

SISTERSONG WOMEN OF COLOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH COLLECTIVE

COLLECTIVE VOICES

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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUE

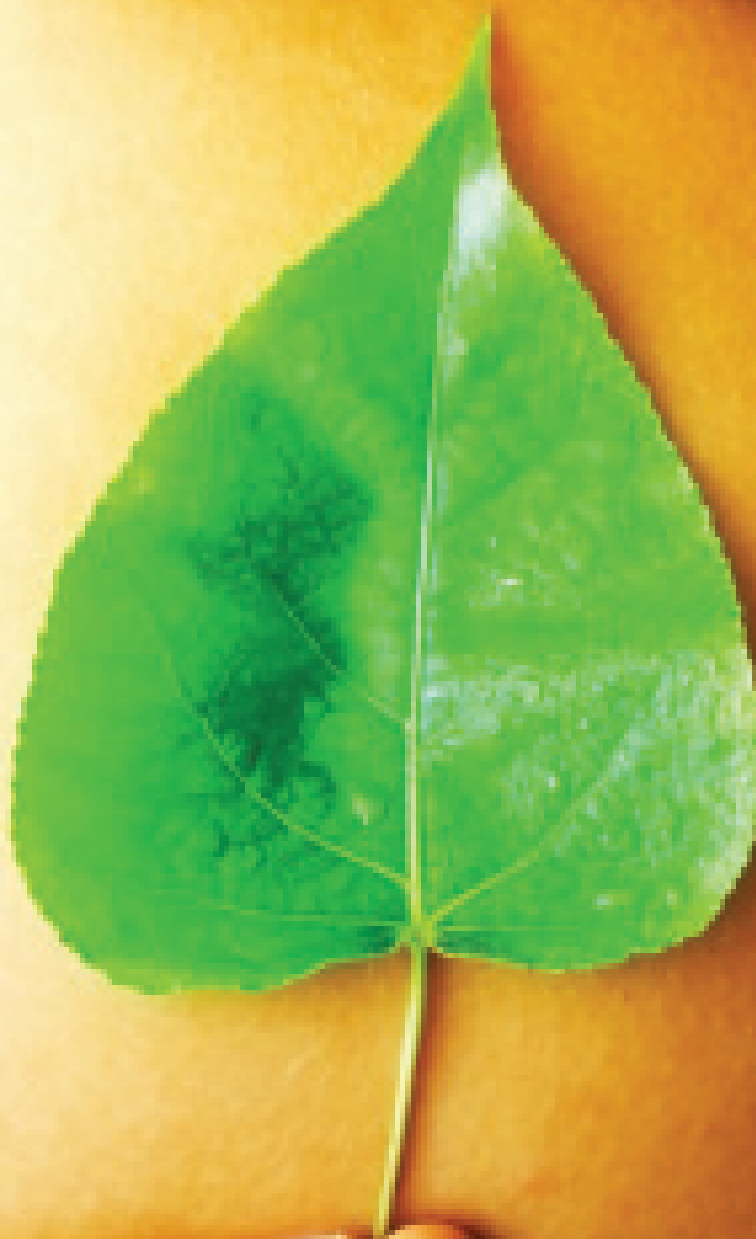
Bridging the
Environmental Justice
and Reproductive
Justice Movements

Population Control is
Not the Solution to
Global Warming

Reproductive Justice
and Climate Change
Justice in the U.S.

Glossed Over:
Cosmetic Toxins and
Reproductive Justice

Endometriosis: A
Reproductive and
Environmental Wrong



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SisterSong

Women Of Color Reproductive
Health Collective

COLLECTIVE VOICES

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-Cherrie Moraga

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Welcome from the National Coordinator

By Loretta J. Ross, SisterSong



This is a special edition of Collective Voices devoted to the intersection between Reproductive Justice (RJ) and Environmental Justice (EJ). There is increasing concern about climate change and its impact on our society, but Indigenous nations and communities of color disproportionately shoulder the burden of the negative effects of long-term environmental degradation, and this is rarely mentioned in the mainstream media. Five hundred years of colonization and oppression have resulted in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples. Instead, we are the targets of misguided and racist efforts at population control as if we are responsible for the environmental and reproductive injustices we endure.

One only has to remember Hurricanes Katrina, Andrew, Ike, and Gustav to realize that global warming is producing stronger storms and vulnerable people of color live and work in the paths of the destruction. Even without cataclysmic events like hurricanes, people of color often live in the most toxic neighborhoods, have less access to healthy food and water, work the most dangerous jobs, and have many health disparities due to inadequate access to quality health care. Evidence is also mounting that chemicals in our everyday environment from the food we eat, to the cleaners we use, to the products we buy, to the communities in which we live – threaten our reproductive health and the health of our families and communities.

With support from the Cedar Tree Foundation, SisterSong initiated a multi-year RJ+EJ Project in 2008 to build bridges between the RJ and EJ movements among women of color. We undertook this work because environmental and reproductive justice are presently organized as separate and distinct human rights movements, yet it is Indigenous people and women of color who stand at the intersections of these movements, linked not only by our bodies, gender and sexuality, but also concerned about the environments in which we live, work and raise our families.

Luz Guerra of Austin, Texas is SisterSong's RJ+EJ Project Coordinator. A Working Group of 25 activists to outline the scope of work was convened in August 2008 by Anuja Mendiratta and Luretha Senyo-Mensah. A follow-up Task Force to develop the reports and trainings will meet several times in 2009. For more information, contact Luz@sistersong.net.

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Mother House Nurtures Community Engagement

By Laura Jimenez, Deputy Coordinator, SisterSong



SisterSong Advocacy & Membership Coordinator Heidi Williamson and SisterSong Deputy Coordinator Laura Jimenez help facilitate the recent debut of the organization's Reproductive Justice 101 & 102 Series training. Serena Garcia, SisterSong's first Communications Coordinator is pictured in the background.

In late summer of 2007, SisterSong purchased the beautiful Mother House jointly with SisterLove and moved into our new home. Now that we have been in our home for over a year now, we have been able to hold many wonderful activities and events for our own agencies, and offer the beautiful space to other organizations for their use.

This year, SisterLove has conducted the following events:

Eight workshops in collaboration with Messages of Empowerment Productions, LLC. This was an HIV prevention intersection training program targeting domestic violence and substance abuse organizations that counsel female survivors of domestic violence and substance abuse. The program aimed to help them incorporate HIV Prevention information in their group and individual sessions for women at high risk for acquiring HIV.

A two-day HIV Testing and Counseling Training to enable SisterLove and its volunteers to provide testing and counseling for high risk participants that live in the census track where the Mother House is located. They will continue to offer testing and counseling (with results in 20 minutes) at the Mother House Monday through Thursday by appointment only.

Two lunch-and-learn workshops sponsored by Gilead and Merck Pharmaceutical Companies on new and innovative HIV treatment regimens for positive clients;

A think tank for positive women to let us know what type of programs they would like to have to help develop their leadership and advocacy skill in the Reproductive Justice area at the intersection of HIV/AIDS;

Two computer classes for positive women and their families to teach basic computer and research skills to learn more about their HIV and treatment diagnosis:

A photo shoot using the outside and inside of the MotherHouse for the state of Georgia prevention education campaign for HIV positive men who have sex with men and HIV positive/high risk negative African Americans.

Additionally, both SisterLove and SisterSong have been able to hold our own board meetings in the conference room. It has been a wonderful experience for us to be able to welcome our board members warmly in our home and share our space as we

meet.

SisterSong has opened the Mother House to our community partners for the following activities:

In January, Project Single Moms came in to the Mother House on a weekend in January to hold a program for their clients, single mothers who are being supported in continuing their education;

Covenant Empowerment Ministries, an LGBTQ ministry, holds their Sunday Sacred Services, and recently were able to host the ordination of their Pastor, Brother Bryan Edney. Over 50 people attended the occasion at the house, bringing food and song to celebrate.

The Dignity and Justice US Solidarity Tour of the Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano visited in March, as a Women's History Month event. Two of its leaders, Emily Blais and Doris Pizarro conducted a lunchtime presentation entitled: "Human Rights & Self-Determination for Puerto Rico: Women Led Struggles". They shared with SisterSong staff and community members the history of the struggle for the Independence of Puerto Rico, including the current status of that struggle within the United Nations. This event was also sponsored by the Latin American and Caribbean Community Center and Project South.

In May, one of SisterSong's Management Circle members, Juanita Williams, began hosting bi-monthly crafting circles on Tuesdays as a way of connecting and being creative. These circles will be ongoing.

SisterSong held a Reproductive Justice training on July 10 at the Mother House – for local community members who are interested in learning more about the RJ framework and how it applies to your work.

Remember, *nuestra casa es su casa*: our home is your home. If you would like more information on using the community space at the Mother House, please contact Laura at SisterSong, 404-756-2680 or laura@sistersong.net.



Shemeka Clayton, SisterLove Positive Connections/ Program Assistant and Damaris Henderson, SisterLove ISIA Research Assistant/Peer Advocate Facilitator participate in SisterSong's Reproductive Justice 101 & 102 Series training at the Mother House in Atlanta.

How Helpful is Your Local Pharmacy?

By Heidi Williamson, Membership & Advocacy Coordinator, SisterSong



In the summer of 2008, the interns of SisterSong asked a provocative question: Are there barriers to obtaining Plan B in a progressive city like Atlanta? And if so what are they? Soon after, they conducted a phone survey of Atlanta pharmacies requesting the emergency contraceptive, Plan B and critical information about its usage. The results were interesting. Plan B is emergency contraception or the morning after pill.

Of the five chain stores surveyed, CVS and Kroger exceeded expectations answering all questions correctly and offering great customer service. The majority of each chain in the city of Atlanta possessed accurate knowledge about the drug and its availability. Additionally, these stores offered customer service in a respectful, non-judgmental way to our college students.

Walgreens, however, had challenges complying with both state laws and its own company policies. In many instances, pharmacists answered questions about the drug inaccurately or allegedly lied to our students. In four instances, our students were told, “We don’t have it, won’t have it and won’t order it.”

Additionally, after contacting the headquarters of Walgreens, they learned that these stores were in violation of the official corporate policy, not to mention Georgia state law, which says pharmacists have the right of refusal if he or she objects to giving a patient Plan B for religious or moral reasons. But that pharmacist must refer that patient to a pharmacy that will provide the drug. This feedback coupled with poor attitude or customer service prompted our interns to give Walgreens the lowest grade.

While all pharmacies answered our questions about Plan B and its availability, one inescapable reality exists – the \$45 one must pay to purchase the contraceptive. And while many pharmacists were willing to offer assistance with the drug, very few knew where women with cash could get the drug cheaper.

How does your pharmacy rate? Put it to the test. If you would like to start a similar campaign in your area, contact SisterSong at Heidi@sistersong.net.



Thank You SisterSong for Another Year of Leadership in the Fight for Reproductive Justice!

The Reproductive Health Technologies Project seeks to advance the ability of every woman to achieve full reproductive freedom with access to the safest, most effective and preferred methods for controlling her fertility and protecting her health.

The Reproductive Health Technologies Project
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There are many groups that currently work at the intersection of RJ and EJ such as Tewa Women United, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, the Mother's Milk Project, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, Black Women for Reproductive Justice, Women's Voices for the Earth, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, Alaska Action Community on Toxins, the New Orleans Women's Health & Justice Initiative, the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW, PODER, the Environmental Justice and Climate Initiative, the University of California at San Francisco, Breast Cancer Action, the Population and Development and the Civil Liberties Programs at Hampshire College, Sustainable South Bronx, Running Strong for Indian Youth, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Women's Environment and Development Organization, the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, the Women's Health and Environment Initiative, the Women's Foundation of California, the Reproductive Health Technologies Project, Generations Ahead, the Center for African-American and Ethnic Studies at Adelphi University, and Planned Parenthood Federation of America, among others.

Some of the groups named above are featured contributors in this issue of Collective Voices. Articles in this issue address climate change, population control, contaminated neighborhoods, toxic health and beauty products, dangerous foods, industry and community issues, and the potential for the environmental justice and reproductive justice movements to work together.

Through our convenings, trainings and reports over the next several years, SisterSong's RJ+EJ Project will engage these and many other groups and activists in strategizing on building relationships, developing greater shared knowledge, and nurturing a variety of potential collaborations and joint work to increase the number and depth of activists working at this intersection.

For women of color, there will be no climate justice without gender justice and there is no environmental justice without reproductive justice.

In Honor of Dr. Tiller

SisterSong and the Reproductive Justice community mourn the lost of Dr. George Tiller, a late-term abortion provider who was assassinated Sunday, May 31 while attending church in Wichita, Kansas. Our hearts go out to Dr. Tiller's family, his clinic staff, and the many women whose lives were touched by his commitment to the movement.

Any donations can be sent to:
George R. Tiller, M.D
Memorial Fund for the Advancement of Women's Health
In care of the Wichita Community Foundation
200 W. Douglas, Suite 250, Wichita, KS 67202

Public Officials and Reproductive Health Advocates Converge for Urban Initiative

By Heidi Williamson, Membership & Advocacy Coordinator, SisterSong

In 2008, SisterSong and several of its members participated in a ground-breaking summit organized by the National Institute for Reproductive Health that convened mayors, city legislative leaders, county executives, public health officials, and local advocates from across the United States to highlight challenges, successes, and opportunities for creating change at the local level around the issue of reproductive health care disparities.

