

Gender Transformative Philanthropy

A Case for More Effective Giving



**WOMEN
MOVING
MILLIONS**



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.

Developed by Riki Wilchins with Ginger Hintz, Jessica Houssian, and Kimberly Otis.

INTRODUCTION

Feminist donors and social justice funders who apply a gender lens undoubtedly share as many differences as similarities. What they do have in common is a passion for gender equality and a commitment to seeking systemic solutions that produce sustainable progress.

These commonalities spring from a deep appreciation of how gender regimes routinely disempower women and girls across the entire plane of social contact, especially in the classroom, the workplace, and home.

Many feminist philanthropists believe empowering women and girls is not just a *moral good*, but a social good as well, one that can also produce major economic benefits for all. This is a foundational understanding of what makes society more stable, just, and productive.

Given their intimate acquaintance with the gender system and their commitment to equality, it seems surprising that among feminist funders gender remains a contested term, and one often wielded in very limited ways.

Donors who say they apply a gender lens usually mean they prioritize giving that maximizes opportunity and funding for women and girls. Yet gender equality is only **half** of a gender lens.

The other half, still overlooked in US philanthropy, concerns gender norms.

“Many feminist philanthropists believe empowering women and girls is not just a *moral good*, but a social good as well... ”

OVERLOOKING GENDER NORMS

Three decades of research has found that when people internalize narrow, rigid ideals of femininity and masculinity they tend to have markedly lower life outcomes.

And these outcomes aren’t limited to any one area but occur across a cluster of related problems: sexual and reproductive health, partner violence, economic (dis)empowerment, and educational under-achievement.

For instance, young women who internalize feminine ideals that prioritize the “three D’s” of dependence, deference, and desirability are more likely to drop out of school early, to have unplanned pregnancies, and to contract STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections)/HIV.

They are also more likely to be abused by an intimate partner and to tolerate infidelity and 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 be kicked or drop out of school. They are more likely to abuse female partners, and engage in homophobic bullying.

They are also more likely to equate sexual risk-taking and promiscuity with manliness, to contract or transmit HIV, and to believe that pregnancy validates manhood.

Such linkages across problem areas have led some authorities to refer to feminine and masculine gender norms as “Gateway Belief Systems” that—once internalized—make young people more vulnerable to lower life outcomes across a number of critical indicators of health and social well-being.

A CEILING ON GENDER EQUITY

But what about feminist donors whose sole priority is improving gender equity for women and girls? Are gender norms relevant to their concerns, and is the other half of a gender lens independent from gender equity?

One major funder that has examined exactly this issue in-depth is the World Bank.

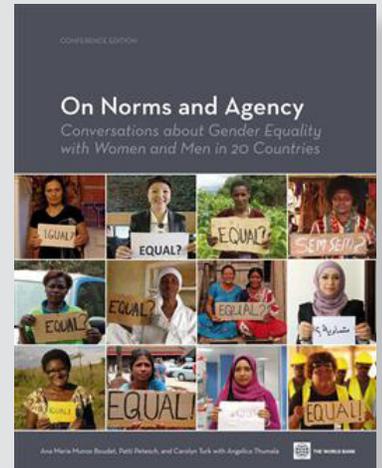
After investing hundreds of millions of dollars in loans, grants, and other aid to improve equality for women and girls, the Bank found while they had made substantial progress in in areas like political and economic participation, in matters of personal agency—education, reproductive health, women’s voice, and partner violence—little had changed.

It was like there was a “ceiling” on making further gains. And this hidden barrier seemed to forestall further progress, even in very different cultures, regardless of their charitable investment.

To investigate, they commissioned an extraordinary study that interviewed 4,000 people in 200 communities across two dozen countries.

The results of their 160-page report, “On Norms and Agency,” are striking: that ceiling was cultural gender norms. [World Bank, 2013]

In every culture, deeply-embedded traditions of masculinity and femininity moved power and decision-making away from women and girls, dictating that a “good woman” was linked to being obedient, dependent, and maternal. And of course those embedded norms resulted in the opposite for males, and of course were intrinsic to everyday social functioning.

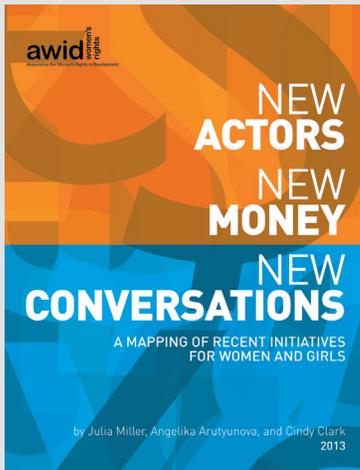


“[B]ehind the progress towards gender equality and persistent gender gaps lies an almost universal set of factors embedded in social and gender norms... that shape and reinforce the gender inequities of power and impact the choices and freedom of women and girls (and men and boys).”

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 power structures are best transformed through interventions [that include] the social and cultural norms that uphold and “normalize” gendered differences in access to resources, power, privilege, opportunities, and responsibilities. These norms are taught overtly in institutions like the family, clan, or tribe, or by religion and reinforced in the school, workplace or other spaces...

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) 2013
New Actors, New Money, New Conversations: A Mapping of Recent Initiatives for Women and Girls.

In fact the Bank determined that gender norms were one of the main “foundations” of gender inequality, and that the lives and opportunities available to women and girls were dictated as much by cultural ideals of femininity and masculinity as by conditions in their communities or their financial circumstance.

The Bank concluded that the only way to generate new progress was to begin challenging gender norms. In fact, its voluminous report was produced to initiate the process of educating their own staff on the importance of integrating a gender norms approach into everything they did—from data collection and grantmaking to policy work and outcome assessment.

As one senior manager at the World Bank manager put it, “We’re not doing this because it’s trendy or politically correct—after all we’re data-driven economists—we’re doing it because the numbers show it works better.”

IMPROVING CHARITABLE RETURNS

That statement contains a key takeaway for US feminist philanthropists. Donors can get better social returns on their charitable investment when they address gender norms than if they ignore them.

Policies and programs that address root causes are more effective at addressing what really holds women and girls back from more productive and empowered lives.

There is certainly a strong moral case to integrating gender justice into existing social and racial justice funding. We argue that it’s not only the *right thing to do*, but more importantly it’s the *more effective thing to do* as well.

As leading gender researcher and author Michael Kimmel puts it, “If we want better outcomes for women and girls, there’s no way around gender norms; there’s only *through*.”

This is especially true with young people. As any parent with a young child at home can affirm, during the “gender intensification” period of adolescence and early teens, interest in traditional gender norms start to accelerate, and belief in them starts to solidify.

Conforming to gender norms is a major rite of passage—perhaps the major rite of passage—for teens or adolescents.

It’s not that gender norms are the sole variable producing lower life outcomes in problems like reproductive health or economic empowerment. It isn’t—there’s the impact of inequalities associated with race, class, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation.

Rather, our argument is that gender norms are the biggest variable still not being addressed. And donors looking for the next big “drop on the meter” in philanthropic efficacy would have to consider gender norms.

INTERNATIONAL DONORS LEAD

This is one of the reasons that major international donor institutions have adopted what are called “gender transformative” approaches to philanthropy.

“Gender transformative” was coined by leading authority Geeta Rao Gupta, who headed SIECUS and International Center for Research on Women before becoming Deputy Executive Director at UNICEF.

The term refers to approaches that highlight, challenge, and ultimately try to change rigid gender norms and inequities, whether these are in policies, programs, or funding priorities.

PEPFAR, the President’s AIDS initiative, has made addressing gender norms a centerpiece of its work in dozens of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Doing so is even mandated in the Congressional law that authorized funding.

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 evaluating the evidence of gender transformative approaches and documented the need for them in areas like fatherhood, maternal and infant health, and violence against women.

As Loren Harris, who led the Ford Foundation’s US youth program, puts it: “Gender impacts every issue funders work on. But grantees and program officers aren’t challenged to do innovative work around gender.”

HOW NORMS WORK

But what about specific issues connected to life outcomes for young women and girls? How do feminine norms impact life outcomes, and how can gender transformative approaches help?

