

# Gender Transformative Giving

## The Next Phase in Feminist Philanthropy?



WOMEN'S  
FUNDING  
NETWORK



## A Gender Dictionary

“Gender” is used in multiple contexts. Here’s a quick guide.

### Gender Equity

Ensuring equal access to resources, power, opportunity for females, males, children and families, LGBTQ, etc.

### Gender Expression

How we express feeling feminine and masculine through dress, hair style, adornment, posture, etc.

### Gender Identity

An inner sense of being male or female, useful when discussing transgender individuals who feel a conflict between their sex and gender identification.

### Gender Lens or Gender Analysis

Being aware of the impact of gender equity and/or gender norms on a problem or issue.

### Gender Norms

Socially-constructed ideals, scripts, expectations for how to be a woman or a man.

### Gender Roles

Social and behavioral norms for how men and women are expected to act: being a doctor or nurse, being martial or maternal.

### Gender Transformative

Gender transformative programs and policies highlight, challenge and ultimately change harmful norms of femininity and masculinity.

# Why a “Gender Transformative” Approach?

## INTRODUCTION

Two decades of basic research have found that when girls and boys buy into really narrow ideals for femininity and masculinity, they have measurably lower life outcomes in a cluster of related areas that include sexual and reproductive health, intimate relationships, economic empowerment and educational achievement.

For instance, young women who internalize codes of femininity that prioritize purity, motherhood, obedience, dependence, deference and nurturance are less likely to carry condoms, acquire accurate sexual knowledge, discuss sex with males or develop condom negotiation skills. This makes them also more vulnerable to early and unplanned pregnancies and STIs, including HIV. They are more likely to get married and/or drop out of school early, defer to male prerogatives in sex and education matters and tolerate an abusive partner or even sexual coercion.

Nor is the problem limited to girls. Boys who internalize narrow codes of manhood as defined by strength, aggression, sexual prowess and emotional toughness are more likely to abuse female partners, be kicked out of school or to drop out early, engage in LGBT bullying and believe that pregnancy validates manhood.

---

**“Even funders whose focus is gender equity for women and girls find they must address gender norms to succeed.”**

---

## INTERNATIONAL DONORS

It is for these reasons that institutional donor agencies in the international community have made “gender transformative” approaches that highlight, challenge and ultimately change rigid gender norms and inequities central to their work, and found them effective.

For instance, PEPFAR, the President’s AIDS initiative, has made addressing gender norms the centerpiece of its work in dozens of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) no longer accepts new proposals that lack a strong gender analysis. And the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued multiple reports documenting the need to address gender norms to improve life outcomes in areas like fatherhood, violence against women, and infant and maternal health.

Even those organizations whose primary focus is improving gender equity for women and girls are finding that gender norms are crucial to the success of their efforts.

Developed by Riki Wilchins with Michele Ozumba, Kimberly Otis, Melinda Fine and Inger Brinck.



Funding for dissemination and training on the concepts contained in this report have been generously provided by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota ([wfmn.org](http://wfmn.org)).

For example, the World Bank recently published a voluminous 160-page report—titled, “On Norms and Agency”—based on focus groups with over 4,000 participants in dozens of countries like Poland, South Africa and Indonesia. Their findings were striking.

For all the progress the Bank has made investing in women and girls, they are reaching a ceiling in basic agency, such as education, workforce participation and a woman’s ability to respond to abuse or make decisions about her life and family. The reason is not insufficient commitment with gender equity, in which the Bank has invested hundreds of millions of dollars.

Rather, the lack of progress in agency is caused by gender norms that relegate much of the power and decision-making away from women and girls, and which dictate that being a “good woman” is closely linked to being obedient, dependent, and maternal. The Bank found that agency for women and girls was dictated as much by gender norms as by the actual conditions in their community or country. And this finding was remarkably stable across countries as dissimilar as Poland, South Africa and Indonesia.

The Bank concluded that the only way forward was to begin addressing cultural gender norms. The purpose of its 160-page report was not to educate the world, but rather to educate their own staff to incorporate gender norms into everything they do.

