

The Men Against Sexism Outreach Project: A Genesis & Short History

The Beginning: Building A Relationship

In March of 2003, the Feminist Women's Health Center (FWHC) began its relationship with the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) through a grant initiative funded by *Up the River Endeavors*. Out of this relationship was born the Men Against Sexism Outreach Project (MASOP), a collaborative project now growing and evolving into Men for Equality & Reproductive Justice (MERJ) now in 2008.

As advocates for positive social change, we recognize, along with others, that throughout the world there is an incredible need for institutions that are cooperative rather than competitive, feminist rather than patriarchal, egalitarian rather than domineering. In responding to this need for such change, a relationship was born between the Health Center and NOMAS. In April 2003, the national co-chair of NOMAS traveled to Atlanta to take part in a 2-day meeting and training at the Feminist Women's Health Center.

Our First Year: What We Have Accomplished

In June of 2003, outreach began as we distributed NOMAS literature at the FWHC Pride booth, and equipped staff with talking points about men's role in fighting sexism and other connected "isms" in order to recruit new NOMAS members at the Pride Festival. Our new collaboration was highlighted in our Spring/Summer newsletter. In August 2003, our first male intern attended the NOMAS Men & Masculinities Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, and NOMAS featured this collaboration in their Summer 2003 newsletter.

A significant goal was met in the fall of 2003 when we succeeded in working with National NOMAS to form an Atlanta chapter. Throughout our first year, we continued to recruit NOMAS members in Atlanta. We developed brochures that explain the collaboration between the Feminist Center and NOMAS, as well as literature that outlines how men can be allies in the feminist movement. As a result of this outreach, we have seen a significant increase in the number of men attending our *Voice for Choice* and *Focus on Feminist* workshops, and in our volunteer ranks.

Our male intern played an important role in implementing our collaboration. His presence was an important step in breaking new ground, and reflected the cooperative relationship and mutual learning experiences that are honored as integral parts of the collaboration. He continued this important work that he began with us by playing a significant role as one of the Atlanta organizers in the 2004 *March to Save Women's Lives*.

The Future of MASOP: A Natural Evolution

At the Feminist Women's Health Center, we are building upon the training, outreach, and education of last year. The Men Against Sexism Outreach Project continues to grow and has welcomed Georgians for Choice (GFC), the statewide coalition for women's freedom, a collaborator with a great deal of depth and breadth in its reach across the state through its organizational members. Through this collaboration, the Feminist Women's Health Center succeeded in getting presentation time at GFC's New Conversations Conference last fall for NOMAS to present on involving men in the reproductive justice movement.

One of new and exciting programs of the Men Against Sexism Outreach Project was generated by NOMAS and the Feminist Center over the mid-winter council meeting. This new program is the development of a male educator and support role at our clinic. We envision this program as an opportunity to educate men to be supportive of women's needs, serve to intervene in potential abusive situations, and challenge men to respect women's voices and the choices they make. Our new MASOP summer intern is in the initial stages of building this program, writing literature and developing training for this male educator/support role in collaboration with NOMAS. Another male intern is working on public relations and marketing at the Feminist Center.

Expanding Definitions, Making Connections

The Feminist Women's Health Center recognizes the link between different forms of oppression such as sexism, racism, class-ism, heterosexism, and others. We believe that we must work with other individuals and groups in solidarity in order to end all forms of oppression. In the second year of the project, interns have begun exploring the important relationship between sexism and the GLBT community, and have sought to specifically address the question "Why should gay men care about sexism?" At the Feminist Center, we feel strongly that the reproductive rights movements and LGBT movements fight a similar battle to protect the fundamental right to control our bodies without interference by the government. Reproductive autonomy is as vital to the fight for LGBT rights as it is to the rights of heterosexual women and men.