It is useful to think of gender norms as having effects at three interconnected levels:

1. Basic attitudes about what it means to be a proper woman;
2. Belief systems that flow from those attitudes; and,
3. Behaviors that are prompted by those beliefs.

To illustrate, consider an issue like teen and unplanned pregnancy. Traditional feminine norms in the US encourage young females to internalize narrow ideals of docility, physical desirability, maternalism, and deference.

The impact of such beliefs on intimate behavior can scarcely be overstated. A young woman who internalizes such ideals is more likely to believe that good girls don’t carry condoms, know too much about the details of sex, or discuss sex openly with males. All of these mean she is less likely to think through safer sex techniques with her partner or learn and master condom negotiation skills.

She is likely to equate self-worth with sexual desirability and less likely to be in touch with her own body or sexual needs. She is also more likely to tolerate sexual coercion in order to attract or maintain a relationship with an intimate partner.

The importance of women’s understanding of men and masculinity can emerge in unexpected contexts. For example, some studies have found that a key factor in STEM’s “leaky pipeline” is fear that young men find logical, brainy, tech-oriented girls unfeminine. And in studying intimate partner violence, gender scholar Deborah Tolman found that women who buy into the belief that manhood involves violent domination are less likely to leave an abusive partner and more likely to go from one abuser to another.



Even in problems like STEM interest and achievement, which would seem to depend more squarely on the girls themselves, males play an important role. In TrueChild focus groups, when middle-school girls were asked if they could be both pretty and smart, they laughed and replied, “Not in junior high!” It wasn’t just a matter of lack of role models, or girl-oriented classes, or “stereotype threat;” what boys thought of girls—or perhaps more accurately what they thought boys thought of them—was a key reason these girls dropped out of math and science.

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

Perhaps this all seems pretty obvious. Yet 25 years ago, the Centers for Disease Control convened 40 top authorities on youth and reproductive health to make recommendations on how to make American policies and programs more effective. This was a crucial time when HIV was just detonating in the US.

The experts told them that the single most important thing researchers and policy-makers could do was to address gender norms, because the US was still working in a “gender vacuum.”

Although that paper has been cited over 1,000 times, today it is still rare to find reproductive health programs or policies that integrate a strong, specific focus on challenging rigid gender norms. That’s what a research-policy disconnect looks like. And it continues today.

Fortunately, that is finally starting to change. A core of high-profile funders have made important grants that engage a focus on gender norms, including the Atlantic Philanthropies, California Endowment, Ford Foundation, Heinz Endowments, Motorola Solutions Foundation, and Overbrook Foundation.

Their grants have addressed a broad cross-section of issues: young Black girls’ health and wellness, teen pregnancy among young Latinas, civic engagement, and STEM interest and achievement.

At its core, the feminist project has always been concerned not only with identifying and remedying the root causes of inequalities themselves, but also with understanding how disparities are produced and maintained.

A group of Jewish women’s funds are beginning to focus on feminine norms’ impact on young Jewish women and girls, especially in areas like body image, self-esteem, and economic empowerment.

The Office of Women’s Health at the Department of Health and Human Services has made gender norms a centerpiece of its work, and major non-profits like EngenderHealth and Futures Without Violence have begun creating model gender transformative programs.

Moreover, these emerging efforts come from a deeply feminist space. At its core, the feminist project has always been concerned not only with identifying and remedying the root causes of inequalities themselves, but also with understanding how disparities are produced and maintained.

Deeply-embedded normative belief systems about gender—about how to “be” men and women, masculine and feminine—are the root causes of inequality and the means by which they are produced and perpetuated.

MEN INTO THE MIX

In fact, gender transformative approaches focus not on only women and girls, but also men and boys. Paradoxically, as Michael Kimmel puts it, women's equality may actually require getting men involved.

Devoting more funding and energy to men and boys can feel deeply at odds with feminist philanthropy. It directs crucial resources away from women and girls who already receive only a small fraction of overall giving.

But as the World Bank found, rigid masculine norms, how men conform to them, and how they impact their intimate relationships are all integral to making enduring and systemic change in the lives of women and girls.

