

*"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."*

- Maya Angelou

On this final day of the WOW Festival at the Apollo Theater, we open the building from top to bottom in a celebration of, by and for women. The WOW Festival is laser-focused on gender equality and female empowerment in all aspects of life, and with good reason.

Research has shown that girls experience a marked drop in self-esteem when they reach adolescence. According to a 2017 survey done in the U.S. by the Dove Self Esteem Project, 70% of girls aged 13-18 feel they are "not good enough." That's 30 million girls! Compare that to the makeup videos that are watched 700 million times a month or about 84 billion a year.

And studies show that one-in-four girls will be assaulted before they turn 18 years old, these are just two of the areas that have an effect on the health and well-being, psyches and safety of women and girls, not to mention the overall impact of sexism, racism, and financial, social and political inequality has on all our lives.

We at the Apollo in Harlem, New York City, join with the WOW Festivals taking place in more than 54 cities on five continents to speak with one voice about our many challenges and obstacles, triumphs and achievements. We, like they, are rooted locally with hands outstretched around the planet to tell our own stories with truth and grace, passion and power.

There are things to see, to hear, to taste, to learn and to do at this WOW Festival at the Apollo. The panels, WOW Bites, workshops, activations, films, conversations and performances purposefully form a day that presents women as wholly formed in body, mind and spirit, and addresses her in the same way.

Our bodies: claiming our birthing, reproductive and wellness practices, nourishing ourselves with culture and cuisine, claiming our sensual beauty and physical strength, preparing for a conscious death. Our minds: being responsible for our sanity, safety and financial wellbeing, sharing effective paths to success, taking up the fight for our rights, standing for the rights of others. Our spirits: soothing ourselves in song, laughing to ease our pain, opening to the wisdom found in circles of women, allowing our brilliance to shine.

Today we encourage you to be bold and open-minded, sexy and sassy, fun-loving and serious, ready to give and receive in equal measure, to be inspired to grow and moved into action, today and every day to come.

Let us say with Audre Lord, *"I want to live the rest of my life, however long or short, with as much sweetness as I can decently manage, loving all the people I love and doing as much as I can of the work I still have to do. I am going to write fire until it comes out of my ears, my eyes, my noseholes – everywhere, until its every breath I breathe. I'm going to go out like a meteor."*

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