, Executive Director of FIERCE, a community-based organization for transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, queer and questioning youth of color in New York City, invited panelists to take symposium attendees to where the “rubber hits the road”—to experience firsthand how young people are developing and exercising their leadership potential, fighting against the limitations of scripted gender roles, and using their collective power to root out the seeds of violence and create a more just society.

Participants on the practitioner panel presented an array of youth-led and youth-focused responses to interpersonal violence, some of which already incorporate the key ideas of a gender-justice framework. The panel enlivened the day with powerful evidence of the creativity of youth-led work, and the vital role youth must play in movement building for social change and gender justice.

Engaging and Empowering Youth

A number of key ideas emerged from practitioners’ presentations that serve as an emerging list of “best practices” about engaging and empowering youth and directing their energy to move toward gender justice, including the need to:

- Create safe spaces for youth to gather and share experiences;
- Allow youth to speak with their own “voice;” and
- Use media and popular culture to engage youth and as tools for expression.

Safe Spaces

The need to create a safe space was one of the most prominent themes the practitioners addressed. Whether it was specifically for African American girls, transgender youth or high school boys, a safe space was often recognized as a prerequisite for offering young people an opportunity to create change.

A safe space, according to the advocates who spoke, is a place to gather, discuss, explore, plan, learn, reflect and share; it is usually youth-defined and free from constraints to conform to somebody else’s values or definitions of self. Glo Ross, Leadership Development Coordinator at FIERCE, described how the organization’s Gender Justice Group, formed as a space where queer and transgender women of color could come together to grapple with their experiences of being disempowered and voiceless, evolved into a vehicle for linking the personal and the political. The group offers its members an opportunity to collectively engage how their experiences reflect the ways that racism, sexism and class are embedded in the larger culture, and link their learning and explorations to FIERCE’s broader gender-justice advocacy work.

The idea of a safe space is also central to the work of the Washington, DC-based organization, Men Can Stop Rape, and their Men of Strength (MOST) Clubs. The clubs utilize a highly regarded violence-prevention curriculum that focuses on explorations of masculinity and manhood and the unhealthy way society teaches young men to think about being men. By creating a safe space for young men to gather, learn and reflect on these issues, the clubs allow them to develop new strategies for representing themselves as men and provide them with support for being true to who they are. Through these experiences, young men gain a sense of connection and responsibility that is then carried out through their participation in community projects that raise awareness about violence prevention, support domestic violence survivors or build partnerships among peers.

Youth Voices

Closely related to the need to provide a safe space is the need to support youth in speaking in their “voice,” often achieved through storytelling. The work of Day One’s Youth Voices Network powerfully underscores this point. Along with offering critical support, education and legal advocacy to young survivors of relationship abuse, Day One, which is based in New York City, provides them with a platform for telling their stories. Survivors not only experience healing by sharing their experience with others, but also their stories help to raise awareness among youth who may be at risk of abuse and advocate for change among legislators, community leaders, teachers and journalists.

Providing young women with a vehicle for their many voices—and speaking to them in a voice that echoes their own—is what makes the HOTGIRLS (Helping Our Teen Girls in Real Life Situations) approach to prevention, education and empowerment so appealing to its members. HOTGIRLS, based in Atlanta, encourages young African American women and girls to use their own language—often the language of hip-hop and urban culture—to fight public harassment and gender-based violence in their own lives. HOTGIRLS bases its approach on the work of its founder Carla Stokes, a researcher, educator and activist. When Stokes studied the Internet home pages of African American teenage girls, she realized not only how actively they used on-line technology, but how powerful a medium it was for self-expression and the construction of girls’ sexual identities. As a result, blending hip-hop and “girl culture” with media-influenced prevention education, HOTGIRLS now offers programming for young women of color in order to empower girls to combat the negative messages they encounter and redefine them in a more positive light. The excitement this approach generates was on full display at the symposium, as a member of the HOTGIRLS “Street Team” (more formally known as the Girls Leadership Council) performed “Let Me Tell You How To Talk To Me,”⁷ a rap they created to the tune of Justin Timberlake’s “SexyBack.” Their version encourages girls to stand firm in the face of harassment and sexist language and admonishes young men for stooping to these kinds of verbal assaults. Reclaiming language and hip-hop culture as their own, and using media to empower rather than denigrate, allows young African American women to create their own identities and develop their capacity for social action.

