Why Race Matters: Women and HIV

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Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime
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Why Race Matters

Race matters when it comes to HIV – and not just for women of color

• “Female face of AIDS” = Black or Brown woman
  – Mostly sub-Saharan Africa and Asia
• Trans women especially affected

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Why Race Matters

• US: 1 in 5 new HIV diagnoses in women
• American Indian/Alaska Native women
  – High rates
• Asian/Pacific Islander women
  – Not talked about
  – Cultural factors may increase vulnerability
• Decline in HIV diagnoses among women
  – But: rates still highest among women of color

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**Health disparity:** “the biological expression of social inequalities” – Paul Farmer (global HIV activist and medical anthropologist)

- Difference in health linked to unequal or unjust social condition
  - Higher rate of a disease among certain groups despite prevention efforts
  - Differences according to gender, race, education or income level, disability, sexual orientation, region, and more

**Social determinants of health** linked to health disparities

- Social realities impacting physical health
  - Poverty
  - Lack of education
  - Racism
What Is Race?

• Usually thought of as physical traits or ancestry
  – Skin color, eye shape, region where ancestors are from
  – Doesn’t explain health differences in same geographic area

• Race is a social category, not a biological one
  – Way to explain differences in how people live in society
  – Differences affect treatment, which affects social conditions

• Powerful idea that has been used to:
  – Separate people
  – Make opportunities available to some but not others

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What Is Racism?

• System in which people are valued differently because of their race
  – Unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities
  – Provides unearned advantage to others
  – Damages the entire society
    Wasted human resources
• Greater likelihood of acquiring HIV related to factors that structure how people live
  – Not related to physical differences

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What Is Racism?

- Racism causes stress; has been shown to be a form of trauma
- **Racism is not just about individual behavior;** a person who is white may:
  - Have many friends of different races
  - Have never intentionally harmed someone because of their race
  - *Still benefit from a racist system* that values lives based on race
- Being **antiracist** (against racism):
  - Does not just mean white people treating individual people of color well
  - Means disagreeing with ways that racial bias shows up
  - Means recognizing ways we may benefit from systems that are biased against others (*privilege*)
"I live in the basement: the **lowest floor of the social systems** we have here in America."

“I ... first learn[ed] about the **perceived differences in skin color**, notwithstanding our commonality or upbringing.”

“Women all around me were delegated to the floor below in their homes, at their jobs, and in the public.”

“When I started transitioning ..., the **basement door became sealed**.”

— Aryah Lester, "I Live in the Basement," on A Girl Like Me

[Trigger warning: The blog entry linked above contains descriptions of sexual violence and discrimination.]
What Is Privilege?

- A set of unearned, often invisible benefits experienced by people who fit into **social groups that have power**
  - White race; middle or upper class; male; heterosexual; documented citizen; native English speaker
- For example, people with privilege can assume that:
  - People in history class and textbooks are same race, gender, sexual orientation as you
  - Your failures will not be thought of as being due to your race or gender
  - You don’t have to think about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc., daily
"I am a white woman, I have privilege. I recognize that we don't have to have a hashtag for white lives. ... Racism towards white people is up for discussion and it pains me!

"The statistics of HIV speak volumes don't they? Maybe I need to shout it louder, as my white voice is more listened to!"

Things to Remember About Privilege

- Often easier to notice **oppression than privilege**
  - Being mistreated leaves deeper impression than fair treatment

- Privilege **doesn’t mean you didn’t work hard**
  - Your life may not be easy, but may be easier than others’ **in certain ways**

- Privilege **isn’t “special advantages”; it’s basic fairness**
  - Problem isn’t that a privileged person gets *more than* they deserve, but that others who don’t have privilege get *less than* they deserve

- Privilege is related to **power systems not individual experiences**
  - Having Obama as president didn’t end racism

- Privilege and oppression **don’t cancel each other out**
  - Can be oppressed by poverty but still benefit from being white
What Is Intersectionality?

- The idea that **many parts of a person’s identity impact their life** at the same time
  - Some aspects give them privilege, some lead them to experience oppression
  - Parts of a person’s identity cannot be separated
    - All women experience sexism, but experience different for Black and white women because experience **is also affected by racism**
- Don’t treat just HIV, also address intersectional issues
Taking Action, Making Change

• **Recognize privilege and use it for change**
  – Having privilege is not usually something a person chooses
  – If you have privilege, you can choose not to be silent

• **United we stand**
  – Learn from the HIV community’s history of challenging privilege

• **Put those most impacted front and center**
  – When those most impacted by an issue speak about it, *listen!*

• **Join a community**
  – For example, *A Girl Like Me*

• **Take action**
  – Connect with advocacy groups

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"The HIV epidemic in this country will end when America commits to addressing the underlying conditions which enable HIV to thrive, such as racism and poverty."

Global Advocacy Groups

- CARE
- Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
- International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW)
- Frontline AIDS
US-Based Advocacy Groups

- Advocates for Youth
- AIDS United
- Black AIDS Institute (BAI)
- Positive Women's Network – USA (PWN-USA)
- Positively Trans (T+)
- Sero Project (Sero+)
- SisterLove, Inc.
- Translatin@ Coalition
- Treatment Action Group (TAG)

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To learn more about this topic, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:

– Why Race Matters: Women and HIV

For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:

– www.thewellproject.org
– www.facebook.com/thewellproject
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– www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv