



From the Editor

A CALL TO MEN: From Bystanders to Activists

By Rob Okun

The transformation in consciousness that *Voice Male* and its publisher, the Men's Resource Center for Change, have long advocated--that men who reject the culture of violence shift their role from men-as-bystanders to men-taking-action--just got a much-needed power surge. More than 300 men and women from around the country spent two days in New York City attending "A Call to Men: Becoming Part of the Solution to End Violence Against Women." The conference, held at John Jay College at the end of September, was organized by a new organization, the National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women. The name may be long but its founders, Tony Porter and Ted Bunch want to make sure people understand precisely what their group is all about--men taking responsibility to end violence against women and doing so by working alongside women whose leadership they acknowledge and respect.

An energy of possibility and hope emanated from the gathering. Attendees, slightly more women than men, included key staff from state agencies and nonprofit organizations working to prevent sexual assault and domestic violence. They networked, exchanged business cards, shared resources. They made concrete the growing phenomenon of collaboration between men and women that the Men's Resource Center for Change and *Voice Male* have long championed. In their engaging presentation, Porter and Bunch offered a primer on the damaging effects of male socialization, peppered with anecdotes from their personal lives. Each man wasn't afraid to reveal some of his foibles, places where conventional ideas about men and manhood still have a hold on them.

Porter shared a sobering example of one of the organization's beliefs: Well-meaning men's silence about other men's violence gives permission to men to act violently. As an older teen he failed to act when he witnessed a mentally delayed teenage girl being repeatedly sexually assaulted at a party. Caught between his awareness that what was going on was not consensual sex but rape, and his desire to maintain status among his peers, he described how he not only didn't intervene but actually falsely conveyed to his peers that he, too, had participated. The young woman, he said, had no value to him yet; his peers did. His story had a powerful effect on the mostly older conference audience--it's a must-tell story for student audiences.

As men of color, Porter and Bunch brought to their talk a profound understanding of male privilege, both as men who have it and as African-Americans who don't. Moreover, their discussion of the epidemic of men's violence against women drew strength from their articulation of the parallels between how racism and sexism play out in men's and women's lives. Among their insights: the awareness that the movement to end violence against women won't "be doing its best work until the voices of women of color are heard." Among those also speaking at the conference was anti-porn activist Robert Jensen, a frequent contributor to *Voice Male* and a professor at the University of Texas at Austin. In a blistering report on the mainstreaming of pornography, Jensen sought to draw the connection between the degraded ways women are treated in the porn world and the violence perpetrated against them by men who feel a sense of ownership, privilege, and entitlement. In the porn world, Jensen said, "women are reduced to three holes and two hands." He despaired over the growing societal acceptance of porn, from awards ceremonies in Las Vegas modeled on the Oscars, to the sheer volume of pornographic videos being produced--"11,000 new hard-core porn tapes a year." A conservative estimate is that \$10 billion a year is spent on the porn industry, Jensen reported. "Pornographers may be able to deliver an inexpensive orgasm but they can't deliver joy," he reminded his audience.

Like the organizers of "A CALL TO MEN," like the Men's Resource Center for Change, like *Voice Male's* ongoing commitment to report on new visions of manhood, Jensen, Porter, and Bunch model what is possible when as men we find our voices and no longer settle for being bystanders to a movement for justice for women, for men, for children, for all of us on our endangered planet. There are many places along the continuum of social change for men to join in; looking inward, at home, in our relationships, pushing past our resistance to examine our privilege, is a rich place to begin.



A CALL TO MEN is a Project of the Tides center