---

**“Lack of progress in improving equity is often due to gender norms that relegate power and decision-make away from women and girls.”**

—World Bank “On Norms & Agency”

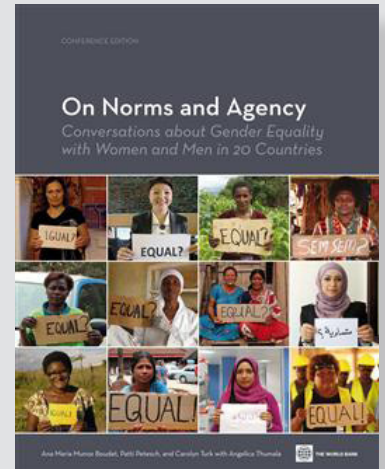
---

## A GATEWAY BELIEF SYSTEM

Moreover, belief in rigid gender norms seems to be linked to a group of related problems: basic health and wellness, partner violence, reproductive health, education and economic empowerment. Some authorities have begun referring to masculinity or femininity as a “Gateway Belief System” whose internalization leaves individuals vulnerable to lower life outcomes across a cluster of related measures.

For instance, when it comes to education, young men establish public masculinity and impress their peers through behaviors like risking-taking, boisterousness and physicality, breaking rules and defying adult authority figures, showing emotional toughness and suffering punishment silently—practically a check-list for increased contact with school disciplinary regimes and the juvenile justice system, and falling afoul of Zero Tolerance and similar “school push-out” policies.

And although we want young women to be economically empowered, wielding money and power are both still seen as deeply masculine. Young women learn early that being feminine includes beauty and desirability, being a good mother and caretaker and being dependent upon a male. They also learn they cannot hope to attract or hold onto a man if they show him up by being smarter, richer or stronger, have a bigger income or tread on his position as main breadwinner and arbiter of economic decisions. All of these can make being both very feminine and economically empowered a conflict in terms.

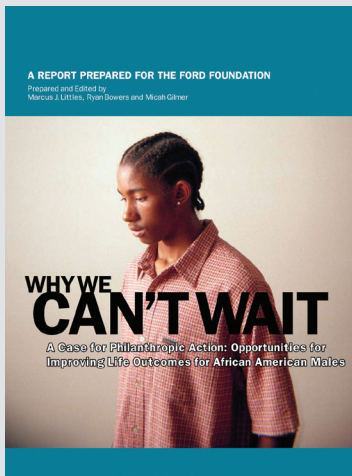


“[B]ehind the progress towards gender equality and persistent gender gaps lies an almost universal set of factors embedded in social and gender norms... that shape and reinforce the gender inequities of power and impact the choices and freedom of women and girls (and men and boys).”

On Norms and Agency:  
Conversations about Gender Equality  
with Women and Men in 20 Countries;  
World Bank, 2012, p12-13.



**“The powerful influence of gender norms on an individual’s actions is one of the foundations of gender inequality.”**



“Gender roles influence the way [young men of color] understand and engage educational opportunity, labor force participation, and relationships with women and other men...[R]igid gender roles limit conceptions of opportunity and success and expose some men to stigmatization, abuse and violence.”

Why We Can't Wait – A Case for Philanthropic Action: Opportunities for Improving Life Outcomes for African American Males, Frontline Solutions for the Ford Foundation, 2006

Increased giving to women and girls does not automatically imply having a strong gender analysis, any more than giving to communities of color automatically means a strong racial justice analysis. While the giving is certainly important, so is having the understanding.

## GENDER LENS IN U.S. LAGS BEHIND

Despite the fact that the world’s foremost researchers and experts in gender norms and at-risk youth are here in US colleges and universities, this is an area where US philanthropy has traditionally lagged behind.

As Loren Harris (Program Officer for the Ford Foundation’s US youth funding) has argued, “Gender impacts every issue funders work on. But grantees and program officers aren’t challenged to do innovative work around gender” [like they are for race and class].