“Homophobia used to be a problem back in the day, like five years ago, but now teens get it, and the adults are the ones that make it bad.”

Amber Twine, HOTGIRLS

⁷ Read the lyrics and learn where to download an audio version in the Appendix.

The Power of Popular Culture

Symposium practitioners spoke again and again about the ways in which popular culture can be used as a powerful vehicle for youth engagement and action. Megan McDermott and Amanda Moscoso of Global Action Project (GAP) underscored this point with the screening of *Did You Hear*, a youth-produced short film which addresses how the use of derogatory, homophobic language in schools can create toxic environments and dangerous consequences for kids who do not conform to strict gender norms. The film also highlighted the role that adults play in perpetuating an atmosphere of intolerance. GAP, an organization based in New York City, but with international reach, offers young people media-arts and leadership training, and provides them with the knowledge, tools and relationships they need to create media projects that speak directly to their concerns and begin to transform culture. Youth-created videos and multimedia projects, which have addressed topics ranging from domestic violence to immigration, become springboards for dialogue and tools for social change.

The media-making process also enables young people to deeply engage issues that matter to them most. As Amanda Moscoso noted, GAP doesn't focus specifically on gender or violence, but because these issues are so real and potent in the lives of young people, they invariably come up. The power of a media project, according to McDermott is its capacity to "disrupt the dominant narrative" in a particular culture, giving voice to youths' authentic concerns and shifting the focus of debate. Youth-led media projects can also encourage profound change among peers and the adults in their lives. The screening of *Did You Hear* in the school upon which it was based resulted in a palpable shift in the school environment, and because it portrayed so realistically the subtle ways adults often collude in maintaining homophobic attitudes and intolerance, school administrators used the film to engage teachers in a dialogue about language and gender stereotypes.

Urban Word NYC provided a fitting close to the panel by describing how the organization incorporates all of the above "best practices": safe space, youth voices, and the power of popular culture. Using spoken word as a vehicle for leadership development and activism, the organization offers young people a safe space to find their voices and engage with the social issues that most affect them. Through programs such as "Women Reborn" and "Living with Violence," youth learn more about hip-hop culture and work with mentors to give voice to their personal experiences of misogyny, homophobia, racism and violence. Mentors guide participants only as far as requiring that they respect each other and not use words that cause harm, but otherwise, youth participants have the freedom to work through their ideas in an uncensored space. Urban Word has found that this process challenges the young people they encounter to move beyond their own difficult past and to speak authentically about the possibility of change and the promise of justice.

The Road to Gender Justice: Strategies for Grantmakers

When the Ms. Foundation for Women began exploring more deeply the ways to apply a gender justice framework to violence prevention, we were struck by the number of challenges on this road. There was tremendous interest among youth development and youth-led social change organizations about working at the intersection of gender, sexuality and violence, but no clearly articulated framework for understanding these different strands

and how they overlap and influence each other. Practitioner organizations needed technical assistance and support and effective means of helping like-minded allies find each other locally and nationally. But no such infrastructure existed. Most critically, funding for work to understand and prevent violence from a gender perspective and to develop gender justice advocacy strategies was limited and highly fragmented and there was little concentrated support available for work that addressed the connections between youth, gender and violence.

Despite these obstacles, it was clear to us from our decades of work in helping create new roles for women and girls that we had the vision, commitment and experience to continue on this road. The spirit, passion and depth of the thinking presented at this symposium, the energy and optimism reflected by the presenters, and the commitment we observed and felt, convinced us that we could count on many allies to join us on this path. The participants at this symposium represented a wide range of stakeholders—activists, philanthropists, scholars and practitioners. Each had something important to contribute, and together, they represent a mosaic of possibilities for real change.

“Young people are pushing us into uncharted territory to discover new tactics and strategies to end gender-based violence and drive progressive social change. The Ms. Foundation is proud to support youth-focused programs which encourage young people—and adults—to make creative and meaningful connections between issues and experiences in their own lives, and to ensure gender justice in communities nationwide.”

Sara K. Gould, Ms. Foundation for Women

As a leader in the field, it is our intention to harness these possibilities and confront with bold action the obstacles standing in the way of change. The insights gained at this symposium reinforced our commitment to and emboldened our belief in the importance of creating and deepening connections among funders, practitioners and scholars. The dialogue and cross-pollination of ideas and approaches that emerge from gatherings such as this are critical to devising and implementing the kinds of effective, aligned and multipronged strategies required to dismantle gender boxes, combat violence and work toward gender justice.

