

INTERVIEW FOR THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION ABOUT JACKSON'S NEW BOOK, THE MACHO PARADOX, WHY SOME MEN HURT WOMEN AND HOW ALL MEN CAN HELP

On March 24, 2006, Media Education Foundation Marketing Director Kendra Olson Hodgson interviewed Tough Guise creator Jackson Katz about his new book *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*. The transcript of the interview follows.

TRANSCRIPT

KOH: To begin with, could you give an overview of your new book *The Macho Paradox*?

JK: Sure. The full title is *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*, and it is a book-length articulation of much of the work that I have been doing over the past couple of decades. What I'm trying to do is reframe the conversation in the field of gender violence prevention. I argue that while historically the issues of sexual assault, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment have been considered "women's issues" that "good guys" sometimes help out with, I'm arguing that they're basically men's issues. Fundamentally, the problems of sexual and domestic violence are problems of boys' and men's attitudes and behaviors, and (white) male-dominated power structures that either produce, perpetuate or condone these attitudes and behaviors. I'm hoping that my book contributes to a paradigm-shift in the field, a move toward holding men accountable on both a personal and an institutional level.

KOH: That leads me to ask about the first chapter in the book which is titled "Violence Against Women is a Men's Issue," which is also a concept that you explore in the video *Tough Guise*—it's a lot of the framework for the whole video. Can you speak a little bit more about this idea—why do you think that violence against women is a men's issue?

JK: One thing I want to be clear about is that women are now and have always been at the forefront of this work. Women created the battered women's movement, the rape crisis movement. In a multicultural and an international sense, women have been the ones who have raised these issues, led reform movements, and created a range of new and vital institutions. And they're responsible, in a very positive way, for changing the national and international dialogue about domestic and sexual violence. So when I say that these are "men's issues," I'm not in any way saying that they're not also women's issues, or that women's and girls' lives haven't been central. Obviously, because the subject here is men's violence against women. But I'm saying

that we need to think about the subject differently, because if we continue to think about men's violence as a "women's issue," it's not going to get us very far in terms of truly preventing the violence. In spite of all of the services for victims and survivors that the battered women and rape crisis movements have been able to provide, and all the judicial and legal reforms, the rates of men's perpetration are still shamefully high. I'm arguing that until we acknowledge that the reason for men's violence is not anything that women and girls are doing or not doing, but that it lies in boys' and men's attitudes and behaviors, and the functioning of institutional structures that are largely controlled by white men. Until we name the problem as men's attitudes and behaviors in patriarchal culture, then we're just cleaning up after the fact.

We need a whole lot more men involved in this work; we're not even close to having a critical mass of men involved for it to be culturally transformative. There is an ever-increasing number of men in the United States and around the world—men of all racial, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds—who are working alongside of women, learning from women, but working in parts of male culture where, historically, there has been very little work done. This is all part of a growing movement; there is no doubt about the positive aspect of it, but we've got a long way to go. This is a movement still in its infancy.

Virtually every man I know has women and girls that he loves and cares deeply about—mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, girlfriends, friends. By definition, if we care about these women and girls, then we should care about the issue of men's violence against women. Both the incidence and the threat of it. And more than our personal connection to women: this is an issue of basic social justice and fairness. Look, just about every woman and girl in this country, almost on a daily basis, orders her life around the threat of men's violence. This is a pervasive reality in women's lives—the fear of rape, the limitations on women's freedoms as a result of fearing men. It's omnipresent—and, as a result, in a sense hidden in plain sight.

An exercise I use in my trainings powerfully illustrates this. I use a chalkboard or a whiteboard, and I put a line down the middle. Then I draw a male symbol on one side, a female symbol on the other. Then I ask the men what they do on a daily basis to prevent themselves from being sexually assaulted. Usually the answer is nothing. I've done this exercise around 1300 times, and I've gotten about four straight answers from men. In most cases a man will finally raise his hand and say, "I don't do anything. I don't even think about sexual assault on a daily basis." And then I ask the same question of the women, and the board fills up with things that women do. Whether they live in an urban, suburban, or rural area, it doesn't really matter. The board just absolutely fills up. The point is that the threat of sexual violence is a pervasive part of women's lives in the United States in 2006, and whether or not a woman has already been victimized by a man—and millions have—the threat of men's violence is an omnipresent reality in women's lives. So, knowing that, men who claim to care about women, social justice, or simple decency, need to figure out what they can do about this horrendous problem.

Something else I say in the chapter "Violence Against Women is a Men's Issue" is that while concern for women and girls should be paramount in terms of men's activation on these issues, our motivation should also be concern for other men and boys. There are so many examples, but just consider one: think about all the boys who are growing up in abusive homes right now. In the domestic violence and sexual assault fields, we've been talking routinely at least

for the past decade about the effects of these crimes on children, on the children growing up in domestic violence homes, or in situations where their mother is a rape survivor, and now she—s an alcoholic or a meth addict, because she—s medicating her trauma. There are countless conferences across the country that have been dedicated to this issue, to “children who witness,” the effects of these crimes on children. Well the category of —children— includes both girls and boys. Look at all the boys who are growing up in homes where they—re being traumatized by what a man—their father, step-father, mother—s boyfriend—is doing to their mother. Look at all the boys in juvenile detention in the United States or in lock-up who have committed crimes, in many ways as an externalization of their family trauma. In other words, they’re acting out in the world trauma that they’ve experienced in their family of origin. For thousands and thousands of boys, there is a direct relationship between the trauma they suffer at home and the perpetration of criminality (not to mention bullying and other forms of cruelty) outside of the home. Look at all the adult men who are walking wounded, who are trauma survivors themselves, who grew up in homes where there was violence perpetrated against their mother, often against their mother and the kids. Look at all the men in AA (Alcoholic’s Anonymous) meetings—if you listen to their life histories, oftentimes their alcoholism developed as a response to trauma. Because men live in a culture where male vulnerability is denied, a lot of men turn to alcohol and other drugs as a way of medicating their trauma symptoms. If your concern is with men and boys and with their lives and health, then by definition you need to pay attention to men—s violence against women. It horribly affects men and boys as well as women and girls.

KOH: In *Tough Guise*, you very clearly state that the phrasing should be “*men’s* violence against women” and not just “violence against women.” Could you talk about why we need to use the phrase “*men’s* violence against women”?

JK: I have a chapter in *The Macho Paradox* called “Stuck in (Gender) Neutral.” It’s an extended discussion about language, and I’m suggesting that the paradigm shift we need to have must begin with a critical reassessment of how we think and talk about these issues. In that chapter, I go through a number of examples of current uses of language that keep us stuck in the old paradigm. One of them is the use of the passive voice, and I talk about that in *Tough Guise* as well. Honestly, it’s one of the insights in *Tough Guise* that a lot of people remember, because when people can critically examine the language they use on a daily basis and look at it from a new perspective, it really changes consciousness. So the use of the passive voice is a really important part of the discussion about violence. It has a very political effect—which is that it shifts our attention off men as perpetrators and puts it onto women and children as victims. I’ll give you an example. We ask questions like “how many women were raped in the United States last year?” or “how many women on college campuses are the victims of rape or attempted rape,” or “how many girls are abused in teen dating relationships,” or “how many teenage girls got pregnant last year in the State of Massachusetts?” In all of these constructions, we’re using the passive voice, and in each case, it shifts our attention off men and boys and puts it onto girls and women. Imagine how the conversation would be different if we asked “How many men raped women? How many adult men and adolescent boys impregnated teenage girls?” The term “violence against women” is itself a passive construction—there is no active agent in the sentence. It’s as if it just happens. It’s a bad thing, “violence against women.” But nobody’s really doing it. It’s happening to women, but nobody’s really making it happen. It just sort of happens. But if you insert the active agent—in this case, “men,” because we know that the

vast majority of violence against women is perpetrated by men (there is some violence against women perpetrated by other women, but the overwhelming majority is perpetrated by men), you have a new phrase, “men’s violence against women.” It doesn’t roll off the tongue as easily, but it’s a more accurate and honest phrase.

KOH: The idea of putting the onus on men can lead some people to say that you are ‘male-bashing.’ It’s a term that has been used to describe feminists for years, and I am wondering if you can respond to the use of this term as a criticism.

JK: Sure. This is an important topic. Again, I have a whole chapter in my book on it. The chapter is entitled, “Male-Bashing?” with a question mark, because I don’t believe that holding men accountable for men’s violence is male-bashing. I don’t believe that for a moment. Let’s look at the term ‘male-bashing.’ Look at the word, “bash.” If you look it up in the dictionary, as a verb it means “to hit or strike.” In other words, it’s a violent term. So, the women who speak out against men’s violence—and it’s disproportionately been women—the women who speak out against men’s violence, who try to hold men accountable, they get called “male-bashers.” If you consider that “to bash” means “to hit or strike,” a “male-basher” in that definition is a violent person. So we’re led to believe that the people who are speaking out against violence are actually the violent ones? This is what is called an Orwellian inversion—it’s like saying, “Freedom is Slavery,” “War is Peace”. . . The women (and men) who are speaking out against men’s violence are the true bashers? They’re the ones who are bashing men? But it’s even worse than that, because in the term “male basher,” not only are the women who are speaking out against men’s violence being called the violent ones, but men are now the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators. So it’s a complete flip-flop of reality, because in the term “male-basher,” men are now the victims of violence. In the real world, there is a huge problem of men’s violence against women. But in the term “male-basher,” women are now the violent ones and men are the victims. Borrowing a phrase, I would call that a double Orwellian Whammy. It’s similar to another really disturbing linguistic development over the past couple of years that is directly related to this phenomenon. It is the term “the accuser,” when headline writers and news anchors call alleged victims of rape or another form of violence “the accuser,” rather than “the alleged victim.” This problematic usage accelerated in the Kobe Bryant rape trial. By calling a woman who comes forth with a rape allegation “the accuser,” it has the effect of making them into the ones doing something to the alleged perpetrator. In other words, it reverses reality. Instead of the alleged victim alleging that she was assaulted by the perpetrator, now the perpetrator is in a sense being assaulted by her accusation. So she is the one doing something to him. He is now the victim of her accusation. This helps to shift people’s sympathy away from the alleged victim and towards the alleged perpetrator, which is a very powerful way of flip-flopping these issues and overturning decades of feminist consciousness-raising around the gender and power dynamics at the heart of these crimes. I reject out of hand that holding men accountable for violence against women is male-bashing.

KOH: I would like to ask about another chapter, which has a very provocative title, “It Takes a Village to Rape a Woman.” Could you explain what the premise of this chapter is and what you are indicating with the statement, “it takes a village to rape a woman”?

JK: Well, it is a deliberately provocative title. But I think it articulates an important part of what I’m trying to say in this book. Basically, what I’m doing in the chapter is flushing out the

feminist idea that we live in a rape culture, that individual rapists have to be understood as products of social systems and institutional forces that are much larger than individuals. And that it is wildly naive to look at individual rapists as just appearing out of nowhere, as if the culture around them—the economic and political structures as well as the gender order—is not implicated in individual perpetration. So, the basic feminist concept of a rape culture is what is embodied in the phrase “It Takes a Village to Rape a Woman.” The existence of a “rape culture” has wide implications—there are so many different ways in which the culture contributes to the high rates of sexual violence, which includes perpetration by men against women, and against other men and children. There are so many cultural factors that are involved. In this chapter, I focus on certain aspects of media culture, and how those contribute to what I refer to as “the growth in rapist values among men and boys.” For example, I look at the Kobe Bryant rape trial, and I look at the popularity of the white rapper Eminem. I look at professional wrestling, and I also look at talk radio—in particular the so-called “shock jocks” Howard Stern and Tom Leykis, and the right-wing bully Rush Limbaugh, and how those men’s public personae, as well as the things they specifically say, help contribute to a rape culture, specifically to the promotion of rapist values among boys and men. I’m not arguing, nor does any thoughtful person argue, that media causes violence or that media causes rape. But I am talking about the ideological role of media in helping to shape gender constructions, especially masculinities.

KOH: There is a line in the book—I think it’s in the sub-chapter on media literacy—that reads, “A crucial component of the patriarchal system is the gender ideology that is transmitted to young people through media, and plays such a powerful role in their understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman.” Could you talk about what you mean by the gender ideology that is transmitted to young people through the media and then how that ideology serves to reinforce the patriarchal system?

JK: The basic concept is that gender is a social construct and not a biological inevitability or essential category. A given culture, at a given time, defines what is masculine and what is feminine and what is the ‘appropriate’ way that boys and men should act to achieve a certain kind of masculine identity and credibility and to ‘make it’ in the world of men. So, this is about social norms; it’s about how a culture defines the norm, what is the expectation of boys’ and men’s behavior, in relationship to women and girls, violence, sexism, sexuality and everything else. Media, as the great pedagogical force of our time, powerfully functions to transmit cultural values. Among those important cultural values are expectations about how boys and girls, men and women, are supposed to act in order to conform to cultural mandates about their gender. So, I think the cutting edge of gender violence prevention, as distinguished from the treatment or punishment of offenders, or services for victims after the fact, the cutting edge of prevention is the critical examination of what it means to be a man. For decades, rates of perpetration have been so high; it is incredibly short-sighted to understand the reason for this as a handful of isolated individuals acting out in ways that are unrelated to each other. This is terribly naive. We have to look at this structurally—why is there so much perpetration? We have to ask: why do so many “average men,” “normal guys,” do bad things? I think the answer is that it’s not about individual, idiosyncratic experience—these are structural, cultural problems. So the cutting edge of gender violence prevention is to critically interrogate how the culture is defining manhood, and masculinity—of course, cutting across class, race and ethnicity in complex ways. I can’t overlook the complexities of this undertaking, but at its heart, this is a very long-term

project that involves redefining what it means to be a man. One of the key places that we need to do the work, both intellectually and politically—and certainly as educators we need to be doing this work—is through critical media literacy. Obviously, that is one of the key linkages between my work in this book and my work in making media literacy videos and working with MEF to make *Tough Guise*, and participating in *Spin the Bottle* and *Wrestling With Manhood*—it’s all related. One of the things I do throughout *The Macho Paradox* is to talk about media culture, and reinforce the idea that critical media literacy is an indispensable component of any thoughtful approach to gender violence prevention.

KOH: *Tough Guise* was released at the end of 1999. What role did that video play in the creation of this book—your choice to write it, the formulation of the argument, your decision to actually publish a book?