Gender transformative approaches view men and boys not solely as oppressors or even bystanders, but seek to engage them fully as key allies and critical stakeholders.

Many problems that feminist philanthropy addresses—from teen pregnancy and partner violence to economic empowerment and infant and maternal care—are relational in nature.

It is unlikely these complex issues will be completely solved by focusing solely on women and girls. Men and boys will need to be part of any solution.

How masculinity is understood not just by men, but also by women, is important. For instance, helping young women become more economically empowered—or develop their leadership potential—is more difficult when they internalize the belief that females who wield money and power are seen as unfeminine.

Helping young women becomes even more difficult when they also buy into beliefs that a male partner's masculine pride may be threatened by a woman who is smarter, richer, or stronger.

This is why when it comes to improving women's equality, gender transformative approaches view men and boys not solely as oppressors or even bystanders, but seek to engage them fully as key allies and critical stakeholders.

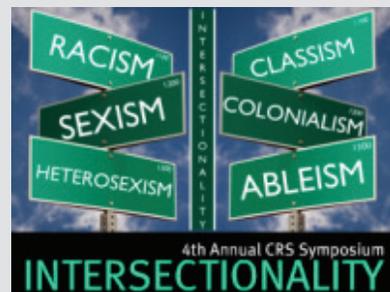
INTERSECTIONAL: RACE, CLASS & SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Where do variables like race, class and religion fit in? Gender transformative approaches have what theorist Kimberle Crenshaw called an intersectional analysis.

This means that they understand how different systems of oppression like race or class are not separate and distinct, but overlap and interact in people's real daily lives.

Moreover, racial stereotypes are always gendered, and gender stereotypes are always raced.

For example, pop cultural icons like 50 Cent, Bruce Lee and Clint Eastwood or Madonna, Beyoncé and Selena are all specifically raced and gendered portrayals of masculinity and femininity (and often classed as well).



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.



Perhaps a truly feminist philanthropy must avoid premature closure and perpetually seek to comprehend the lives of women and girls in the full beauty—and messiness—of their complexity.

As a result, whenever we're talking about race, we're always on some level talking about gender, and vice versa.

A gender transformative approach also enables us to more fully integrate an understanding of LGBTQ issues and sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many donors now "get" that young people who don't fit traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity—or who are openly gay or transgender—often grow up struggling in a world of depression, fear, and social isolation that can lead to lower life outcomes.

A gender transformative analysis also reveals and addresses how even those who do fully conform to traditional norms experience lower life outcomes. In doing so, it allows donors to address the concerns of gender conforming and gender non-conforming individuals—long separated into gay vs. straight—in a single, common framework that addresses the impacts of gender regimes.

WHY DONORS SHOULD ACT

As was noted above, making these kinds of connections with race, class, religion, or sexual orientation isn't just intellectually interesting or politically correct, it is more effective philanthropy.

First, because understanding overlapping systems like race and class enables us to see problems in greater depth and address them with more comprehensive solutions.

Second, because gender transformative approaches represent a low-risk, high-return opportunity that can make systemic improvement in gender equity for truly minimal investments.

Just imagine how much more effective after-school programs would be if every one of them taught young people from eight through 18 to think critically about rigid gender norms (especially the kinds they see reflected constantly in music, videos, games, movies, and social media).

Third, because as philanthropists committed to growing funding for gender equality, a gender transformative analysis that is truly intersectional in nature opens new avenues to communicate and engage mainstream donors whose focus is men and boys, or racial justice, or Jewish cultural traditions.

Not to mention a gender norms lens authentically addresses the passions and concerns of fellow women donors who are themselves of color, or gay or transgender, or from low-income communities.

Because the truth is, many of us have never had the luxury of simple and uncomplicated identities. We've made our homes, and build our lives at the intersections of multiple identities, where many different kinds of challenges and oppressions meet and intersect.

Our philanthropy should strive to mirror those complexities and draw from those lived experiences.

Perhaps this seems needlessly messy and complex. But a truly feminist philanthropy must perpetually seek to avoid the premature view of the straightforward and simple. It must work towards continually seeking to comprehend the lives of women and girls in the full beauty—and messiness—of their lived complexity.

