

A father's greatest fear

Written by BraVada Garrett-Akinsanya, Ph.D., LP
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As we celebrated this past Father's Day, it occurred to me that over the years, I have seen many fathers in my office.

Some of them come to see me because they are grieving the loss of their daughters to the streets. Some of them come to see me because they are grieving the loss of their ability to care for their daughters financially. Finally, some of them come because they are grieving the loss of the closeness with their daughters that they had once dreamed would be theirs. Broken dreams and promises are usually a father's greatest fear when he has the opportunity to sit and talk about his woes. Sometimes those dreams are shattered by teen pregnancy, drug abuse or poor academic standing. Sometimes they are shattered when a father's ex-wife, ex-girlfriend or former partner hides the kids or lies to his daughters about him or his intentions for her future. In all of these scenarios, fathers envision their daughters as precious and out of reach.

Some fathers do not know how to relate to girls. They believe that girls are to be objectified and "stay in their places." Some fathers deter girls from sharing feelings because when his daughter shares her feelings, that places him in the awkward position of recognizing that as a Black male he has feelings too. More often than not, fathers face the larger fear of somebody (most likely another man) taking his place or mistreating his daughter and dishonoring the spirit that he, as a dad, placed into his child.

Several weekends ago, many of us participated in a rally at the Minnesota State Capitol to

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protest the Boko Haram's kidnapping of 276 school girls from their dormitories at a boarding school. We talked about the fact that those girls have been exposed to torture; some have been sold into sexual slavery, and others trafficked for labor in other countries. Some girls have reportedly been killed due to being bitten by poisonous snakes in the bush where they have been kept.

As an African American "womanist" who is two generations from being a slave myself, my heart breaks as I see those in my adopted country of Nigeria engage in the exploitation and marginalization of these precious African girls. Last month on Mother's Day, I took time out to hold the many mothers in my heart as I imagined the anguish they must feel while waiting for the safe return of their girls. Again, this past Father's Day, I thought of all the dads of those near 300 girls and the unimaginable pain, anger, rage and fear they must hold for their daughters. After I said a prayer, I hoped that we, in our African American community, can find voice to address this issue and support the development of rigorous engagement strategies in securing the physical and psychological liberation of these youths and girls like them all over the world.

I'm sharing the brief speech that I gave at the rally in anticipation that it will stimulate conversation and action among us. Please see my sentiments below.

"I am here today as a clinical psychologist and the grand daughter of a freed slave. I know too well the long-term detrimental impact of historical trauma and oppression on the healthy development of children and the societies in which live. Therefore, today I am not only here to complain about the egregious acts of the Boko Haram, but also to describe my disappointment, sadness and outrage at the deplorable negligence and inactivity of the Nigerian government in responding in a forceful, timely way to the kidnapping of these beautiful girls.

The United States is a friend to Nigeria and no friend should ever wait to ask for help – especially when it comes to the welfare of our children. All children deserve equitable and fair access to an education – whether they are boys or girls, rich or poor, Black or white. By failing to act in a timely manner, a message has been inadvertently communicated that the plight of these girls is not worthy of our love, efforts or resources. Yet, the spirits of Umoja (unity), of Ubuntu (sacred humanity), community and collaboration are our ways of surviving as an African people. We realize that the Boko Haram is a terrorist group, and that their psychological intent is to elicit hate, fear and paralysis. Nonetheless, we must fight against such psychological warfare and where there (is) hate, we must replace it with love, where there is fear we must replace it with courage, and where there is paralysis, we must replace it with *action*; for truly no act of courage is without fear. Courage, itself, is the ability to act, even though you are afraid.

Therefore, today, we stand with the courageous acts of these girls' mothers and fathers who have placed themselves in the positions of imminent harm, death and risk for retaliation in order to secure the safe release of their daughters. With that in mind, we must strongly urge the United States government to *act boldly and without haste* in returning these girls to safety.

Although these girls are not Sasha and Malia Obama, they are just as precious to their mothers and to our world community.

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I close by saying that I believe that no man has the right to speak for God ... but, all of woman and mankind (have) the right to speak for justice. I believe that all children are our children, and these girls are our girls. Bring them home *now*."

As I review this speech today, I realize that a father's greatest fear is that harm will come to his daughter, and because of apathy, nobody will care.

BraVada Garrett-Akinsanya, Ph.D., L.P. is a clinical psychologist in private practice, serves as president of Brakins Consulting and Psychological Services and is the executive director of the African American Child Wellness Institute SM. The mission of the African American Child Wellness Institute SM is to promote the psychological and spiritual liberation of children of African descent by providing culturally specific mental health services and by developing culture-based, holistic wellness resources, research and practices. Dr. Garrett-Akinsanya warns that this column should in no way be construed as constituting a therapeutic relationship through counseling or advice. To forward a comment about this article or to make an appointment, please contact Garrett-Akinsanya by email at bravadaakinsanya@hotmail.com or by telephone at (763) 522-0100.