JK: To be honest, for years I had planned to write a book that articulated some of my basic ideas and insights around men’s violence against women. One connection between *Tough Guise* and this book is that I’ve seen how so many people have responded to *Tough Guise* over the years, and how useful it is as an educational tool. I’ve seen how many women and men—whether they’re college professors, high school teachers, or educators in the domestic and sexual violence fields—how many of them use *Tough Guise* in their classrooms, trainings, and other settings. I think there is a hunger, a thirst, among both educators and students to hear these perspectives and listen, talk and engage with the ideas presented therein. I knew this instinctively before we made *Tough Guise*, but it’s been completely validated that there are countless people, including great numbers of men, who are eager to have this conversation. I have to tell you about my experience in the publishing world, trying to get this book published. My literary agent sent the proposal out to twenty-five publishers and got twenty-four rejections. Only one publisher agreed to publish it, Sourcebooks. All of the other ones who bothered to respond said essentially the same thing. They said, “We think this is a very important subject, we think you have the proper credentials to write the book, but we don’t think there is a market for it. Good luck.” This is after I had documented in the proposal that *Tough Guise* has been seen by millions of people. In other words, I argued, there is already a track record; people are interested in these ideas. But the mainstream publishing world, almost in a single voice, said, “No one is really interested.” Knowing, in the back of my mind, that *Tough Guise* is being used all over the country, in so many different places, strengthened my conviction. But ultimately only one in twenty-five publishers was persuaded by that argument.

KOH: Your work in general—the work you do around the country in lectures, this new book, *Tough Guise*—is really focusing on prevention of men’s violence against women. Your work isn’t about law enforcement, crisis response, or treatment. Why have you chosen to focus your efforts on prevention?

JK: There are so many different reasons. For one, I firmly believe that the vast majority of gender violence is preventable. Men who act out in these ways, who sexually harass, abuse, rape, and batter women and children, are not sick; they’re not sociopaths, they’re not deeply disturbed. They are in fact disturbingly “normal.” This, by the way, makes a lot of people extremely uneasy, because it’s a lot easier to see the men who perpetrate these crimes as “monsters” and as “sickos.” If you adopt the position that there are some depraved individuals out there who need to be caught and punished, in an interesting way the world seems to be a safer place. If you see them as completely

different from yourself—in other words, if you “other” them—then it’s easier to maintain your (false) sense of security in the world. That is also one of the ways that racism contributes to this dynamic. If the cause of the problem is the racialized other—in other words, men of color—the problem at least hypothetically can be contained, and the white majority can deflect the need for introspection. This is one of the ideological functions of the prison industrial complex: lock them up and we feel safer. But of course this is not only racist but delusional. In our society, most of the perpetrators of gender violence are white men, and they are not sick and disturbed. They’re normal, average guys, so prevention means addressing the culture that produces perpetrators—before the fact. But effective prevention requires introspection on a national or cultural level, as well as on an individual level. It means thinking about how systems as well as individuals participate. That’s a challenge because many people and institutions don’t want to look in the mirror.

Throughout *The Macho Paradox*, I focus most of my attention on so-called “good guys,” or men who see themselves as good guys. I don’t focus on batterers and rapists. Of course I talk about batterers and rapists, but my focus is on the guys who see themselves as good guys, and how they, in so many different ways, participate in a culture that oppresses women, and that produces rapists and batterers at pandemic rates. This is a challenging approach to take because a lot of guys will say things like “I listen to Eminem and I don’t go out and rape women or murder them and cut them up and put their bodies in the trunk of a car. I know the difference between fact and fantasy.” They’ll make those kinds of simplistic arguments. Or they’ll say, “I can go to strip clubs, I can masturbate to pornography. This is not a problem. I don’t go out and rape women. So get off my case. Talk to the guys who are doing it—the rapists and the batterers—you know, it’s not me, it’s not my problem.” So many men—and some women—say those sorts of things. But the systematic prevention of domestic and sexual violence means looking at how culture systems are implicated in perpetration by individuals, much in the way a racist society is implicated in the racist acts of individuals or institutions. I don’t think it is credible for men to say, “I have nothing to do with (gender violence) because I’m a good guy.”

It’s like white people saying, “I’m not racist. I don’t burn crosses, I don’t tell racist jokes, and I don’t enact racist policies. I’m a good person, I support racial justice.” But if you’re a white person and you don’t challenge other white people, don’t use your power and privilege as a white person to work against racism, your silence or passivity is a form of consent and complicity in the perpetuation of racism. Well, it’s the same thing with men’s violence against women. If individual men do not directly assault women, but they do participate in so many different ways in a culture that glamorizes men’s violence against women—not only tolerates it, but in some ways glamorizes it—then how can they say that they have nothing to do with it? So, part of what I’m talking about in terms of prevention is thinking critically about the ways in which so many of us men participate in this culture, actively or passively. This is an uphill climb, I have to say. But it’s one of the things I’m trying to articulate. We need to get many more men involved in starting to challenge other men in peer cultures, small and large. It’s as simple as when one of your friends tells a rape joke, saying, “Hey man, that’s not funny. That could be my sister you—re talking about. My daughter, my friend, my mother. It’s not funny.— It’s the same thing as encouraging white people to challenge other white people when they make racist jokes, or heterosexual people to challenge other heterosexuals when they tell a heterosexist joke. If we can create peer culture climates among men whereby the abuse of women by some men will be seen as completely socially unacceptable—in other words, if guys will lose status among

their peers if they act out in sexist ways—then we'll see the rates of rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment come way down.

KOH: In your biggest dreams, what will be the impact of this book? Who will read it? How will it be used? What do you want it to do?

JK: I really hope that my book contributes to this paradigm shift that I'm talking about. Instead of thinking that the way to address the issues of domestic and sexual violence is for a handful of good guys to help the women out—if we can shift that perspective to make it one where responsible men, by definition of that responsibility, address these issues head-on and take sexism seriously, as seriously as they take all other forms of oppression, including imperialism, racism, and poverty, and other forms of exploitation— If men take sexism as seriously, then we're going to begin to start to see significant positive changes. I have to say that one of the persistent problems on the left is there is more lip service paid to sexism than there actually is work against sexism by many, many men who claim to care about social justice, who claim to care about oppression and other forms of exploitation. When it comes to sexism, it's just kind of an add-on, "Yeah, and the women too, oh yeah, we have to pay attention to sexism, too." As opposed to understanding that sexism is one of the central oppressions in human societies, and one that directly—not tangentially—intersects with all other forms of oppression. Sexism, or male dominance, is part and parcel of oppression at every level, and it needs to be understood as such. And so if my book can contribute to a re-invigoration of a focus on sexism as a fundamental oppression, I—d be very, very pleased by that. And certainly, in the field of domestic and sexual violence prevention, I hope that people who are influential in the field read it, and I hope that it helps to shape their thinking about how to bring more men into the conversation, how to talk about these issues in a way that brings more men into the conversation, how to build alliances between women and men, and to move beyond the simplistic idea that it's "men against women."

KOH: Anything else that you'd like to share that we haven't talked about yet?