As a part of the second phase of the initiative, the National Institute agreed to work hand-in-hand with local advocates to support and engage their public officials to develop and implement city specific initiatives in their communities. Since that time SisterSong and two of our members, California Black Women's Health Project and the Illinois Coalition for Adolescent Health, have received grants to host regional conferences modeled on the groundbreaking Summit held in New York in 2008. The Regional Summits will bring together advocates and public officials from major cities in a region of the United States to discuss improving reproductive health policies and programs in their city and region. Regional Summits will be held in Atlanta, Denver, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

SisterSong is partnering with the ACLU of Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Project and the Planned Parenthood of South Florida to host advocates and elected officials on the cutting edge of reproductive health care.

For more information about the Urban Initiative, please contact Heidi at Heidi@sistersong.net.

THE 2009 CONFERENCE DATES:

Denver, hosted by NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado, SEPTEMBER 23 – 24

Atlanta, hosted by SisterSong, OCTOBER 1-2

Chicago, hosted by Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, OCTOBER 21 – 22

Los Angeles, hosted by California Black Women's Health Project, OCTOBER 29 – 30

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Why I Give: Featuring La'Tasha Mayes

By Kai Gurley, Development Coordinator, SisterSong



SisterSong is excited to launch a new series of articles featuring our fabulous donors. This issue's features La'Tasha Mayes, Executive Director of New Voices Pittsburgh: Women of Color for Reproductive Justice.

La'Tasha, tell us a little bit about yourself.

I am a Reproductive Justice activist and community organizer in Pittsburgh originally from Philadelphia, the Founder and Director of New Voices Pittsburgh: Women of Color Reproductive Justice - the only grassroots humanrightsactivistorganizationinPittsburgh for, led by and about women of color; a member of SisterSong's Management Circle; trainer and community educator with the Center for Victims of Violence and Crimes and believer in the indefatigable spirit of women and our leadership in the greatest of deeds.

So, what's up with you and SisterSong?

I am in love with SisterSong! No other organization has fostered a sustainable and powerful social change movement based in the lived experiences of women of color that connects us all through human rights and with a clear vision for Reproductive Justice for all people. I adore the passion, charisma and selflessness of all those who act in the name of SisterSong and in the name of our movement; I am eternally grateful for the inspiration through SisterSong to do this work each day. There is no idea that is impossible or improbable in the vision of SisterSong as, "We specialize in the wholly impossible."

Alright, so you LOVE SisterSong, but why does that love translate into your decision to donate?

No one will invest in our vision if we do not invest in our vision ourselves. I cannot authentically ask anyone to give to SisterSong unless I can lead through my own actions and give to SisterSong. I give what is meaningful for me and the option to pay on a monthly basis eases the potential anxiety to give especially in these extreme economic times. New Voices Pittsburgh would not exist had it not been for SisterSong encouraging us as emerging leaders and providing tangible resources to give birth to our local movement. It is my personal duty and

organizational duty to give and to support SisterSong - a partner of the highest integrity for which I am proud to participate, to lead and to give.

SisterSong needs your support too! Our monthly sustainer program allows for automatic deductions to be made from your bank account or credit card on the same day every month, taking the hassle out of giving. And as La'Tasha alluded to, small monthly donations add up at the end of the year. To become a monthly sustainer, simply complete the envelope included with your Collective Voices newspaper, and return it to us. We'll take care of the rest! Questions? Call Kai at 404-756-2680 or email kai@sistersong.net. We can't do it without you!

Bridging the Environmental Justice and Reproductive Justice Movements

By Loretta J. Ross, National Coordinator, SisterSong

Those of us who work for reproductive justice — who have long fought for a woman's human right to control her reproductive destiny and that of her family and community — must pay serious attention to environmental

toxins that affect our ability to become pregnant, have a healthy pregnancy and give birth to and raise a healthy child. Instead individual women are blamed for these problems, often told to avoid dangerous jobs, move out of contaminated areas, improve our educational status or eliminate language barriers. In a bizarre victim-blaming analysis by the Heritage Foundation after the catastrophic Katrina disaster, we were told that women died because they didn't have husbands to rescue them from the deadly floodwaters.

Our pregnancies are policed, our behaviors are monitored, and we are frequently imprisoned at the whims of callous judges in the interest of "fetal rights." For example, in June 2009 a judge in Maine ordered the incarceration of an HIV-positive pregnant woman, Quinta Layin Tuleh, simply to "ensure that the baby is born free of the AIDS virus" (she was later released on bail). Will the next ill-informed judge sentence a pregnant woman to prison because she lives in a contaminated neighborhood and cannot guarantee the health of her child? In other words, we are told it is our fault for not protecting ourselves and our families from diseases, abuse and disasters.

Moreover, women of color often work in industries that pose severe risks to our health. Farm workers are exposed to many dangerous chemicals that cause spontaneous miscarriages and create lifelong physical damage. For example, the commonly used pesticide methoxychlor can prevent implantation of an embryo in the uterus. Called the "chemicalization of farming," these preventable risks are not individual problems for women to deal with but instead require that we create a society based on human rights in which it is unacceptable to profit from chemicals

that harm us. It is not an individual responsibility, but a collective responsibility.

We live in communities that are situated in some of the most dangerous conditions in the United States. The world's poorest people are the least responsible

for causing environmental degradation such as climate change, yet they are suffering the most from its effects. While everyone is affected by climate change, we know that women are disproportionately harmed by climate change disasters. The majority of the world's poor women and their families often live in substandard housing on marginal land subject to drought or flood, or in crowded urban areas lacking essential services.

Women's livelihoods are most endangered by climate change. Due to gendered divisions of labor, women comprise 70-80% of the world's agricultural workers. Women are more likely than men to die from natural disasters caused by climate change because of gendered vulnerabilities. Men are more likely to survive floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and other disasters. In New Orleans, more than 83 percent of poor single mothers were displaced as a result of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Almost four years later, many women and girls remain unable to return home. If women are displaced by environmental disasters and unable to care for their families, if women cannot access even the most basic of social and reproductive health services, then they likewise will be denied the most elemental aspects of reproductive justice.

Emerging research is proving that chemical exposures that occur prior to conception and during pregnancy can have serious ramifications on adult health. A 2005 study by the

Environmental Working Group found an average of 200 industrial chemicals and pollutants in umbilical cord blood from babies born in U.S. hospitals that included pesticides, consumer product ingredients, and wastes from burning coal, gasoline and garbage.