Recommendations to Funders

Drawing from the experiences shared by symposium participants as well as from our own expertise, we offer the following recommendations for the funding community to move this agenda forward:

1. See gender as relevant to all grantmaking areas and strategies.

Whether your foundation funds youth programs, child development, violence prevention, community development or mental health—gender is always there and it always matters. Bringing gender consciousness to your programming will make visible a range of new issues and concerns but will also present potential solutions to seemingly intractable problems. For example, a foundation that funds service-delivery models for mental-health needs may see issues of gender at play when women’s abuse histories go undetected and instead, women are commonly considered paranoid; conversely, contemporary, restricted gender roles may cause men’s abusive behavior to go undetected because aggressive behavior is a trait that is normally associated with males.

It is critical to recognize gender (alongside race and class) as a factor that shapes the different levels of power and control over socioeconomic conditions, access to resources, status, roles, options and treatment in society. A dedicated focus on gender as it relates to the daily realities of people's lives ensures that organizations and their funders are truly meeting the needs of their clients, members and constituents.

“Acknowledgement from supporters like the Ms. Foundation enables organizations like ours to validate the importance of our work on many levels. For a supporter to correlate the mission of our organization [focused on spoken word] with the development of safe spaces to address, critically analyze and prevent violence, is visionary.”

Michael Cirelli
Urban Word NYC

2. Recognize the fluidity of gender identity and sexuality.

Leading the way toward gender justice means seeking out opportunities to recognize and highlight the full range of gender identities and sexualities as central rather than ancillary. Start by examining the language in your institution's grantmaking guidelines. What assumptions are hidden there about expectations of gender and sexuality? Is heterosexuality implied or assumed? Would groups representing the transgender community feel invited to request support? Reframe guidelines to reflect a more gender-neutral approach to your work and erase any vestiges of homophobia. Think about the way that language can reinforce gender stereotypes or create opportunities for freer expression and revise your materials accordingly. Expect the same of your grantees. Evaluate proposals with an eye toward gender awareness and how welcoming programs may be to gender non-conformity; use the evaluative process with potential grantees to educate and raise awareness.

3. Fully engage boys and men across race and class.

No one gender holds the key to gender justice. Rather, it is a job that will require concerted and collaborative effort across gender, and therefore the full engagement of men and boys as partners. This effort must deliver to men and boys a compelling vision of manhood that frees them from the constraints of traditional masculinity and allows for the embrace of a broader, richer and more human understanding of themselves in the world. Such a vision would offer positive, alternative expressions of manhood that center less on power and physical domination and more on courage and compassion—paving the way for true gender justice.

“Gender justice is a notion for all young people, not just girls, so we have to challenge those who are doing work with only one gender.”

Symposium participant

4. Ensure safe space for the queer community.

Our society is a long way from ensuring that individuals in the queer community inhabit public spaces with the same sense of relative comfort and safety as do heterosexuals. A critical first step is to fund queer-led groups and programs in all settings, shifting norms to be inclusive and welcoming on all levels. Another step is to be vigilant in our efforts to create these safe spaces, physically and conceptually, particularly for children and youth in academic and social settings, in playgrounds and in promoting the games that children play, as their experiences shape their view of and place in the world. These steps will allow the philanthropic community to examine how to systematically support and enhance safe spaces.

5. Fund the continuum of gender justice work.

The subtitle of the Ms. Foundation’s symposium on youth, gender and violence was “exploring the connections,” a reference to how issues of gender and violence intersect and how they are amplified and altered by race, class and culture. Funders need to understand more clearly the way issues such as gender, race, violence and sexuality cut across each other, and they need to act accordingly. But working at these intersections is a creative endeavor, and it can make for a somewhat blurred programmatic approach—supporting this work won’t necessarily fit neatly into one specific funding category. An approach that gets at the heart of gender justice necessitates creativity and funding for a broad strategy that will reflect the continuum of lived experiences across race and class lines and find expression, exploration, and definition through media, art and popular culture. This will amplify the ideas and voices of youth and provide a platform for shaping new culture around gender, gender identity and expression.