A small core of high-profile progressive funders have made important grants that engage a focus on gender norms—for example the Atlantic Philanthropies, California Endowment, Ford Foundation, Heinz Endowments, Motorola Solutions Foundation and Overbrook Foundation.

But, by and large, US funding continues to ignore the impact of feminine and masculine norms.

As one frustrated program officer put it, “My staff and grantees get race and class, and some are even starting to get sexual orientation; but where is the gender analysis? What I want to know is, what happened to gender?”

---

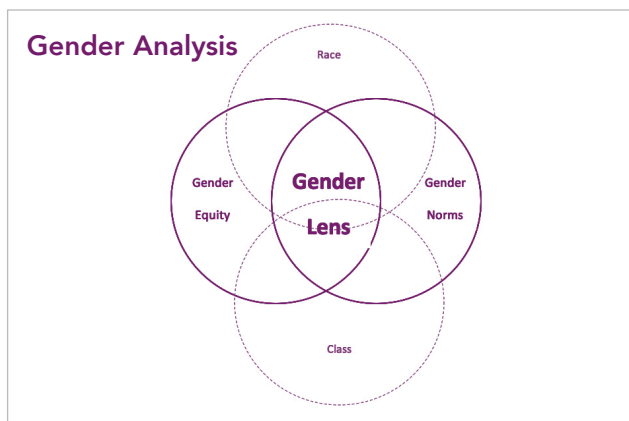
**“Gender impacts every issue funders work on. But grantees and program officers aren’t challenged to do innovative work around gender [like they are for race and class].”**

---

Complicating matters, many in the women’s funding movement have shifted to promoting a gender analysis as a broader frame for their work, in hopes of strengthening girls- and women-focused programming and potentially appealing to a wider range of funders.

While the motivation for this was to reach for a broader analysis that could appeal to a wider range of funders, in practice it may have sometimes become simply another way of appealing for increased support for women and girls.

No one would deny that increasing such funding is important and remains an important philanthropic priority.



## A LEADING EDGE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY

However, the shift in language has not entirely worked, and often it has not been pulled thoroughly or deeply through our giving. A real gender analysis is much more robust than the uses to which we have been putting it. Put bluntly, it is stronger than we realize.

If we promoted a gender transformative approach that was broadly inclusive (men, boys, LGBTQ), fully intersectional (age, race, class, disability), and deeply grounded in how rigid gender norms lower outcomes for nearly every issue and community we serve, we might be better able to: a) engage the wider philanthropic audience we seek; b) accomplish our original goal of increased attention to women and girls; and, c) shift philanthropic discourse for the better.

This last would be no minor accomplishment. Because, as we hope we made clear from the beginning, gender norms remain a huge and overlooked variable.

Integrating a strong, specific focus on challenging rigid masculine and feminine norms could make many grants and programs more effective, and increase the social return on philanthropic investment. And this is especially true for our most vulnerable populations, such as youth, or individuals in low-income communities.

Perhaps as importantly, shifting philanthropic practice towards a more gender transformative approach would be the “right thing to do:” making it more diverse and inclusive, grounding it more deeply in the diverse oppressions people face and bringing it into closer alignment with human rights funding, which shares many of the same values—including treating social justice and gender justice as indivisible.

We realize that this kind of retooling of women-centered giving—and giving in general—may strike some as provocative. Yet we believe it is entirely consistent with feminist principles and represents a leading edge of “best practice” for social justice giving in the 21st century.

As one World Bank senior manager put it, “We’re not doing this because it’s trendy or politically correct—we’re data-driven economists—we’re doing it because the data shows that addressing gender norms gets better outcomes.” The remainder of this paper, created and disseminated by Women’s Funding Network and TrueChild with help from Public Interest Projects, is devoted to exploring how women’s philanthropy in the US might begin to do likewise.

A strict focus on funding for women and girls may inadvertently hinder philanthropic effectiveness in addressing problems that directly affect this constituency—such as partner violence or teen pregnancy—where ignoring men and boys has obvious limitations.