Two chemicals are of particular concern to fertility and reproductive health - phthalates and bisphenol A. Bisphenol A has been linked to infertility, miscarriage, breast and prostate cancer. Phthalates have been linked to reproductive health problems in males such as reduced testosterone and reduced sperm count. In March 2009, Women's Voices for the Earth and the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics released a report revealing that Johnson & Johnson's Baby Shampoo contains at least two hazardous contaminants: 1,4-dioxane and formaldehyde. Both of these chemicals cause cancer in animals, and formaldehyde is also known to cause skin rashes in people who are sensitive to the chemical. These chemicals, and many others, have been shown to cause harm to women and families. They are in the products that we use everyday and women of color are especially vulnerable to risks of increased infertility and problematic pregnancies.

But instead of coming together to protect peoples' health and remove toxins from our environment, some anti-contraceptive, anti-choice activists instead want to ban all contraceptives! At a hearing in March 2009 in Colorado on the Birth Control Protection Act, one anti-contraceptive activist said, "[O]ral contraceptives [should] be banned entirely because women taking birth control pills excrete hormones into the wastewater system, which pollutes the watershed, creating intersex fish that are unable to reproduce."

These and other misguided sentiments that stigmatize and blame people of color and women underscore the urgent need for EJ and RJ activists to work together to save our lives and protect our communities.

Women of color in the EJ and RJ movements share key principles in our work that create common ground for our movements to come together and collaborate. While both movements are not homogenous and have various perspectives and campaigns, we believe that people of color are central to defining the issues for our communities. We have the right to participate as equal partners at every level of environmental and public health decision-making. Both movements feature the leadership of women of color, Indigenous communities, and intergenerational leadership. Base-building, community organizing, and a race/class/gender analysis underpin both movements.

We share a firm commitment to opposing all forms of population control because we understand that efforts to control our reproduction, immigration, labor, bodies and sexuality are pathways for controlling the destinies of our communities. We understand that population control to limit the fertility, viability and mobility of vulnerable communities is part of the agenda for some mainstream groups. Thus we oppose both eugenics and environmental and scientific racism that leads, for example, to the patenting and privatization of seeds and human genes. We are understandably cautious about the issue of emerging technologies (e.g., biotech, genetic, nano-tech, etc.) and their impacts on communities of color and Indigenous communities. Both movements are engaged in responding to state-based and non-state based controls over our lives (i.e., product liability and corporations, laws and regulations, religious entities, etc.).

We also share a critical analysis of the concept of "choice" and how true "choice" often does not exist for low-income, communities of color and Indigenous people (e.g., informed consent around testing, the choice to move away from environmentally toxic sites, and/or the choice to have/or not have an abortion, etc.). We share critiques of the "dominant" mainstream movements for not addressing key "justice" and "equity" issues facing low-income, communities of color and Indigenous communities. Both movements experience the co-opting of RJ and EJ language and framing by the mainstream movements, the government, and the media. In particular, both movements increasingly find that mainstream movements do not want to address the fundamental problems of racism

that contaminate their perceptions of our communities and deny our central leadership role in addressing these issues.

For example, at the recent State of Environmental Justice in America Conference in May 2009 sponsored by Howard University School of Law, the National Small Town Alliance, the US Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the US Environmental Protection Agency, one of the speakers in the Grand Opening Session, Shankar Prasad, Executive Fellow with the Coalition for Clean Air, stated that "environmental justice is not about race or economics, it is about health." He was challenged by long-time environmental justice activists who asserted, as they often must do, that environmental justice is framed by responding to endemic racial and economic injustices and it is not just about health or even health disparities.

We also share an understanding of the complexity and intersectionality of issues that include not only the right to have, or not have children, but the right to raise our children in healthy and safe communities. We demand the right for all people to be free from toxic threats, environmental contamination and resulting health impacts, the right for all people to live, work, pray, learn and play in healthy environments, and an affirmation of the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction. Both movements are holistic and look at the individual as embedded in communities and broader societal contexts. In particular, EJ involves a holistic understanding of ecological systems and cycles.

Despite the many sites of overlap and common ground, for the EJ and RJ movements to come together to address environmental and reproductive injustices, we also recognize that the two movements do not necessarily share a common understanding of language and that many assumptions about framing and language exist that need to be teased out and explored in order for the groups to successfully partner and blend with one another. There remains a fair amount of work to be done to first achieve greater clarity about each movement's terminology, language, triggers, sensitivities, and framing, and from there, to find places of intersection and the possibilities for collaboration.

An example of such a tension is around the EJ and RJ movements' framing and embrace of the terms "healthy" and "normal" within the context of toxic trespass and health outcomes. While the EJ and Environmental Health movements are concerned with how toxic chemicals might impact the "healthy" or "normal" development of unborn fetuses, and how particular chemicals such as the herbicide, atrazine, might impair "normal" testicular development in males or cause intersex development, the RJ movement, embracing a disability rights framework, challenges the notion of what is "healthy" and "normal" in terms of biology and gender expression. The RJ movement embraces the promotion of sexual health, choice, body autonomy, and diverse sexuality and gender expressions.

Both movements are significantly underfunded compared to the environmental health, environmental, reproductive health, and reproductive rights movements of the mainstream. Despite the lack of resources, many women of color are valiantly leading the bridging of the Environmental Justice and Reproductive Justice movements. We are developing and deepening our relationships by tapping into our diverse wisdoms, expertise and understandings. As we learn more about our shared histories, key issues, campaigns, challenges and opportunities, we will bring about a paradigm shift away from single-issue and silo-based efforts to make incremental change to a pragmatic and collaborative approach to transformative change. Women of color can and should be leaders in this work.

Empowered Voices, Stories Revealed

Reproductive Justice and Citizen Journalism Movements Mobilize

By Serena Garcia, Communications Coordinator, SisterSong

SisterSong's Mapping Our Rights website is unique because it brings together in one site information that was previously hard to find or disaggregated on many different websites. By using our intersectional reproductive justice analysis, MOR brings women of color together with LGBTQ activists, pro-choice advocates, midwives and other movements in pursuit and support of reproductive justice.

Our second phase of expansion for MOR is to create an interactive component allowing for mutual dialogue and storytelling. Based on your requests after MOR trainings and website exposure, we will incorporate new filters for state rankings, such as information on gun laws, voting records, HIV statistics, environmental laws, hate crime laws, and other intersectional issues. Our partners IPAS, Queers for Economic Justice, and the Center for Reproductive Rights are working with us on the new expansion.

We feel that the creation of a citizen journalism movement based on storytelling within the reproductive justice movement will provide balanced stories on the effects of reproductive and sexual health state laws and policies. Written by users and readers, stories will be produced using multimedia tools and social media.