The most authentic change efforts toward gender justice will come from communities that face the most oppression and are the most marginalized and under-resourced. Gender non-conforming youth—particularly youth of color—are at this cutting edge. Channeling the experiences of those individuals who are most likely to be the targets of gendered violence into strategic action is a critical strategy. Whether within LGBTQ spaces only, mixed-gendered programs, or programs that build leadership among marginalized youth, those organizations that provide gender-conscious programs and offer opportunities to engage in broader social change efforts with both peers and adult allies are those that are most likely to have impact and spark activism.

6. Take back the media.

The mainstream media is a veritable Goliath in the struggle for gender justice. Philanthropic efforts to advance fair media or media justice can focus on strategies to hold media accountable for their over-reliance on gender-based stereotypes and glamorized images of

“There is growing interest in funding around hip hop and media—young people as creators of alternative media and young people becoming more media savvy.

Hopefully it’s not a fleeting romanticism around what’s hot, but rather a focus on making real shifts.”

Symposium participant

gendered violence. Funders can support projects and organizations that are working to counter these trends and to untangle the web of media messages that contribute to gendered violence. Media programs, including those with misogynistic messages, can be used to promote discussion. Youth organizations in particular have their fingers on the pulse of alternative media and are eager to use new media and technology in innovative ways to shift attitudes and move the culture forward around gender issues.

Identifying and funding these groups will enable them to craft and deliver messages that can gain traction against the cacophony of sexist and homophobic voices that clog the airwaves and litter the blogosphere, and have a real impact on public perceptions and awareness.

7. Support grassroots infrastructure to build a movement.

Many of the organizations that shape the gender-justice landscape and move it forward are small, often unfunded and unrecognized groups. There is a sizable funding gap between established groups and small grassroots organizations, many of whom don’t have the resources to go after bigger dollars. And if those groups are youth-led, then assumptions are often made about them as being too nascent or unsophisticated. Grantmakers are often

hesitant to fund youth organizations that may be deemed risky. Yet, youth-focused organizations are especially in need of philanthropic resources that will help them leverage the creativity and readiness of young people to work effectively with adult allies. Important efforts would include not only dollars but technical assistance that would allow less-established groups to be more competitive for funding, and opportunities that would enable them to nurture partnerships and develop community—build a movement—with mentors and peers.

8. Distinguish between sex, gender and sexuality.

There is little common understanding among the general public about the difference between sex, gender and sexuality and the ways in which they interact. And skewed perceptions around sexuality, gender identity and gender expression fuel intolerance. Funders can work to build better public awareness around these issues, not only by highlighting the work of their grantees, but by funding theoretical and scholarly work and activities that bring together researchers and practitioners to examine these issues, and by actively engaging the media to publicize these efforts and the ideas they generate.

9. View funding colleagues as allies for collaboration.

Institutional priorities may limit the flexibility any particular funder has to make grants that stretch beyond narrowly constructed guidelines. By reaching out to colleagues across the philanthropic community, funders can gain insight into novel ways of approaching particular issues and creating synergy across funding categories. Finding ways to collaborate with funding colleagues enables an organization to think more creatively about making grants that seem tangentially related or do not appear to directly fit within their overall strategy. As well, reaching out to funding colleagues through a joint initiative can minimize risk while simultaneously leveraging impact. Another strategy is to consider funding intermediaries who have the ability to work more closely and more flexibly with smaller front-line organizations—this seeds an approach across multiple organizations, builds a field and deepens the learning. Partnering with funders who can work more closely at the grassroots level to build momentum for the work and build grantee capacity is an effective way to grow a movement, particularly in areas that require an on-the-ground strategy.

The Ms. Foundation Approach to Advancing Gender Justice

The Ms. Foundation for Women has always been a pioneer in creating new program models and devising innovative philanthropic approaches that spur and support activism to advance social justice feminism. We take pride in our legacy of leadership in women’s advocacy and in our continuing focus on identifying high-impact strategies that will make a difference in the lives of women and girls, and thus for all of society. One of these core areas is securing the safety of women and girls. The Ms. Foundation believes that gender-based violence is socially constructed and *preventable*. And we believe that preventing violence starts locally—through building relationships in communities across the country, engaging people to stake a claim in imagining a future without violence, and empowering them to be active in seizing power to demand real change.

The Ms. Foundation for Women believes that gender-based violence is socially constructed and *preventable*.

This is why we have already moved decisively to articulate gender justice as a framework for our evolving approach to ending interpersonal violence, to place youth-focused grantmaking at the forefront of our efforts, and to bring the philanthropic community together with other stakeholders to build support for a multi-sectored strategy. Our leadership in this includes the following movement-building strategies:

Build a movement of youth as leaders.

