Why We Can’t Wait: Lessons from Listening to Girls of Color

Monday, December 15th, 2014
3-5pm
Featured Speakers

MODERATOR: Alvin Starks
Kimberle Crenshaw
Joanne Smith
Pamela Shifman
Andrea Lynch
LaShawn Jefferson
The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) provides information and organizes activities to raise awareness about the state of women and girls of color across the nation.
Today’s Conversation:

- Why are girls and women of color “hidden in plain sight” and what are the consequences to the community as a whole?

- Why an intersectional lens is critical to advance a vision of race and gender justice that centers the concerns of the entire community, women as well as men, girls as well as boys
Despite popular belief, women and girls of color are facing significant life challenges in...

- School
- State Violence

[Image of stick figures representing wealth gap]

The Wealth Gap for Women of Color
Racial Differences in Wealth, Ages 18-64, 2007

- Single Black Women - $100
- Single Latina Women - $120
- Single Black Men - $7,900
- Single Latino Men - $9,730
- Single White Women - $41,500
- Single White Men - $43,800
Let’s all come together – Congress, the White House, and businesses from Wall Street to Main Street – to give every woman the opportunity she deserves. Because I firmly believe *when women succeed, America succeeds.*

And I’m reaching out to some of America’s leading foundations and corporations on a new initiative to *help more young men of color facing tough odds stay on track and reach their full potential.*
When women succeed, America succeeds, so there’s no such thing as a women’s issue. This is a family issue and an American issue -- these are commonsense issues.

Remarks by President Obama at the White House Summit on Working Families, June 23, 2014
Yet when it comes to the success of some of our daughters...

Their dreams for themselves, their futures, their families seem to matter less..
In fact, when it comes to “women” on one hand, and “people of color”

Girls and young women of color

Seem to disappear...
Reciting facts is not enough...

We need an intersectional lens to address intersectional problems.
3 Reasons Why We Must Have an Intersectional Frame When Talking about Girls of Color
Girls aren’t included in research and policy. Information about their circumstances is minimized. Fewer interventions are taken on their behalf. Assumptions that they’re doing ok are reinforced. This results in fewer interventions to scale up, fewer resources and less public will. 1) Because reversing the cycle of invisibility is critical.
2) Because one size fits all strategies don’t always work

Girls of color experience risks that are the **same** as their peers and risks that are **different**
3) Because the hidden racial burdens that Black girls face are often obscured.
Listening to What Girls of Color Have to Tell us About Their Lives

AAPF held focus groups with Black girls in NY and Boston in order to hear directly from them about their needs and experiences. These conversations:

• Revealed factors that contribute to under-achievement and dropout rates

• Gave us a nuanced understanding of their lives
Increased levels of law enforcement and security personnel within schools often make Black and Latina girls feel less safe and therefore less likely to attend school.

“It’s like sexual harassment. Ok, it’s not really sexual harassment. But you are very uncomfortable. You have to strip down to the T. . . . You basically got to come to school naked . . . . It’s like uncomfortable. . . . They got to search you. It feels like you’re in jail. It’s like they treat you like animals, because they think that’s where you’re going to end up.”
Girls’ attachment and sense of belonging in school can be undermined if their achievements are overlooked or undervalued

“What I have seen is that when girls do well in school it is kind of overlooked. Because despite everything [more is] still expected of them than the boys. So if the attention is always placed on the boys who do well, and that’s what people in the building tend to highlight, girls who do well just kind of get overlooked. [T]here is rarely anything done to celebrate them or to encourage them to keep going”
The failure of schools to intervene in situations involving the physical and sexual harassment of girls contributes to their feelings of insecurity in school.

“...a girl got a lot of attention from a boy, and he kept pressuring her for sex, and her father was trying to get teachers to help his daughter. He was saying that she can’t go to school anymore if you don’t do something, and the teachers were like “good, take her out, she attracts too much attention from our boys.” I was waiting for another group of teachers to chime in, and they all kind of agreed. This isn’t just an isolated incident. Teachers aren’t the role models of gender equity...”
Girls sometimes resort to acting out when their counseling needs are overlooked or disregarded.

“The only way they’re going to know there’s something wrong with you is if you show your face. If you try . . . to go in there, try to sit there, one on one, they can automatically think you’re there to waste time and not to go to class. It’s like they shutting down on us.”
Stakeholders highlight the need to address the barriers facing girls.

“It is not in vogue to deal with gender disparities, and even when I talk to the director [for the] achievement gap I was surprised [to find] that they don’t look at gender. They look at race, ELL [English language learner], and disability...they can’t do gender”
Develop the Public Will

- Support opportunities for women and girls of color to speak about their lived experiences.
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Expand existing funding opportunities to ensure the inclusion of girls and women of color

• Reverse the invisibility of women and girls of color in research, public discourse, advocacy, the provision of services and policy interventions

• Develop ways to help girls feel safe without an over-reliance on suspension and expulsion policies
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Develop culturally competent programs to identify and address girls who have been traumatized by violence and abuse, including sexual violence.

• Develop and expand programs that support girls who are pregnant, parenting or otherwise assuming significant familiar responsibilities.

• Develop workable knowledge about girls of color by replicating proved strategies including field development, data disaggregation and wide dissemination.
Comprehensive List available in Malcolm X Grassroots Movement Report “Operation Ghetto Storm”