We are moving to an economy that values referral, recommendation and reputation. Our hope is to improve our branding within the social media ecosystem to achieve the following goals:

- drive traffic to the MOR website (mappingourrights.org)
- create new reproductive justice reporters
- provide a media outlet for their work

As citizen journalism chiefly centers on covering news and events in a community, using diverse



technology such as digital storytelling, citizen reporting and podcasting can also fill in the gaps in local news coverage that newspapers have abandoned. The mainstream media fails to regularly and accurately report on the growing reproductive justice movement and how policy and laws impact women of color and their families. Far too many stories have gone unnoticed and unheard.

The voices of women of color in particular will be heard through this enhanced website. We anticipate that once the reporter's work is published on the Mapping Our Rights website, we will encourage them to consider writing for our bi-annual 32-page newsletter, Collective Voices as a contributing writer. This experience, we hope, will encourage them to continue their work within the reproductive justice movement, reporting on the challenges and awareness of the human rights framework.

In addition to reporting state laws and policies on sexual and reproductive rights and greater depth of information for users, the stories of those affected are necessary to provide localized, journalistic hooks to the site.

This site will return power to women of color by creating a new "citizen journalism" movement coupled with the reproductive justice movement that, by working together, will provide an opportunity for everyday people to collect and disseminate news, opinions, and information that matter to them most. We will expect fairness, truth and accuracy in the work of our citizen journalists. Their stories may either reflect personal observations, first-hand experiences, or be told through interviews. We will encourage our citizen journalists to reference their local and state policies or laws in their reporting.

The MOR site users will create stories that the regular news media doesn't do, can't do, wouldn't do, and misreport. Though the form of citizen journalism continues to evolve, it is clear that reproductive justice messages and underrepresented populations may benefit from adopting citizen journalism, and social tenets and technologies. This will engage our constituents and enable them to participate in the reproductive justice and citizen journalism movements simultaneously.

Environmental Injustice Causes Louisiana Activist Death

Mr. David Prince, Board Member of Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN), in Mossville, LA, died because of a house fire August 4, 2009. David and his wife Diane were committed members of the Mossville community who fought diligently for the place they called home. Our condolences go out to his family because Mr. Prince fought for environmental justice in his community and probably died because of an environmental injustice.

This largely African American community has 14 industrial facilities yet endures an inadequate emergency response system to handle fires and other emergencies. In fact, the emergency response system is so poor that a simple kitchen fire destroyed Mr. Prince's home and caused his death. The community suffers from too few fire hydrants and inadequate water pressure in the hydrants they have.

Activists from MEAN vow to continue to fight for environmental justice. In response to MEAN's request for an emergency meeting in Mossville with emergency responders and environmental agencies to develop safety measures in

the community, Calcasieu Parish Police Juror Hal McMillin said, "It is not his job." He refuses to see the larger safety issue of the community he is supposed to represent.

MEAN asks that you please keep The Prince family and the Mossville community in your prayers. Friends, we MUST fight for the human right to healthy communities for ALL. For more information contact:

Michele L. Roberts, Campaign and Policy Coordinator

Advocates for Environmental Human Rights

1730 M Street, NW, Suite 412

Washington, DC 20036

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mroberts@ehumanrights.org; www.ehumanrights.org

AEHR is a human rights law firm dedicated to upholding the human right to live in a healthy environment.



Reproductive Justice Series: RJ 101 & 102 -A New Vision for a Collective Movement

SisterSong is offering a new vision for a winning movement: **Reproductive Justice!** Reproductive Justice calls for the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, social, and economical well-being of women, girls, and individuals, based on the full achievement and protection of human rights. SisterSong trainings are excellent opportunities for activists and organizations who desire to use the Reproductive Justice (RJ) framework in their work and campaigns. Our new Reproductive Justice 102 debuted in Atlanta this summer.

RJ 101 offers:

- ★ The history of Reproductive justice and how to integrate the framework into your work
- ★ How Reproductive Justice can help bring together constituencies that are multi-racial, multi-generational, and multi-class
- ★ How to build a more powerful and relevant grassroots movement for Reproductive Justice

RJ 102* will show you how to:

- ★ Understand the Reproductive Justice framework
- ★ Apply the Reproductive Justice framework
- ★ Expand the Reproductive Justice framework

*RJ 101 is a prerequisite for taking RJ 102

SisterSong Women of Color
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This training is made possible through the support of the U.S. Human Rights Fund.

Female Condom Relaunches: Its Impact on Women of Color

By Serena Garcia, Communications Coordinator, SisterSong

Medical reports state that rates of HIV infection are disproportionately high among young women of color, especially those who are members of the working poor and, therefore, lack health insurance and easy access to health care. Negotiating condom use and asserting control of how to engage in sexual activity is difficult for young women of color and in some cultures, difficult for women regardless of age. The result accounts for a sizeable percentage of reported HIV infections among this demographic.

Black women and Latinas account for 79 percent of all reported HIV infections among 13- to 19-year-old women and 75 percent of HIV infections among 20- to 24-year-old women in the United States although, according to www.mysistahs.org. Asian and Pacific Islanders (API) and American Indians and Alaska natives account for about one percent of reported HIV infections among women ages 13 to 24. Barriers to HIV prevention point to primarily cultural expectations and trust issues.

Catholicism's opposition to birth control and machismo affect Latina women's consistent condom use. This includes the cultural expectation of respect towards males and submission.

"It's up to government, organizations, and communities to make new condoms more available and accessible. It's up to government, organizations, and communities to increase equity and access."

—Dázon Dixon Diallo, Founder/CEO of SisterLove

My Sistahs' reports that in a study of African American women ages 13 to 19, 26 percent felt little control over whether or not a condom was used during intercourse; 75 percent agreed that, if a male knew a female was taking oral contraceptives, he would not want to use a condom. Sixty-six percent felt that a male sex partner would be hurt, insulted, angry, or suspicious if questioned about his HIV risk factors.

Within the African American community, negotiation often questions trust and fidelity, particularly with a regular partner. Fear of rejection and violence sometimes surface at the point of negotiation.

According to one study from the *Journal of Women's Health and Gender-Based Medicine*, Native American women who did not consistently use condoms also felt little vulnerability to HIV and were unprepared to change their risky sexual behaviors as compared to their peers who used condoms regularly.



"When a man comes up with excuses for not using a male condom, women have a right to introduce their own tool for protection."