The symposium, *Youth, Gender and Violence: Exploring the Connections*, demonstrated our commitment to meeting the challenges of working toward gender justice. So too does our recent grantmaking, focused on grassroots organizations that are utilizing youth-led strategies and energizing their work with a bold mix of media, art and pop-culture infused tactics. Our grantmaking supports community-based approaches that engage young people in challenging systems and institutions that sustain patterns of gendered violence. We seek to transform youth expectations around violence and relationship norms as well as support efforts that include new ways of thinking about masculinity, gender expression and gender non-conforming individuals. We continue to fund programs that focus on empowering girls and young women as leaders to effect change and prevent violence in their lives and in the lives of others.

We understand that youth are both current as well as future leaders, and that they are savvy media consumers as well as shapers of new youth culture. Thus we place a special emphasis on media literacy and youth-made media production, youth organizing, hip-hop activism, and LGBTQ-straight movement building as strategies for addressing gender-based violence. We prioritize low-income and communities of color to address the critical intersections of race, class and gender in this work. Through these innovative approaches, our grantees are effectively engaging young people to challenge gender norms and to take action in shifting the landscape of gender intolerance.

Build a movement to support policy and culture change.

Preventing homophobic violence and building a broader base of support among men and boys are two areas that the Ms. Foundation is committed to furthering in its work. Homophobic violence is a critical area that needs attention not only because the level and intensity of violence is increasing, but also because it is so intertwined with society's ability to address gender and reach new standards of humanity. More work is needed to explore and expose the gendered nature of homophobic violence, to create policy change that addresses homophobia on all levels and facilitate culture change within communities where gendered views of the world are shaped. This is ground that the Ms. Foundation's work will cover, reaching out to all funder colleagues along the way who are interested in learning about this area.

Building a broader base of support among men and boys is also critical because, while the roles of women and girls have changed more dramatically over the past several decades, the roles of men and boys have remained largely intact. Dedication to deeper culture change involves moving away from gender as a synonym for girls to also challenging society's conceptions of masculinity. There is a small movement underway that seeks to explore these deeply ingrained roles in order to expand the gendered box that currently defines masculinity

and manhood. The Ms. Foundation is committed to help jump start that work through grantmaking and other activities.

Provide new tools to leverage grantmaking.

As a full partner in this work, the Ms. Foundation for Women traditionally supports our grantees with more than just funding. We add value to every dollar we give to maximize our strategic impact through such opportunities as learning institutes and retreats, convenings and peer-to-peer training.

Grantee convenings provide grassroots organizations with the opportunity to further explore the framework of gender justice and to share resource materials, background readings and approaches to organizing and activism. These meetings are highly effective tools for facilitating networking and cross-pollination among grantees and other groups in the field, and a critical component of our strategy for violence prevention. We link our grantees with like-minded organizations and facilitate their access to other potential partners through our network of relationships with social-change organizations nationwide.

Along with offering capacity building to support their organizational infrastructure and bringing in experts in the field to enrich the exchange on issues, the Ms. Foundation also uses these convenings to survey our grantees for a fresh perspective on the unique ways each is utilizing the gender-justice lens in their work. Moving forward we will prioritize communications to help bring attention to the work of our grantees and to build grantee capacity to embed communications strategies in all of their work.

Build a learning base.

Symposia, policy institutes, audio conferences and other fora provide a platform for the shared reflection and deeper learning that is critical to building an effective gender-justice movement. By bringing together activists, youth, expert facilitators, curriculum-development educators, researchers and funders across the spectrum of efforts focused on gender, youth and violence, the Ms. Foundation has assumed a leadership role in generating substantive discussion and debate on how these issues intersect on the ground.

The Ms. Foundation has conducted audio conferences on media justice and violence, transformative justice and other topics identified by grantee organizations. For example, our *Safety & Justice for All* series of publications and audio conferences linked organizations across 40 states in a single call and created the highest number of downloads and multiple printings for Ms. Foundation publications. By sharing our best learnings with the funding community, we enhance the strength of our giving potential and the success of the movement as a whole.

Build a movement within philanthropy.