JK: I want to mention a chapter in the book called, "Guilty Pleasures: Pornography, Prostitution, and Stripping." In this chapter, I look at the ways in which the pornography culture, and the prostitution and stripping industries, if you will, are helping to shape boys' and men's attitudes toward women and girls and their sexuality—as well as men—s sexuality. This is a national conversation that is long overdue. You asked what my dream was about the book—well, one piece of the dream is that I hope my book helps to catalyze a more thoughtful conversation between men, as well as between women and men, about pornography, prostitution, and stripping. Ideologically, these are enormously influential industries. I think there has been very little thoughtful conversation about them in male culture, and certainly even in the academy. My friends and I are very frustrated by either the lack of or the superficiality of the conversation about them. For example, pornography is by far the most influential form of sex education—or sex (mis)education—in the United States. There is so little quality sex education in the schools in our sex-crazed country. The right has successfully squelched the responsible sex education movement that arose in the seventies. In the void, you have this enormous multi-billion dollar industry that has profit as its motive, not education. The pornography industry is serving as the vehicle for so many boys' and men's sexual socialization. And the level of brutality that has been normalized in mainstream pornography, the level of sexist brutality, is just astounding.

Many people have not been paying attention, but I think they need to pay attention. It's very disturbing, I think, for a lot of people to see—with eyes wide open—what boys and men are masturbating to. But I think it needs to happen. Sadly, in recent years many feminists have been leery of going down this road because this issue is seen as divisive, and fraught with both ideological and interpersonal conflict. I think that's really sad because the industry hasn't slowed down one bit—in fact, it's only been accelerating in the last few years.

I also want to re-emphasize that I address some of the complexities of race and ethnicity as they relate to gender violence. I have a whole chapter in the book called “Race and Culture,” and in this chapter, most of the discussion is about white men's violent sexist behavior. I want to call attention to the ways in which discourses about race and violence often shift attention off of white men and onto men of color. I—m turning that around and saying that when we talk about race and culture, we also need to talk about white men and white culture, and how aspects of that culture contribute to men's violence against women. I examine how the racialized “other” as the rapist or as the batterer is one technique, conscious or unconscious, to shift focus off of white men's actions and responsibilities. I think it's important for white men to talk about this.

I also discuss heterosexism and homophobia, and the relationship between men's violence against women and men's violence against other men, especially gay men. There are all kinds of links between these phenomena. In my book, I talk about how homophobia is used as a policing mechanism in male culture—in other words, one of the reasons why so few men speak out against men—s violence against women is the fear that they will then be constructed as less than fully masculine, or as gay. In a culture where homophobia persists—although significant progress has been made—in a culture where homophobia persists, a lot of young men and boys will not speak out, if speaking out will call upon them homophobic animosity, anger, and potential violence. The point I'm making more generally is that while the focus of *The Macho Paradox* is men's violence against women, I do weave in a critical discussion about racism, heterosexism, and even neo-colonialism, and how all of these social oppressions interact and intersect.

KOH: Jackson, thank you for speaking with me at such length. I'm looking forward to reading the book.

Source: www.jacksonkatz.com/pub_interview.html

Jackson Katz, Ed.M. (JacksonKatz@aol.com) is one of America's leading anti-sexist male activists. He is widely recognized for his groundbreaking work in the field of gender violence prevention education with men and boys, particularly in the sports culture and the military. He has lectured on hundreds of college and high school campuses and has conducted hundreds of professional trainings, seminars, and workshops in the U.S., Canada, Japan and Australia. He is the co-founder of the Mentors In Violence Prevention (MVP) program, the leading gender violence prevention initiative in college athletics. He is the director of the first worldwide domestic and sexual violence prevention program in the United States Marine Corps. He is also the creator and co-creator of educational videos for college and high school students, including Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity (2000), Wrestling with Manhood (2002) and Spin the Bottle: Sex, Lies, and Alcohol (2004).

THE MACHO PARADOX—AN INTERVIEW WITH JACKSON KATZ—SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

I. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS A MEN'S ISSUE

Sexual assault, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment have been considered WOMEN'S ISSUES.

Actually though they are “problems of boys’ and men’s attitudes and behaviors, and (white) male-dominated power structures that either produce, perpetuate or condone these attitudes and behaviors.

Women’s leadership is needed and has always been present in the movement but men need to step up. More men need to be involved in this work.

This is an issue of basic social justice and fairness. “Every woman and girl in this country, almost on a daily basis, orders her life around the threat of men’s violence (particularly, the fear of rape).

Jackson Katz conducts a particular activity with the group of men that he works with. **He asks men what they do on a daily basis to prevent themselves from being sexually assaulted. The men usually can’t think of anything.** He then asks the same group what women do to protect themselves from being sexually assaulted and the page is filled with responses. This illustrates the inequality inherent in being a woman in this society.

Violence against women is a MEN'S ISSUE. Men’s motivation for dealing with these issues should of course mainly be because of their concern for the women they care about, justice and fairness. Jackson Katz suggests though that it should also be concern for other men and boys. “Think about the boys who are growing up in abusive homes right now.”

When women are abused, men are affected in many tangible and direct ways:

1. by witnessing the abuse of their mothers.
2. by being the victims of abuse themselves at the hands of male abusers.
3. by being the victims of abuse at the hands of their own mothers who are taking out their anger on them.

If your concern is with men and boys and with their lives and health, then by definition you need to pay attention to men’s violence against women because it horribly affects men and boys as well as women and girls.

Question: What does Jackson Katz means when he says that violence against women is a men’s issue?

II. LANGUAGE

It is important to critically examine the language we use on a daily basis.

We often use the passive voice in our discussions about violence. It shifts our attention off men as perpetrators and puts it onto women and children as victims. For example: How many women were raped in the U.S.? How many girls are abused in teen dating violence relationships?

Imagine how the conversation would be different if we asked instead “How many men raped women?” The term “violence against women” is itself a passive construction. If you insert the active agent—in this case, “men,” because we know that the majority of violence against women is perpetrated by men, you have a new phrase “men’s violence against women” which is a more accurate and honest phrase.

III. MALE BASHING

“I don’t believe that holding men accountable for men’s violence is male-bashing.”

Male “BASHING”—When women speak out against men’s violence and hold men accountable they get called “male bashers.” “So we’re led to believe that the people who are speaking out against violence are actually the violent ones?”

**Question: Does this make sense? Why do you think people would use the term “male bashers?”
What purpose does it serve?**

Answer: It transforms men into “victims” of violence rather than the perpetrators. It is a tool used by those in power to deflect attention from the cause of the problem and discourage women from speaking out. It reverses reality.

IV. RAPE CULTURE

There are so many different ways in which the culture contributes to the high rate of sexual violence, which includes perpetration by men against women, against other men, and children. Many cultural factors are involved including certain aspects of media culture.

Media does NOT CAUSE violence or rape but it functions to transmit cultural values. Among those cultural values are expectations about how boys and girls, men and women, are supposed to act in order to conform to cultural mandates about their gender. So it is important to understand how culture defines manhood, what it means to be a man.

Question: What is Katz’s main point about the role of the media in supporting violence against women and girls?

V. PREVENTION

Katz believes that prevention is very important because “men who act out in these ways, who sexually harass, abuse, rape, and batter women and children, are not sick; they’re not sociopaths, they’re not deeply disturbed. They are in fact disturbingly ‘normal’.”

Question: What does Katz mean by the statement that men who commit violent acts are “disturbingly normal?”

Prevention means addressing the culture that produces perpetrators—before the fact. Jackson Katz focuses on the men who see themselves as “good guys” rather than on the batterers and rapists [although his work is also addressed to them]. He tries to show these “good guys” how they participate in a culture that oppresses women, and that produces rapists and batterers at alarming rates. He shows them how they passively and actively participate in a sexist culture.

VI. HOMOPHOBIA

Jackson Katz discusses the relationship between men’s violence against women and men’s violence against other men, especially gay men. Homophobia is used as a policing mechanism in male culture—in other words one of the reasons why so few men speak out against men’s violence against women is the fear that they will then be constructed as less than fully masculine, or as gay.

Question: How can this issue of homophobia and heterosexism be addressed within YWAT’s workshops and work?

VII. MISCELLANEOUS

The following are some tips for addressing all of the questions and challenges that will arise in your workshops and as you talk about men’s violence against women.

1. YWAT’s position is that we think that it is wrong when anyone uses violence against another person—whether the perpetrator is a man or a woman.
2. However, we believe that it is important to be accurate in how we characterize violence against women and girls.
3. Women are the disproportionate victims of violence at the hands of men. The reality is that most batterers are men. However, most men are not batterers. This is an important distinction. A significant *minority* of men are committing most of the violence; while the majority of men who are non-violent stay silent. If you are upset by these realities, we invite you to speak out against this minority of men who are giving the majority of well-meaning men a bad name. This is another good reason for men to get involved in addressing the issue of violence against women and girls.

If you are doing a workshop and men or women start to say things like “women are just as violent as men.” You can respond in the following way:

- I am sorry that you have been hurt by women in your life. We think that it is wrong to use violence—whether you are a man or a woman. We do not condone it from anyone.
- Next, you can say: Can I ask you a question? [If he/she says yes]
- Then say: Can you think back to when you were a small child, then think back through all of the years that you have moved through to get to today?
- When you have experienced violence in your lifetime, when you have been hurt and harmed, whether at home, at school, and in the streets, who has been the perpetrator of that violence? Has it been women or has it been men?
- [If the person is honest, the answer that they will give almost always give [whether they are male or female] is that they were harmed by men’s use of violence against them.
- Thank the person for responding honestly and highlight that men’s violence affects EVERYONE [women, other men, and children] and this is why you will be discussing the issue in the workshop.

RIHANNA/CHRIS BROWN: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS—THE REMIX

Posted on Huffington Post, February 12, 2009

Given all the hype and controversy around Chris Brown’s alleged beating of Rihanna, I feel compelled to post this essay I originally wrote in late 2007, so that some of us can have an honest jump off point to discuss male violence against females, to discuss the need for ownership of past pains and traumas, to discuss the critical importance of therapy and healing. Let us pray for Rihanna, first and foremost, because no one deserves to be beaten, or beaten up. No one. And let us also pray that Chris Brown gets the help he needs by way of long-term counseling and alternative definitions of manhood rooted in nonviolence, real love, and, alas, real peace. And let us not forget that Rihanna and Chris Brown happen to be major pop stars, hence all the media coverage, blogs, etc. Violence against women and girls happens every single day on this planet without any notice from most of us. Until we begin to address that hard fact, until we all, males and females alike, make a commitment to ending the conditions that create that destructive behavior in the first place, it will not end any time soon. There will be more Rihannas and more Chris Browns.

In my recent travels and political and community work and speeches around the country, it became so very obvious that many American males are unaware of the monumental problems of domestic violence and sexual assault, against women and girls, in our nation. This seems as good a time as any to address this urgent and overlooked issue. Why is it that so few of us actually think about violence against women and girls, or think that it’s our problem? Why do we go on believing it’s all good, even as our sisters, our mothers, and our daughters suffer and a growing number of us participate in the brutality of berating, beating, or killing our female counterparts?

All you have to do is scan the local newspapers or ask the right questions of your circle of friends, neighbors, or co-workers on a regular basis, and you’ll see and hear similar stories coming up

again and again. There's the horribly tragic case of Megan Williams, a 20-year-old West Virginia woman, who was kidnapped for several days. The woman's captors forced her to eat rat droppings, choked her with a cable cord and stabbed her in the leg while calling her, a Black female, a racial slur, according to criminal complaints. They also poured hot water over her, made her drink from a toilet, and beat and sexually assaulted her during a span of about a week, the documents say. There's the woman I knew, in Atlanta, Georgia, whose enraged husband pummeled her at home, stalked her at work and, finally, in a fit of fury, stabbed her to death as her six-year-old son watched in horror. There's the woman from Minnesota, who showed up at a national male conference I organized a few months back with her two sons. She had heard about the conference through the media, and was essentially using the conference as a safe space away from her husband of fifteen years who, she said, savagely assaulted her throughout the entire marriage. The beatings were so bad, she said, both in front of her two boys and when she was alone with her husband that she had come to believe it was just a matter of time before her husband would end her life. She came to the conference out of desperation, because she felt all her pleas for help had fallen on deaf ears. There's my friend from Brooklyn, New York who knew, even as a little boy, that his father was hurting his mother, but the grim reality of the situation did not hit home for him until, while playing in a courtyard beneath his housing development, he saw his mother thrown from their apartment window by his father. There's my other friend from Indiana who grew up watching his father viciously kick his mother with his work boots, time and again, all the while angrily proclaiming that he was the man of the house, and that she needed to obey his orders.

Perhaps the most traumatic tale for me these past few years was the vile murder of Shani Baraka and her partner Rayshon Holmes in the summer of 2003. Shani, the daughter of eminent Newark, New Jersey poets and activists Amiri and Amina Baraka, had been living with her oldest sister, Wanda, part-time. Wanda was married to a man who was mad abusive—he was foul, vicious, dangerous. And it should be added that this man was “a community organizer.” Wanda tried, on a number of occasions, to get away from this man. She called the police several times, sought protection and a restraining order. But even after Wanda's estranged husband had finally moved out, and after a restraining order was in place, he came back to terrorize his wife—twice. One time he threatened to kill her. Another time he tried to demolish the pool in the backyard, and Wanda's car. The Baraka parents were understandably worried. Their oldest daughter was living as a victim of perpetual domestic violence, and their youngest daughter, a teacher, a girls' basketball coach, and a role model for scores of inner city youth, was living under the same roof. Shani was warned, several times, to pack up her belongings and get away from that situation. Finally, Shani and Rayshon went, one sweltering August day, to retrieve the remainder of Shani's possessions. Shani's oldest sister was out of town, and it remains unclear, even now, if the estranged husband had already been there at his former home, forcibly, or if he had arrived after Shani and Rayshon. No matter. This much is true: he hated his wife Wanda and he hated Shani for being Wanda's sister, and he hated Shani and Rayshon for being two women in love, for being lesbians. His revolver blew Shani away immediately. Dead. Next, there was an apparent struggle between Rayshon and this man. She was battered and bruised, then blown away as well. Gone. Just like that. Because I have known the Baraka family for years, this double murder was especially difficult to handle. It was the saddest funeral I have ever attended in my life. Two tiny women in two tiny caskets. I howled so hard and long that I doubled over in pain in the church pew and nearly fell to the floor beneath the pew in front of me.

Violence against women and girls knows no race, no color, no class background, no religion. It may be the husband or the fiancé, the grandfather or the father, the boyfriend or the lover, the son or the nephew, the neighbor or the co-worker. I cannot begin to tell you how many women—from preteens to senior citizens and multiple ages in between—have told me of their battering at the hands of a male, usually someone they knew very well, or what is commonly referred to as an intimate partner. Why have these women and girls shared these experiences with me, a man? I feel it is because, through the years, I have been brutally honest, in my writings and speeches and workshops, in admitting that the sort of abusive male they are describing, the type of man they are fleeing, the kind of man they've been getting those restraining orders against—was once me. Between the years 1987 and 1991 I was a very different kind of person, a very different kind of male. During that time frame I assaulted and or threatened four different young women. I was one of those typical American males: hyper-masculine, overly competitive, and drenched in the belief system that I could talk to women any way I felt, treat women any way I felt, with no repercussions whatsoever. As I sought therapy during and especially after that period, I came to realize that I and other males in this country treated women and girls in this dehumanizing way because somewhere along our journey we were told we could. It may have been in our households; it may have been on our block or in our neighborhoods; it may have been the numerous times these actions were reinforced for us in our favorite music, our favorite television programs, or our favorite films.

All these years later I feel, very strongly, that violence against women and girls is not going to end until we men and boys become active participants in the fight against such behavior. I recall those early years of feeling clueless when confronted—by both women and men—about my actions. This past life was brought back to me very recently when I met with a political associate who reminded me that he was, then and now, close friends with the last woman I assaulted. We, this political associate and I, had a very long and emotionally charged conversation about my past, about what I had done to his friend. We both had watery eyes by the time we were finished talking. It hurt me that this woman remains wounded by what I did in 1991, in spite of the fact that she accepted an apology from me around the year 2000. I left that meeting with pangs of guilt, and a deep sadness about the woman with whom I had lived for about a year.

Later that day, a few very close female friends reminded me of the work that some of us men had done, to begin to reconfigure how we define manhood, how some of us have been helping in the fight to end violence against women and girls. And those conversations led me to put on paper *The Seven Steps For Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*. These are the rules that I have followed for myself, and that I have shared with men and boys throughout America since the early 1990s:

1. Own the fact that you have made a very serious mistake, that you've committed an offense, whatever it is, against a woman or a girl. Denial, passing blame, and not taking full responsibility, is simply not acceptable.
2. Get help as quickly as you can in the form of counseling or therapy for your violent behavior. YOU must be willing to take this very necessary step. If you don't know where to turn for help, I advise visiting the website www.menstoppingviolence.org, an important organization, based in Atlanta, that can give you a starting point and some suggestions. Also visit www.usdoj.gov/ovw/

pledge.htm where you can find helpful information on what men and boys can do to get help for themselves. Get your hands on and watch Aishah Shahidah Simmons' critically important documentary film NO! as soon as you are able. You can order it at www.notherapedocumentary.org. NO! is, specifically, about the history of rape and sexual assault in Black America, but that film has made its way around the globe and from that very specific narrative comes some very hard and real truths about male violence against females that is universal, that applies to us all, regardless of our race or culture. Also get a copy of Byron Hurt's Beyond Beats and Rhymes, perhaps the most important documentary film ever made about the relationship between American popular culture and American manhood. Don't just watch these films, watch them with other men, and watch them with an eye toward critical thinking, healing, and growth, even if they make you angry or very comfortable. And although it may be difficult and painful, you must be willing to dig into your past, into the family and environment you've come from, to begin to understand the root causes of your violent behavior. For me that meant acknowledging the fact that, beginning in the home with my young single mother, and continuing through what I encountered on the streets or navigated in the parks and the schoolyards, was the attitude that violence was how every single conflict should be dealt with. More often than not, this violence was tied to a false sense of power, of being in control. Of course the opposite is the reality: violence towards women has everything to do with powerlessness and being completely out of control. Also, we need to be clear that some men simply hate or have a very low regard for women and girls. Some of us, like me, were the victims of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse at the hands of mothers who had been completely dissed by our fathers, so we caught the brunt of our mothers' hurt and anger. Some of us were abandoned by our mothers. Some of us were sexually assaulted by our mothers or other women in our lives as boys. Some of us watched our fathers or other men terrorize our mothers, batter our mothers, abuse our mothers, and we simply grew up thinking that that male-female dynamic was the norm. Whatever the case may be, part of that "getting help" must involve the word forgiveness. Forgiveness of ourselves for our inhuman behavioral patterns and attitudes, and forgiveness of any female who we feel has wronged us at some point in our lives. Yes, my mother did hurt me as a child but as an adult I had to realize I was acting out that hurt with the women I was encountering. I had to forgive my mother, over a period of time, with the help of counseling and a heavy dose of soul-searching to understand who she was, as well as the world that created her. And I had to acknowledge that one woman's actions should not justify a lifetime of backward and destructive reactions to women and girls. And, most importantly, we must have the courage to apologize to any female we have wronged. Ask for her forgiveness, and accept the fact that she may not be open to your apology. That is her right.

3. Learn to listen to the voices of women and girls. And once we learn how to listen, we must truly hear their concerns, their hopes and their fears. Given that America was founded on sexism—on the belief system of male dominance and privilege—as much as it was founded on the belief systems of racism and classism, all of us are raised and socialized to believe that women and girls are unequal to men and boys, that they are nothing more than mothers, lovers, or sexual objects, that it is okay to call them names, to touch them without their permission, to be violent toward them physically, emotionally, spiritually—or all of the above. This mindset, unfortunately, is reinforced in much of our educational curriculum, from preschool right through college, through the popular culture we digest every single day through music, sports, books, films, and the internet, and through our male peers who often do not know any better either—because they had not learned to listen to women's voices either. For me that meant owning the

fact that throughout my years of college, for example, I never read more than a book or two by women writers. Or that I never really paid attention to the stories of the women in my family, in my community, to female friends, colleagues, and lovers who, unbeknownst to me, had been the victims of violence at some point in their lives. So when I began to listen to and absorb the voices, the stories, and the ideas of women like Pearl Cleage, Gloria Steinem, bell hooks, Alice Walker, of the housekeeper, of the hair stylist, of the receptionist, of the school crossing guard, of the nurse's aid, and many others, it was nothing short of liberating, to me. Terribly difficult for me as a man, yes, because it was forcing me to rethink everything I once believed. But I really had no other choice but to listen if I was serious about healing. And if I was serious about my own personal growth. It all begins with a very simple question we males should ask each and every woman in our lives: Have you ever been physically abused or battered by a man?

4. To paraphrase Gandhi, make a conscious decision to be the change we need to see. Question where and how you've received your definitions of manhood to this point. This is not easy as a man in a male-dominated society because it means you have to question every single privilege men have vis-à-vis women. It means that you might have to give up something or some things that have historically benefited you because of your gender. And people who are privileged, who are in positions of power, are seldom willing to give up that privilege or power. But we must, because the alternative is to continue to hear stories of women and girls being beaten, raped, or murdered by some male in their environment, be it the college campus, the inner city, the church, or corporate America. And we men and boys need to come to a realization that sexism—the belief that women and girls are inferior to men and boys, that this really is a man's world, and the female is just here to serve our needs regardless of how we treat them—is as destructive to ourselves as it is to women and girls. As I've said in many speeches through the years, even if you are not the kind of man who would ever yell at a woman, curse at a woman, touch a woman in a public or private space without her permission, hit or beat a woman, much less kill a woman—you are just as guilty if you see other men and boys doing these things and you say or do nothing to stop them.

5. Become a consistent and reliable male ally to women and girls. More of us men and boys need to take public stands in opposition to violence against women and girls. That means we cannot be afraid to be the only male speaking out against such an injustice. It also means that no matter what kind of male you are, working-class or middle-class or super-wealthy, no matter what race, no matter what educational background, and so on, that you can begin to use language that supports and affirms the lives and humanity of women and girls. You can actually be friends with females, and not merely view them as sexual partners to be conquered. Stop saying "boys will be boys" when you see male children fighting or being aggressive or acting up. Do not sexually harass women you work with then try to brush it off if a woman challenges you on the harassment. If you can't get over a breakup, get counseling. As a male ally, help women friends leave bad or abusive relationships. Do not criticize economically independent women because this independence helps free them in many cases from staying in abusive situations. Donate money, food, or clothing to battered women's shelters or other women's causes. Do not ever respond to a female friend with "Oh you're just an angry woman." This diminishes the real criticisms women may have about their male partners. American male voices I greatly admire, who also put forth suggestions for what we men and boys can do to be allies to women and girls, include Michael Kimmel, Jackson Katz, Charles Knight, Mark Anthony Neal, Jelani Cobb, Charlie Braxton, and Byron Hurt. Of course standing up for anything carries risks. You may—as I have—find things that you say and

do taken out of context, misunderstood or misinterpreted, maligned and attacked, dismissed, or just outright ignored. But you have to do it anyway because you never know how the essay or book you've written, the speech or workshop you've led, or just the one-on-one conversations you've had, might impact on the life of someone who's struggling for help. I will give two examples: A few years back, after giving a lecture at an elite East Coast college, I noticed a young woman milling about as I was signing books and shaking hands. I could see that she wanted to talk with me, but I had no idea the gravity of her situation. Once the room had virtually cleared out, this 17-year-old first-year student proceeded to tell me that her pastor had been having sex with her since the time she was four, and had been physically and emotionally violent toward her on a number of occasions. Suffice to say, I was floored. This young woman was badly in need of help. I quickly alerted school administrators who pledged to assist her, and I followed up to make sure that they did. But what if I had not made a conscious decision to talk about sexism and violence against women and girls, in every single speech I gave—regardless of the topic? This young woman might not have felt comfortable enough to open up to me about such a deeply personal pain. My other example involves a young male to whom I have been a mentor for the past few years. He is incredibly brilliant and talented, but, like me, comes from a dysfunctional home, has had serious anger issues, and, also like me, has had to work through painful feelings of abandonment as a result of his absent father. This, unfortunately, is a perfect recipe for disaster in a relationship with a woman. True to form, this young man was going through turbulent times with a woman he both loved and resented. His relationship with the young woman may have been the first time in his 20-something life he'd ever felt deep affection for another being. But he felt resentment because he could not stomach—despite his declarations otherwise—the fact that this woman had the audacity to challenge him about his anger, his attitude, and his behavior toward her. So she left him, cut him off, and he confessed to me that he wanted to hit her. In his mind, she was dissin' him. I was honestly stunned because I thought I knew this young man fairly well, but here he was, feeling completely powerless while thoughts of committing violence against this woman bombarded his mind and spirit. We had a long conversation, over the course of a few days, and, thank God, he eventually accepted the fact that his relationship with this woman was over. He also began to seek help for his anger, his feelings of abandonment, and all the long-repressed childhood hurts that had nothing to do with this woman, but everything to do with how he had treated her. But what if he did not have somebody to turn to when he needed help? What if he'd become yet another man lurking at his ex's job or place of residence, who saw in his ability to terrorize that woman some twisted form of power?

6. Challenge other males about their physical, emotional, and spiritual violence towards women and girls. Again, this is not a popular thing to do, especially when so many men and boys do not even believe that there is a gender violence problem in America. But challenge we must when we hear about abusive or destructive behavior being committed by our friends or peers. I have to say I really respect the aforementioned political associate who looked me straight in the eyes, 16 long years after I pushed his close female friend and my ex-girlfriend into a bathroom door, and asked me why I did what I did, and, essentially, why he should work with me all these years later? American males don't often have these kinds of difficult but necessary conversations with each other. But his point was that he needed to understand what had happened, what work I had done to prevent that kind of behavior from happening again, and why I had committed such an act in the first place. Just for the record: No, it has not happened since, and no, it never will again. But I respect the fact that, in spite of my being very honest about past behavior, that

women and men and girls and boys of diverse backgrounds have felt compelled to ask hard questions, to challenge me after hearing me speak, after reading one of my essays about sexism and redefining American manhood. We must ask and answer some hard questions. This also means that we need to challenge those men—as I was forced to do twice in the past week—who bring up the fact that some males are the victims of domestic violence at the hands of females. While this may be true in a few cases (and I do know some men who have been attacked or beaten by women), there is not even a remote comparison between the number of women who are battered and murdered on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis in America and the number of men who suffer the same fate at the hands of women. Second, we men need to understand that we cannot just use our maleness to switch the dialogue away from the very real concerns of women to what men are suffering, or what we perceive men to be suffering. That's what step number three in the seven steps to ending violence against women and girls is all about. So many of us American males have such a distorted definition of manhood that we don't even have the basic respect to listen to women's voices when they talk about violence and abuse, without becoming uncomfortable, without becoming defensive, without feeling the need to bring the conversation, the dialogue, to us and our needs and our concerns, as if the needs and concerns of women and girls do not matter.

7. Create a new kind of man, a new kind of boy. Violence against women and girls will never end if we males continue to live according to definitions of self that are rooted in violence, domination, and sexism. I have been saying for the past few years that more American males have got to make a conscious decision to redefine who we are, to look ourselves in the mirror and ask where we got these definitions of manhood and masculinity, to which we cling so tightly. Who do these definitions benefit and whom do they hurt? Who said manhood has to be connected to violence, competition, ego, and the inability to express ourselves? And while we're asking questions, we need to thoroughly question the heroes we worship, too. How can we continue to salute Bill Clinton as a great president yet never ask why he has never taken full ownership for the numerous sexual indiscretions he has committed during his long marriage to Senator Hillary Clinton? How can we in the hip-hop nation continue to blindly idolize Tupac Shakur (whom I interviewed numerous times while working at Vibe, and whom I loved like a brother) but never question how he could celebrate women in songs like "Keep Ya Head Up?" and "Dear Mama," on the one hand, but completely denigrate women in songs like "Wonda Y They Call U Bitch"? What I am saying is that as we examine and struggle to redefine ourselves as men, we also have to make a commitment to questioning the manifestations of sexism all around us. If we fail to do so, if we do not begin to ask males, on a regular basis, why we refer to women and girls with despicable words, why we talk about women and girls as if they are nothing more than playthings, why we think it's cool to "slap a woman around," why we don't think the rape, torture, and kidnap of Megan Williams in West Virginia should matter to us as much as the Jena 6 case in Louisiana, then the beginning of the end of violence against women and girls will be a long time coming.

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SEXISM AND MISOGYNY: WHERE MY BROTHAS AT?

Posted On: Oct 08, 2006

By Shawn M. Bediako, NNPA

Recently, the University of Georgia placed Chi Phi fraternity on two year's probation after a group of seven freshman pledges and a campus visitor showed nude pictures of Black women to passers-by on campus, photographing people's reactions. Public responses to the incident have been mixed, with some people questioning whether the incident was actually racially-motivated or whether the right to free speech protects the group's actions.

