

WHERE OUR BOYS AT? INVOLVING YOUNG MEN AS ALLIES TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS

By the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team and Mariame Kaba (www.rogersparkywat.org)

When we started our anti-street harassment work, we felt a bit lonely. We were new to activism and new to understanding the dynamics of violence against women and girls. We kept thinking “where our boys at?” We had no idea that anti-violence activism would be so dominated by women. When we would host workshops, the room would be filled with women. When we would host a spoken word event, there again we mostly had women in the audience. Where were the men? We kept reading statistics and observing that men were overwhelmingly the perpetrators of violence against women and girls. Yet, they were invisible to us. We were teenagers and it didn't occur to us that male violence against women and girls was an issue that needed to be primarily solved by women.

Early on we asked ourselves how we could change that fact that women seemed to be doing most of the heavy lifting in the anti-violence movement. Based on our conversations with the men in our own lives (brothers, uncles, cousins, and friends), we knew that we would have an uphill battle. One thing that was immediately clear to us was that we needed to find and cultivate some male allies. One of our members' brother Corey suggested that men would be much more likely to listen to an anti-violence against girls message if it came from another man. Initially, we felt a bit put off by this advice. “Why couldn't we be the spokespeople of our own oppression?” Once again, we felt that women's voices were being disregarded or seen as less valid. We had to sit for a while with both our feelings and with the advice.



After several conversations among our group members, we came to the conclusion that we didn't care about who the messenger was. Instead we just wanted our message to be heard. We began the hard work of planning a new campaign called "Engaging Young Men as Allies to End Violence against Girls and Young Women (EYMA)." Our members decided to use film, community-based research, workshops, and art as the foundation for our campaign. We wanted to reach a diverse group of young men and to keep them interested in our work.

Our campaign, which ran from 2006 to 2009, had several key components:

1. Creating a documentary, as part of our research process, that reflected the importance of engaging young men as allies in ending violence against girls and young women.
2. Creating a workbook/discussion guide to be used with the film.
3. Developing a workshop along with young men about how they can be allies in addressing sexism and male violence against girls.
4. Implementing a train the trainer session (2 days) to help allies address gender violence in their own communities.
5. Organizing a young men's only conference to address the issue of misogyny and sexism (February 9, 2008).
6. Incubating a network of young men who will become allies in ending gender violence.
7. Documenting what we have learned and sharing our findings (2011 and beyond)

The following publication is a toolkit that we hope will be of use to others who are interested in engaging young men as allies in the fight against gender-based violence. Here we share some of the tools and resources that we have developed and perhaps even more importantly we discuss the challenges and accomplishments of this three-year project. We hope that others who are interested in engaging young men as allies will find something in this toolkit to inspire them to action.