WHAT THE FIELD NEEDS

If so, there is much that remains to be done. To begin with, too little is known about feminine gender norms. The basic research is about a third as old, and many times more narrow, than the data on men and boys.

There seem to be universal facets to feminine norms, yet every community's gender culture has its own particular nuance. Young women in El Paso, Newark, Mobile, and Silicon Valley all understand femininity in common but also very specific ways.

Knowing these differences is the key to effective community-based work. More formative research like focus groups, surveys, and in-depth interviews with girls and also girl-serving professionals to better document gender's impacts in specific populations are urgently needed.

Second, we need more dialog: not just one conversation but many. Donors and grantees often don't fully digest gender transformative approaches from a single brief exposure. Both are often overloaded with information at the best of times and because gender is so engrained in our thinking, we often take it for granted.

We need not one dialog, but many.

So the more ways we communicate these ideas the better, including intellectual collateral like white paper reports (such as this one), toolkits, or short guides to help those just started on practicing a gender transformative analysis.

These should be coordinated with in-person workshops, conference presentations, webinars, and board trainings. All of these educate and create awareness, building familiarity and comfort level with basic terms and concepts.

Third, for grantee organizations that want to master the gender transformative approach, there are few programs or curricula in the US that integrate a strong, specific focus on challenging rigid gender norms.

Fortunately, international NGOs have developed a wealth of exercises that just need to be adapted for use by domestic organizations (another reason formative research is important).

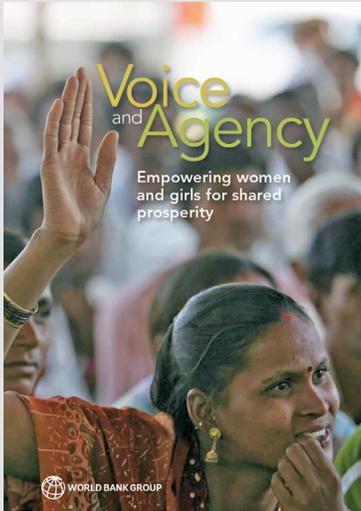
These exercises are part of model curricula that can be easily disseminated to non-profit and integrated into their existing programs, along with before-and-after metrics.

Helping grantees do so is part of pulling a gender transformative approach through all aspects of our giving—funding priorities, grantmaking, strategizing, and interaction with other philanthropists.

Finally, for donors who want to do a "deeper dive," there are also TrueChild Gender Audits®. These examine brochures, websites, and funding guidelines for points of entry where a gender norms approach could easily be integrated. The goal is to help donors pull a gender analysis through their work so it quickly becomes part of their "giving DNA."

Women's philanthropy is itself impacted by gender norms. For instance, often in families of wealth—especially inherited wealth—men fill the leadership roles in the family business while women provide the philanthropic leadership, which may be seen as less important. Women-led philanthropy may be subtly disparaged as frivolous and not on par with the family's financial goals, despite increasing evidence that business and philanthropic strategies can be mutually supportive. Moreover, male family members may encourage transactional or scattershot philanthropy to respond to other donors' requests, instead of [supporting] women donors' strategic direction."

Kimberly Otis, consultant and former Exec. Dir., The Sister Fund; former CEO, Women & Philanthropy



Social norms act as powerful prescriptions for how men and women should behave...Norms over time become legalized discrimination, which imposes its own steep economic cost. The good news is that social norms can and do change... Programs that tackle regressive gender norms...have had promising results.

Jim Yong Kim
President, World Bank Group
Voice and Agency, 2014

WHAT IT WILL MEAN FOR US

Think how your giving engages issues of race, religion, or ethnicity. This awareness probably shows up in things like intellectual collateral, grantee guidelines, presentations, and funding priorities. And you might expect new staffers or partners in your giving circles to at least be conversant in these areas.

As importantly, current and potential grantee organizations are also expected to be sensitive to these issues and acknowledge or integrate them into proposals and programs.

Integrating gender norms is very similar. There is no single, simple action to perform. Instead it informs the full range of philanthropic communication and partnership between and among donors, boards, and grantees.