—Deusdeait Kiwanuka, Project Coordinator, Safe Homes and Respect for Everyone (SHARE), Source: www.rhrealitycheck.org

Education About Female Condoms

By Maame-Mensima Horne, Communications Intern, SisterSong

August 2004 was the first time I learned about the female condom. I was a freshman in college attending an orientation session that addressed the high rates of STIs on college campuses. One of the facilitators of the program demonstrated the correct use of condoms, both male and female. Sadly that was the last female condom demonstration I saw although I attended different sex education programs.

The lack of educational programs utilizing female condoms is a major contributor to the high costs of female condoms. If only one female condom for every 33 women is distributed in the US, we are not getting the exposure and education necessary to better protect ourselves against HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies.

The Female Health Company, manufacturer of FC and FC2 female condoms, has worked hard to increase their affordability and accessibility. The FC2 approved by

the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2006 was just approved by the Federal Drug Administration in March 2009.

FC2 maintains the same design as the FC but is made of a nitrile polymer, a synthetic rubber that is cheaper to manufacture and more cost effective than its female condom predecessor.

In 2006, only 20 million female condoms were distributed through public-sector organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America while 6 to 9 billion male condoms were distributed. If global bulk purchases increased to 200 million per year, the cost of female condoms can drop by more than two-thirds.

With US-based organizations able to buy FC2 for distribution, there is a chance that bulk purchases will increase enough to significantly decrease the price of female condoms and increase their access in HIV/AIDS prevention programs internationally.

What do Female Condoms mean for Women of Color?

Young women and women of color, specifically Black and Latina women, are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS. Black women have been diagnosed with AIDS approximately 23 times the rate for White women and approximately four times the rate of Latina women and young women currently make up the majority of teens newly infected with HIV.

Women of color have to work together urging sex education and HIV/AIDS prevention programs and increasing female condom distribution. This will enhance accessibility, affordability, and education on the FC2. Safer sex is better sex.

CHANGE

CHANGE and the Global Campaign for Microbicides recently facilitated a three-day advocacy workshop in Uganda with civil society leaders to support government efforts to reintroduce the female condom later this year.

"Determined to ensure success, workshop participants not only formed a working coalition structure and implementation plan by the end of the three days," says representatives from the Center for Health and Gender Equity. "They also had written a proposal to secure resources for their advocacy campaign."

Ugandan advocates representing HIV/AIDS service organizations, women's rights groups, domestic violence activists, and faith based groups convened to provide contraceptive control for women.

Is It Right For You?

PROS:

- Female controlled
- Protects against pregnancy and STIs when used correctly
 - Can be used by people allergic to latex
 - Can insert up to 8 hours prior to sex
- Can use with water and oil-based lubricant
 - Transfers the heat between partner

CONS:

- Makes noises which can be lessened with use of lubricant
- Sometimes difficult to insert, it's important to practice use
 - Noticeable during sex

*Thanks,
SisterSong, for
all that you do!*

~Katie, Sara, and everyone else
at NARAL Pro-Choice Texas

NARAL Pro-Choice Texas is pleased to have SisterSong on the Advisory Committee of our new statewide coalition, Healthy Women, Healthy Families. If you live in Texas, visit www.HealthyWomenHealthyFamilies.org to tell your lawmakers what YOU need to keep yourself and your family healthy!



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The Healthy Vagina -- It's Not Supposed to Smell Like Flowers

Black Women for Reproductive Justice

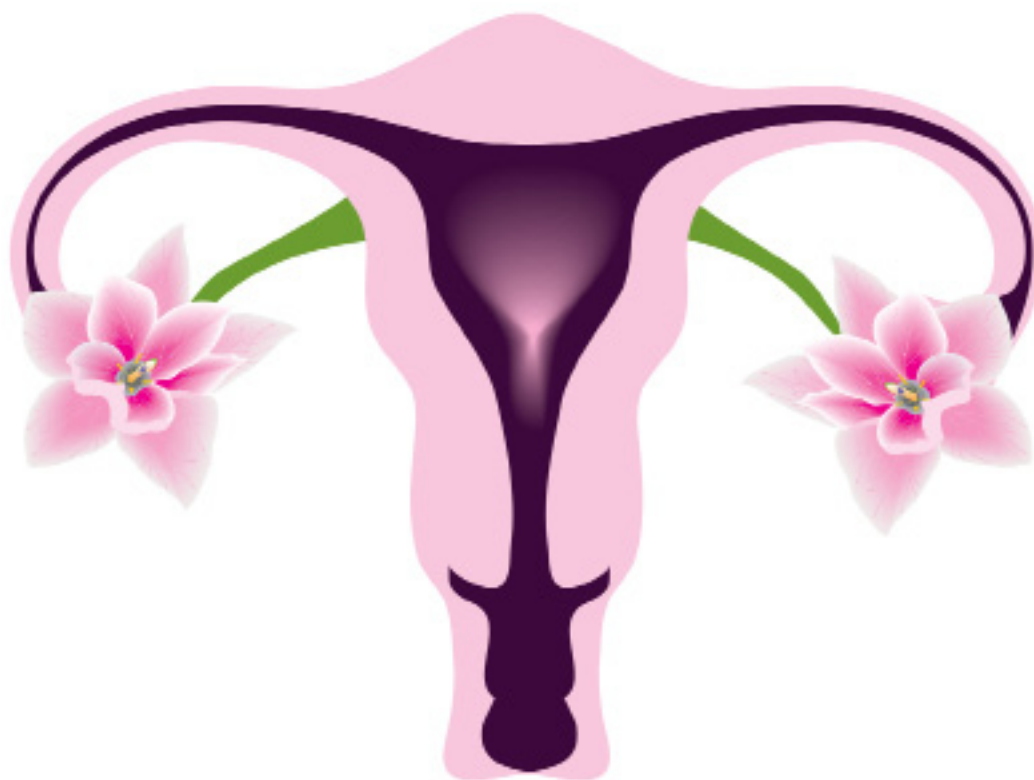
By Toni M. Bond Leonard, President and CEO, Black Women for Reproductive Justice

There is a continuous need to educate African American women about the risks associated with the use of feminine hygiene products like douches, feminine spray, personal cleansing clothes, etc. The most harmful are douching products. Numerous studies continue to show links between the practice of vaginal douching (intravaginal cleansing with a liquid solution) and several adverse health outcomes. Some of these include, pelvic inflammatory disease, bacterial vaginosis, cervical cancer, low-birth weight, preterm birth, human immunodeficiency virus transmission, sexually transmitted diseases, ectopic pregnancy, recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis, and infertility. Douching alters the normal vaginal pH and vaginal flora, weakening the vagina's natural defenses and creates an environment more susceptible to the overgrowth of pathogens. In addition, the process of inserting fluid intravaginally can also help to push harmful bacteria further up into the reproductive tract. Although douching prevalence is higher among women with lower educational levels, the racial difference persists. Approximately 52% of African American college graduates reported that they douched as compared to their Caucasian (12%) and Hispanic (30%) counterparts.