The Ms. Foundation will continue to take a leadership role in the philanthropic community for increased and strategic funding of violence-prevention efforts and advocacy. It is critical to the success of our grantees and the movement in general that we enlarge the audience of those who know about and are invested in gender justice. We will undertake a “state of funding” survey to identify and quantify the resources available for gendered violence

prevention, as well as continue our cultivation of men as donor activists to the Ms. Foundation.

As the country's leading national women's fund, we see advancing gender justice as our responsibility. But we know that we cannot do it alone. We hope that this document is perceived as an invitation to join us in this work, and that it inspires deeper thought about the myriad ways that gender expectations are entwined with our cultural values. We believe that gender justice is a goal with universal implications. We know that any institution that supports men, women and children to live safer and healthier lives, that envisions more peaceful and enriched communities, or that endeavors to safeguard human rights, will find their mission more ably fulfilled when viewed through the lens of gender justice.

Appendix

Song Lyrics: “Let Me Tell You How to Talk to Me” by the HOTGIRLS Street Team

To hear the song, “Let Me Tell You How To Talk To Me,” visit <http://www.helpingourteengirls.org/media/hotgirlssexyback.mp3>

Verse 1

imma give you yo number back (Amber)
(yep) (Sesyli)
cause I don't like you and yo game is whack
(yep)
you see these boys just don't know how to act
(yep)
I try to walk away but they talk smack
(yep)
Take it to the streets

Verse 2 (Jazzmyn)

dirty boy (uh huh)
you try to play wit me like I'm a toy (uh huh)
you must not know that I'm the real ma-coy (uh huh)
some things you say just keep me real annoyed (uh huh)
take it to the streets

Chorus

Come here boy (Jakia)
-let me tell you how to talk to me- (*HOTGIRLS Street Team*)
don't be lame
-let me tell you how to talk to me-
ask my name
-let me tell you how to talk to me-
don't spit game
-let me tell you how to talk to me-
let me see where your mind is at
-let me tell you how to talk to me-
don't be whack
-let me tell you how to talk to me-
don't need no hint
-let me tell you how to talk to me-
we represent
HOT GIRLS STREET TEAM!! (call and response 4x)

Featuring: Amber a.k.a. “Ladii Tink,” Sesyli a.k.a. “Cayenne,” Jazzmyn a.k.a. “Weather,” Jakia a.k.a. “Flip Flop,” Stephy a.k.a. “Boston”

Credits: Produced and Mixed by CW (Harland Intel Computer Clubhouse)
Instrumental Version of Justin Timberlake’s “SexyBack”: Copyright Jive Records

SYMPOSIUM SPEAKERS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Donors:

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Symposium Speakers:

Lyn Mikel Brown, Colby College & Hardy Girls Healthy Women

Loren Harris, Ford Foundation

Neil Irvin, Men of Strength Clubs & Men Can Stop Rape

Rickke Mananzala, FIERCE

Meghan McDermott, Global Action Project

Donald G. McPherson, Ms. Foundation for Women Board of Directors &
Sports Leadership Institute at Adelphi University

Monique Mehta, Third Wave Foundation

Amanda Moscoso, Global Action Project

Mark Anthony Neal, Duke University

Stephanie Nilva, Day One

Anwar Mohamed Nur, Men of Strength Clubs

Sara Oaklander, Interaction Institute for Social Change

Robyn Rogers/aka DJ Reborn, Urban Word NYC

Glo Ross, FIERCE

Tahani Salah, Urban Word NYC

Carla Stokes, HOTGIRLS

Brett G. Stoudt, Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Jean Sung, Day One & New York University

Maya Thornell-Sandifor, Women's Foundation of California

Deborah L. Tolman, San Francisco State University

Amber Twine, HOTGIRLS

Riki Wilchins, Gender Public Advocacy Coalition

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Karen Mahler is a psychologist and independent consultant with more than 15 years of experience working as a researcher and writer with organizations addressing issues facing children, youth and families. She has been on the staff of the Guttmacher Institute and Planned Parenthood of New York City, and has a long-standing interest in the intersection of gender and sexuality, reproductive health and rights, youth development and risk prevention.

Ms. Foundation for Women

The Ms. Foundation for Women is the national women's foundation engaged across the United States to build women's collective power to ignite change.

The Ms. Foundation creates connections that strengthen social movements, bringing the leadership and perspectives of women who are working at the intersection of race, class and gender to the center. The Foundation funds and builds the capacity of diverse women and their organizations to connect across issues, geography and with other social justice groups.

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