That's why international agencies doing gender transformative work often begin with internal work (board and staff training, and funding priorities), move on to working with funder peers (donor networks and giving circles), and finally to grantees (materials, programs, and policies).

Asking staffers and grantees to address gender norms is similar to asking them to consider how factors like race, class, sexual orientation, or gender identity impact their work.

WHAT WILL IT MEAN FOR OUR GRANTEEES?

The change for grantee organizations should not be burdensome or daunting. Asking grantees to consider how gender norms impact their population requires a certain amount of thought, similar to that required to engage with issues of race or—with new advances in LGBTQ rights—sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our experience has mostly been that grantees are enthusiastic about integrating gender norms and are often way ahead of donors and foundations in this regard. Most grantees already have some appreciation of gender equity, and gender norms can be introduced as a corollary to those efforts.

In practice, this means prospective and current grantees can be asked to address the impact of gender norms in LOIs (Letters of Inquiry) and grant proposals—especially when gender equality is mentioned. However, we suggest they not be required to do so (or penalized if they don't). This provides grantees time to learn and absorb the impact of gender norms—without feeling pressured or compelled to do so.

It also helps if donors provide funding for capacity building assistance for a predetermined, closed-end period—no longer than three or four years—to enable grantees to integrate gender transformative work so that it survives the institutional memory of the current staff.

A Transformative Donor Checklist

- Are gender norms mentioned in your webpages, brochures, and other intellectual collateral where gender equality or race and class are addressed?
- Are gender norms part of your Theory of Change and funding priorities?
- Do you bring up gender norms whenever you mention gender equality?
- Do you raise the issue of gender norms in giving circles and other philanthropic collaboration?
- Do your funding associates foreground gender norms in presenting your work?

8 Positive Steps Donors Can Take

YOUR OWN GIVING

1. Host a presentation on gender transformative work for your staff and grantees.
2. Suggest a workshop on gender norms be presented at your next philanthropy conference.
3. Get a True Child Gender Audit® of your current funding and priorities to uncover places a gender analysis could be added or an existing one made stronger.
4. Track summaries of the latest research at www.truechild.org/ReadTheResearch, or the latest international papers at www.IGWG.org

IN GIVING CIRCLES

5. Build shared awareness by hosting gender presentations and discussing it afterwards.
6. Develop collaborative funds to collectively experiment with and learn from gender transformative giving strategies.

WITH GRANTEE GROUPS

7. Add questions on gender norms to funding guidelines and LOIs or grantees how norms affect their work during site visits and interviews.
8. Fund development of model curricula that challenge young people to think critically about gender norms.
9. Commission focus groups and interviews to learn more of the specifics of the local gender culture, especially among grantees doing gender sensitive work.

Developed with Matt Barnes, The Houston Endowments; Rahsaan Harris, Atlantic Philanthropies; and Melinda Fine, Public Interest Projects.



Where Can I Find More Resources?



There are some great sources of information on gender transformative approaches. For instance, check the Interagency Gender Working Group maintained by USAID at www.igwg.org. It has a wealth of papers, data, and the latest news.



Promundo, an NGO headquartered in the US and Brazil, and a world leader in this work, has excellent reports and (free) curricula on their website (www.promundo.org.br/en/)

Women Moving Millions is a community of women (and a few good men) who have made gifts and pledges of one million or more to organizations/initiatives promoting the advancement and empowerment of women and girls. WOMEN MOVING MILLIONS is committed to funding systemic change and building a peaceful and equitable world. We believe that women and girls are the single best investment towards creating healthy societies, economic growth, and global stabilization. What is good for women is good for everyone.

TrueChild helps donors, policymakers, 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.



At the TrueChild website (www.truechild.org), we 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.



And Women’s Funding Network has posted a new paper titled, “Gender Transformative Giving: the Next Phase in Feminist Philanthropy”—online at http://issuu.com/womensfundingnetwork/docs/gender_lens_grantmaking_report



You can also view the “Gender Transformative Giving” report on the NEO Philanthropy website at <http://www.theneodifference.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Gender-Transformative-Giving.pdf>



WomenMovingMillions.org



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