A key reason why women continue to douche is the aggressive advertising by manufacturers of douching products. Major pharmacies and grocery stores have entire aisles dedicated to feminine hygiene products. Positioned directly next to the tampons and sanitary napkins, one can find a broad selection of "medicated" solutions, disposable douche products, and feminine sprays in a number of different scents.

Over the years, messages about vaginal odors, post-menstrual bleeding, and maintaining a "clean, crisp" feeling have been passed on to women by douche manufacturers. Douche manufacturers have, in turn, profited to the tune of approximately \$144 million annually, as women add to their annual health care cost by spending as much as \$500 per year for over-the-counter vaginal products that are not medically necessary. There are two major manufacturers of douching products -- Massengill, manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline and Summer's Eve®, manufactured by C.B. Fleet Company, Inc. The irony behind C.B. Fleet's manufacturing of douching products is that they also manufacturer the Fleet line of disposal enemas, laxatives, and suppositories for constipation. C.B. Fleet has even developed a character called EneMan®. In addition, most of the major pharmacies and neighborhood dollar stores have their own brand of "generic" disposable douches. The tagline on the Summer's Eve® douching product is "Enjoy being a woman." The message here is that having a "clean, non-smelling vagina" is preferable and that the natural scent of the vagina is unnatural, making it impossible to enjoy being a woman. Massengill offers douching products with scents ranging from baby powder to vinegar and water. Summer's Eve is a bit more creative and offers a variety of scents for the vagina, including, "Fresh Scent", "Tropical Rain", "Island Splash", and "Sweet Romance".

Despite the research pointing to various associated health risks and adverse effects, the sanitization by women of their bodies is still a regular practice. Black Women for Reproductive Justice successfully got a policy resolution passed in November 2007 by the American Public Health Association, setting the stage for greater education through public health institutions, nursing and medical school, and health care providers about the need for increase patient education about douching. This also provides BWRJ yet another opportunity to engage its expanding volunteer core in policy advocacy around both provider-to-patient education. Additionally, BWRJ will need to build a broad-based collaborative of groups to begin the longer term work to get the Surgeon General to post a warning on douching



A random telephone survey of 535 adult women living in the southeastern United States found that 65% of the women believed that douching was a good hygienic practice. Half of the 65% reported that douching was necessary for good hygiene. More African American women believed this to be true than White women. Along age and class lines, older women and less-educated women were more likely to believe that douching prevented infections and pregnancies. Reasons given included washing away old blood after the menstrual cycle, washing away fluids after sexual intercourse, and self-treating abnormal discharge.

products about the connections between douching, reproductive tract infections, low-birth weight, and pre-term delivery.

There is some conflict, however, among studies with respect to those adverse health outcomes that have a causal link or an observed association. For example, those women with certain risk factors (i.e., multiple sexual partners, poverty, certain races, and lower educational level) are also at a greater risk of sexually transmitted infection, bacterial vaginosis, and pelvic inflammatory disease. This situation makes it difficult to determine causality, because women may douche as a result of infection-related symptoms rather than as a part of their normal hygienic practice. The 2002 National Survey of Family Growth reported that women who douched in the 12 months prior to the survey had a higher prevalence of pelvic inflammatory disease than those who did not douche. A study of douching and endometriosis found that recent and frequent douching in a group of women with clinical pelvic inflammatory disease was associated with endometritis and upper genital tract

-continued on page 17

-continued from page 16

infections in those women with normal or intermediate vaginal flora. Although some studies report that bacterial vaginosis is sometimes sexually transmitted, it can also occur in women who have never had sexual intercourse.

Beyond the immediate connection between douching and reproductive tract infections, the sanitization of women's bodies by the feminine hygiene industry brings forth concerns about toxins or antimicrobial agents in antiseptic douching products that are inhibitory to lactobacilli. The major bacteria in a normal, healthy vagina are lactobacilli. Women with bacterial vaginosis, for example, have been found to have decreased hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) producing lactobacilli. Douching can upset the normal vaginal flora, creating a greater susceptibility to certain sexually transmitted diseases. Women who douche are at greater risk of contracting bacterial vaginosis. In their efforts to treat the symptoms of bacterial vaginosis through douching, the healthy bacteria are killed, and unhealthy bacteria are allowed to grow. If a pregnant woman has bacterial vaginosis and douches, chronic bacterial colonization of the endometrium may cause premature rupture of the uterine membranes or early labor.

The popularization of a way to remove semen from the vagina came from Charles Knowlton, a Massachusetts doctor in the 1800s. Knowlton published a description of douching in his 1832 publication, *The Fruits of Philosophy*; or the Private Companion of Young Married People. Knowlton suggested using a syringe filled with a solution of the astringent alum and infusions of white oak or hemlock bark, green tea, or raspberry leaf. Shortly thereafter, Frederick Hollick spoke of the douching in his publication, *The Marriage Guide*, which was printed in 300 editions between 1850 and 1875. Edward Bliss Foote also celebrated douching in his publication, *Medical Common Sense*. It is estimated that 250,000 copies of Foote's publication were sold between 1858 and 1900.

In the early 20th century, varying types of chemicals and detergents were advertised as feminine hygiene douches; Lysol and Fresca advertised their products for use as contraceptive "feminine hygiene" douches. For many African American women, cleansing the vaginal cavity is part and parcel of a monthly hygienic ritual associated with menstrual cycles. In the African American community, douching is a practice that has been handed down generationally. In the Gynecologic Infections Follow-Through (GIFT) Study of 532 douching women, 45% of the respondents cited their mothers as the person who first recommended douching. Approximately 28.6% of the respondents cited friends and other relatives as the first persons to recommend douching. In this same study, women gave the following reasons for douching: to cleanse after the menses, general hygiene, before or after sex, to reduce vaginal odor, "it's normal to douche," abnormal vaginal discharge, bleeding between menses, pregnancy prevention, and recommendation by a health professional. Pregnancy prevention and recommendation by a health professional were reported by 3% or less of the respondents. Few women in the study linked douching to health conditions such as pelvic inflammatory disease, HIV infection, or cervical cancer. A little more than half of the women (52%) did not think anything would happen if they stopped douching, or they thought they would experience some adverse effect, including feeling less clean, being less sexually attractive, or more likely to get an infection if they stopped douching. More than half of the respondents reported being advised by a health professional to stop douching. However, 85% reported that they would stop if they were told that douching might cause a sexually transmitted infection, infertility, or cancer.