### LGBTQ

A gender transformative analysis readily includes gay, transgender and even intersex individuals, because it sees gender as not a strict binary but a broad spectrum along which each of us falls according to how we align with expected feminine or masculine norms.

### MASCULINITY

“We’re in this box, and in order to be in that box, you have to be **STRONG**, you have to be **TOUGH**, you have to have lots of **GIRLS**, you gotta have **MONEY**, you have to be a **PLAYER** or a **PIMP**, you gotta be in **CONTROL**, you have to **DOMINATE** other men, and if you are not any of those things, then people call you **SOFT** or **WEAK** or a **P\*SSY** or a **CHUMP** or a **F\*GGOT** and NOBODY wants to be any of those things so **EVERYBODY STAYS INSIDE THE BOX.**”

**HIP-HOP:**  
**Beyond Beats & Rhymes**

Byron Hurt | [www.bhurt.com](http://www.bhurt.com)



# How Will a Gender Transformative Approach Affect Grantmaking?

Even funders who accept the need for a gender transformative approach often confess to feeling daunted by what it will mean in practice. How does this affect our funding?

## WHAT WILL IT MEAN FOR US?

Think for a moment about how your institution engages issues of race (although this is not to say that gender and race are equivalent or interchangeable—they are not).

Most foundations with a racial justice analysis address race in a number of interlocking and reinforcing ways. First, they consciously address the impact of race in the way they articulate their mission, vision or understanding of the problem.

This awareness of race and of racial disparities shows up in their intellectual collateral: reports, webpages, brochures and presentations often mention race. Staff are expected to be conversant in issues of race. As importantly, grantee organizations are also expected to be sensitive to race and acknowledge its impact in programming and proposals.

Perhaps most importantly, most progressive philanthropic institutions tacitly or overtly accept that race is a very important variable in more effectively promoting social justice. This knowledge, this vision, informs how they understand their work, what social problems they address, the philanthropic investments they make and the returns on charitable investment they hope to realize and actually measure.

The impact of integrating a focus on rigid gender norms (or for that matter, class or sexual orientation) is very similar. There is no single, simple action to perform. Instead it informs philanthropic work across the entire plane of contact the institution makes with its pursuit of social justice. That's why international institutions doing gender transformative work often begin with internal work (board and staff training, adding it to funding priorities), move to working with funder peers (donor education), and finally move out to work with grantees (materials and websites, white papers and other external communication).

## WHAT WILL IT MEAN FOR OUR GRANTEES?

The change for grantee organizations need not be overly daunting. Asking them to think about how gender norms impact their population requires a certain amount of thought and consideration (much as many groups are going through now in grappling with sexual orientation or gender identity).

Today among some nonprofits a degree of "compassion fatigue" sets in when they are asked to address another marginalized group or issue. And many nonprofits are overburdened with philanthropic and reporting requirements already.



## Intersectional Approach

Addressing different facets of oppression—race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.—as interacting in people's lives rather than compartmentalizing them and treating each as independent of the others.

We propose that gender be suggested as a frame of analysis. Prospective and current grantees can be asked about the impact of gender norms in LOIs and grant proposals, but not required to do so (or penalized if they don't). This provides grantees time to learn and absorb a gender lens, without feeling they are being pressured to do so.

---

**“My grantees get race and class – what happened to gender? What I want to know is, where is the gender analysis?”**

---

Moreover, when we expect additional things from grantees, it is always good to offer them additional resources. This can take the form of free gender trainings, webinars and other capacity building. There are a number of groups who offer this, as well as many researchers working in nearby colleges and universities in the US. And helping grantees develop an understanding of how gender links to race and class need not be expensive or time-consuming.

Nor is implementing gender transformative programs on the ground. We find most grantees can master the delivery of gender transformative exercises relatively quickly. These proven exercises are designed to be straightforward and easy to facilitate, and need add only a handful of hours grantees' existing programming. (For example, please see “Gender Box” Exercise to the right.)