However, my problems with this incident extend beyond mere intellectual banter. As a Black man, my racial identity makes me mad as hell at the fact that seven White boys were brazen enough to publicly show explicit pictures of Black women without fear of consequence. It conjures uncomfortable images of the historical exploitation of Black women by White men that is rarely discussed. As a social/community psychologist, however, I am perplexed by the fact that, to my knowledge, no public statement condemning the acts has come from Black fraternities, Black male faculty, or Black male administrators—either at UGA or any university.

How could Black men be so silent on this issue?

I dare say that there are probably more than a few Black men who are in possession of the same issue of Black Tail magazine that the Chi Phi pledges used to “shock” passers-by. These Black men are prime candidates for experiencing cognitive dissonance - thinking that it's wrong to objectify women as sexual instruments, but doing so because they like how what they see makes them feel. Therefore, how can Black men conscientiously condemn seven White boys for flashing nude pictures of Black women to others in public when Black men flash the same pictures to themselves in private? Something seems hypocritical about that, right? Yet, in order to avoid perceiving oneself as hypocritical - which exacerbates cognitive dissonance - one might react like Brandon Hall, president of the Black Affairs Council at UGA, who is quoted in the campus newspaper as asking, “Why didn't (the pledges) use a more mainstream magazine?”

Hall's comment could be interpreted as insinuating that it would have been less controversial had the “Chi Phi Seven” used pictures of, say, White or Latino women. But, by making race a salient issue, the broader issue of sexism is relegated to the periphery and ignored.

Yes, it is true that the sexist and misogynistic images that are widespread in media reflect an objectifying patriarchy that promotes and justifies an ambivalent, demeaning attitude of men towards women. And yes, it is also true that this is not a problem that uniquely affects Black men - it affects men of all races and ethnicities. So why am I choosing to focus on Black men's sexism and misogyny towards Black women? Why am I being so hard on Black men? There are two reasons. First, the ubiquity of sexism and misogyny means that Black men from all walks of life - athletes, clergy, entertainers, gangstas, intellectuals, laborers, politicians, professionals, and thugs - share a common problem that affects our communities: a problem that we must

collectively address. It is shameful that organizations that have a “Black Male Agenda” or that have leadership comprised primarily of Black men - such as the Congressional Black Caucus, the National Baptist Convention, the NAACP, the National Urban League, and Concerned Black Men - do not do more to explicitly attack sexism and misogyny in Black communities.

Second, I press the issue because the silence of both individual Black men and the organizations that supposedly represent Black communities becomes complicit in the degradation of women in general and increases the vulnerability of the image of Black women - making it easier for those both inside and outside our community to portray Black women in any way they see fit and not face repercussions. Would the Chi Phi frat boys have so easily flashed those photos if it was clear that Black men and Black organizations would have joined Black women in condemning their actions? Would Christina Norman (an African American woman and president of MTV Networks), permit the airing of a cartoon episode that depicts Black women as dogs on leashes (i.e., “bitches”) if she thought that doing so would elicit a hue and cry from Black folks? It is crucial to understand that our silence about what people do to us and how they portray us is endorsement to those people that their actions are acceptable.

The intergenerational transmission of sexism and misogyny is wreaking havoc on our young people, our families, and our communities. Researchers note that repeated exposure to crime, violence, and other suboptimal environments are not conducive for human growth and development. I further propose that repeated exposure to the less than respectful ways that many Black men refer to and treat Black women cannot be healthy for our children’s growth and development. It shapes negative attitudes about gender roles, contributes to a poor self-concept, and creates a vicious cycle of unhealthy and destructive relationships that aid in destabilizing our families and communities. This is why I’m writing on the issue. We’ve got to do something about this.

As a starting point, Black men must address issues related to sexism and misogyny by confronting the contradictions between what we say and what we do. Black civic and social organizations should facilitate a structured dialogue about these issues and make the elimination of sexism and misogyny prominent goals in their organizational aims. At the same time, Black men must be more vocal in challenging instances of sexism and misogyny that are directed towards Black women and Black girls wherever they occur - be it in commercials, television news and network “programs,” movies, magazines, music videos, radio songs, or conversations in barber shops, schools, social spaces, workplaces, and, yes, even places of worship. Black men must, in clear non-patriarchal terms, confront the negative images of our people that are created and propagated by either corporate media or emboldened White frat boys. We must also take to task and hold accountable those individuals or entities within our community that perpetuate and profit from these negative images.

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STREET HARASSMENT SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT

The Young Women's Action Team surveyed 168 young women about street harassment and safety in Rogers Park.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

22.6% were between the ages of 10 and 13; 36% were between the ages of 14 to 16; 25% were between the ages of 17 and 19.

55% were African-American/Black; 22% were Latina/Chicana/Hispanic; 10% were Asian-American; 5.4% were White/Caucasian.

The majority of respondents attended the following schools:

n=168

Sullivan High School (41)	24%
Field Elementary (15)	9%
Senn High School (15)	9%
Gale Academy (14)	8%
Mather (9)	5%
Lane Tech (9)	5%
Jordan Community Academy (8)	5%
Armstrong Elementary (5)	3%
Kilmer Elementary (5)	3%
TOTAL	71%

SURVEY RESPONSES

- **86% said that they had been catcalled (for example: Hey baby! Hey beautiful!) on the street.**
- 58% said men or boys on the street had harassed them.
- 36% of those respondents who had been harassed suggested that this happened once a day or more.
- 54% said that they never responded to the catcaller or harasser.
- **53% felt like they could not do anything to stop street harassment.**
- 60% felt unsafe walking around in Rogers Park.

- 61% of those who felt unsafe were most uncomfortable at night (8 p.m. to midnight).
- ***81% deemed either Howard Street or Morse Ave as the most unsafe streets in Rogers Park.***

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE—THE REAL DEAL FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

Research Conducted by the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team (October 2004)

In Spring 2004, we collected surveys from 296 youth ages 13 to 19. 82% of respondents were female and 18% were male. 56% of respondents were African-American, 16.4% were Latino, 11.5% were mixed race, 6.3% were White, 5.2% were Asian.

- 11.1% of teen respondents to our survey said that they have been/are in an abusive relationship. 4.8% said that they were not sure.
- 79% of our survey respondents said that they believed that “dating violence is a big issue among teens.”
- 62.1% of teens said they know other teens who are or have been in an abusive/violent relationship.
- 54% of teens believe that “if someone is being abused, it is not his/her fault.”
- Most teens identify “REAL” violence as physical violence as opposed to emotional abuse.
- A majority of teens (69%) said that they probably would or definitely would break up with their partner if he/she were ever to grab, shove, slap or punch them.
- 74% of our respondents said they would probably or definitely grab, slap, or punch the person back. 52% would get a family member to do this.
- 81% said that they probably or definitely would talk to a friend about the abuse.
- Only 39% of teens that we surveyed would talk to a family member about being abused.
- 19% would probably or definitely talk to a teacher, pastor, or counselor if they were being abused.
- Only 12% probably or definitely would call a dating/domestic violence hotline for advice.
- Most teens that we surveyed didn't know of many places for teens who are in abusive relationships to get help.