Particularly for grantees that work with young people, learning to fulfill gender expectations for femininity and masculinity is such a primary rite of passage and drives so much of unhealthy adolescent and teenage behavior, that the biggest payoff for a gender transformative approach is that it makes everything they do more effective.

## Where Can I Find More Resources?

There are some great sources of information on gender transformative approaches. For institutional founders, check the Interagency Gender Working Group maintained by USAID at [www.igwg.org](http://www.igwg.org). Promundo, an NGO headquartered in the US and Brazil, and a world leader in this work, has excellent reports and (free) curricula ([www.promundo.org.br/en/](http://www.promundo.org.br/en/)) At the TrueChild website ([www.truechild.org](http://www.truechild.org)), we try to post everything we can find on gender transformative programs, policy, funding and research; and there's a new portal specifically for philanthropic officers at [www.truechild.org/funders](http://www.truechild.org/funders).

### “GENDER BOX” EXERCISE

There are many proven and powerful gender transformative exercises that grantees can easily integrate into their existing programming. One of the most basic is the Gender Box. Facilitators draw boxes with Woman and Man (or Boy and Girl) at the top, and ask participants what adjectives go with each. Groups quickly generate pretty comprehensive lists. Then they are asked how these expectations impact behavior in the classroom, in intimate relationships, in civic engagement, etc. Surprisingly robust discussions usually result.

**Women's Funding Network** connects and strengthens more than 160 organizations that fund women's solutions across the globe, making us one of the largest collaborative philanthropic networks in the world. Our members are women's foundations that span public charities, private foundations and funds within community foundations. Collectively our members invest \$65 million annually in women and girls worldwide and have over \$535 million in working assets.

**Public Interest Projects** is a public charity that catalyzes funders to do their work in innovative ways. Since 2002, we have led 10 collaborative funds on diverse social justice issues, building on a 30 year track record of providing fiscal sponsorship services for an exciting array of projects. In 2013, we actively engaged 130 funders, investing 20 million dollars in grants to nonprofit organizations in 37 states and the District of Columbia. We are partnering with the Women's Funding Network and TrueChild because we believe it is important for funders to think more intentionally about gender. PIP is in the early stages of exploring gender transformative approaches in our own grantmaking and institutional practice. We look forward to engaging our colleagues in this vital conversation.

**TrueChild** helps donors, policy-makers and practitioners reconnect race, class and gender through "gender transformative" approaches that challenge rigid masculine and feminine norms—highlighting their impact in areas like reproductive health, education, economic empowerment and intimate relationships. We are especially interested in at-risk communities, like those that are low-income, of color or LGBTQ.

# A Dozen Steps Donors Can Take

## WITHIN YOUR FOUNDATION

1. Improve your understanding by speaking to experts from groups doing gender transformative work, such as: The Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities, Futures Without Violence, International Center for Research on Women, Men Can Stop Rape, Ms. Foundation for Women, Promundo/US or TrueChild.
2. Familiarize yourself with findings of some of the latest studies (a list can be found at [truechild.org/ReadTheResearch](http://truechild.org/ReadTheResearch).)
3. Fund the development of model curricula that challenge young people to think critically about gender norms.
4. Host a presentation on gender transformative work to educate your board and/or staff.
5. Get a True Child Gender Audit of your institution's policies, website and materials to uncover places a gender analysis could be added or an existing one made stronger.

## WITH FUNDER PEERS

6. Elevate awareness by hosting a webinar or presentation on the gender lens.
7. Organize a workshop on the impact of gender norms at a funders conference.

## WITH GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS

8. Add content on gender norms to funding guidelines and LOIs.
9. Ask grantees questions about gender norms and how they affect their population during site visits and interviews.
10. Fund the development of model curricula that challenge young people to think critically about gender norms.
11. Commission capacity building that helps grantees integrate a gender analysis into their work.
12. Commission focus groups and interviews to learn more of the specifics of the local gender culture among populations you serve.

*Developed by Matt Barnes, The Houston Endowments and Rahsaan Harris, Atlantic Philanthropies*