Another area of grave concern is the way in which feminine hygiene products, specifically, douching products are regulated. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies douche products as cosmetics. Cosmetics need not be sterile; however, they must not be contaminated with microorganisms that may be pathogenic, and the density of nonpathogenic microorganisms should be low. The FDA requires tamper-resistant packaging of products used vaginally. However, the FDA does not stringently review or regulate douche products. Nor does the FDA require that cosmetic manufacturers or marketers test their products for safety. The FDA merely "strongly urges" cosmetic manufacturers to conduct toxicological or other tests manufacturers deem appropriate to substantiate the safety of their

products. Under the Federal Drug and Cosmetic Act, cosmetic manufacturers are not required to register manufacturing establishments or formulations with FDA or make safety data available or other information available before a product is marketed in the United States. Providing this information is on a voluntary basis.

The issue of douching among women has gone historically unaddressed by the public health community. Despite the wide body of research that points to various adverse reproductive and maternal outcomes and medical personnel's knowledge of the harmful effects, scores of women still continue this harmful practice. In 1997, GlaxoSmithKline came under a legal challenge from National Black Nurses Association because they included the organization's name and logo in its advertisements in *Essence* and *Heart & Soul* magazines. The Association subsequently issued a resolution opposing douching. There is some information available that warn women about the harmful effects of douching. For example, The National Women's Health Information Center produced a douching fact sheet of "frequently asked questions" about douching and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts has a fact sheet. In some instances, a physician may advise a woman to douche for certain chronic vaginal infections but that is only after thorough screening for preexisting conditions that may be better treated by other prescribed medications.

Even Massengill acknowledges on its douching product box that douching does not prevent pregnancy, has been linked to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), and warns against possible vaginal discharge, vaginal bleeding, nausea and/or fever. They also inform women that douching does not prevent against contracting sexually transmitted infections, coming short of a full warning that douching is harmful overall.

The work we all must engage in is demystifying the vagina and eradicating the myths that it must smell like anything other than its natural smell. It's not supposed to smell like flowers, baby power, rain, a Caribbean island, vinegar or anything else. If there is some sort of unusually foul odor, a woman needs to see her physician to find out the root cause of the odor. A foul smell is usually the body's way of clueing us in to some abnormality that no amount of douching will cure. We must also do greater education with women about their menstrual cycles and the fact that the menstrual cycle is the body's way of cleansing itself. For lack of a better example, a woman's body is like a self-cleansing oven, quite capable and efficient at cleaning itself.

Some of the policy recommendations in BWRJ's APHA policy resolution include:

1. Schools of public health, pharmacy, and medicine and nursing should include in their curriculum specific education about the impact of douching on reproductive and maternal outcomes. (BWRJ is currently working to have a section included about douching in the standard medical curriculum).
2. Public health efforts should be increased through federal and state public health departments, federal and state offices of women's health, private and public medical institutions, local and state departments of public health, and physicians and other medical professionals to provide culturally competent education to women about the reproductive and maternal risks associated with douching. (BWRJ produced a douching factsheet that is now being distributed at some Chicago Department of Public Health Clinics, local abortion clinics, and at a clinic within the University of Chicago that provides gynecological services to low- to moderately income predominantly women of color).
3. The US surgeon general should include a warning label with all associated risks on douching product labels. (Understanding the public health urgency of douching, the APHA added this policy recommendations. BWRJ will be pursuing this policy effort in collaboration with several partners in the near future).
4. Public health promotion efforts should be increased through the use of population-specific media venues such as radio, television, and newspaper to provide culturally competent education to women about reproductive and maternal risks associated with douching. (BWRJ will be working in the future to develop an audio/print campaign to encourage women to stop douching).

Population Control is Not the Solution to Global Warming

By Betsy Hartmann and Elizabeth Barajas-Roman, in Hampshire College

We are now hearing escalating rhetoric from mainstream population and environment organizations about how population growth is a major cause of global warming. Some of these groups are reaching out to reproductive justice activists with the argument that we should all join together to advocate for more investments in international family planning since this will help reduce carbon emissions and improve women's health and rights at the same time. This strategy threatens to undermine both climate justice and reproductive justice.

HERE ARE 10 REASONS WHY:

1. The numbers don't add up.

It is not population growth that drives carbon emissions but economic systems of production, distribution and consumption based on the profligate use of fossil fuels. The industrialized countries, with only 20% of the world's population, are responsible for 80% of the accumulated carbon dioxide build-up in the atmosphere. From 1950-2000, the entire continent of Africa was responsible for only 2.5 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, most countries in the world are already moving to a smaller family size.

2. Blame games target the wrong people.

Blaming climate change on overpopulation lets wealthy countries, corporations, and consumers off the hook. It is part of a long tradition of eugenic environmentalism in which environmental and economic resource scarcities are attributed to "too many people" – usually meaning too many people of color – and not to highly inequitable and environmentally damaging resource guzzling by the rich.

3. Demographically driven family planning programs erode reproductive rights.

Viewing family planning as a means to solve the climate crisis will set back progress on the delivery of safe, voluntary, and ethical reproductive health services. That's because there's a big difference between family planning programs designed primarily to reduce birth rates and those premised on reproductive rights as an end that is worthy in itself.

4. Population control is no substitute for gender justice.

Gender justice in the climate policy arena means bringing gender issues into the design of early warning systems as well as efforts to strengthen food and livelihood security. It entails looking critically at how corporate-driven climate change policies, such as carbon offset projects, often harm poor women and their communities. Activists should advocate for safe reproductive health services as a vital part of disaster response, not as a tool of population control.

5. The population-climate change connection bolsters anti-immigrant agendas.

By attributing environmental degradation to population growth, population, and environment groups play into the hands of conservative anti-immigrant forces who argue that immigrants to the U.S. should remain in their home countries where they consume less energy. Many of these anti-immigrant groups are tied to white supremacist organizations.

6. Fear-based stereotypes of overpopulation contribute to the militarization of climate change.

Current narratives about 'climate conflict' and 'climate refugees' draw on racialized fears of overpopulation in the Global South. Such narratives serve as a rationale for further militarization of immigration enforcement and the expansion of U.S. military intervention, especially into Africa.

7. Population stereotypes victimize the displaced.

Portraying climate-displaced people as a dark and dangerous horde of violent migrants rather than human beings with human rights has profoundly negative consequences. By propagating the notion that population growth is a major cause of global warming, mainstream population and environment groups make such stereotypes more palatable to the general public, contributing to a climate of fear that can only impede effective disaster planning and response.

8. Population alarmism encourages apocalyptic thinking and distracts us from the search for practical solutions to the climate crisis.

Doomsday scenarios of population outstripping resources and causing climate change make people feel powerless to do anything about the problem. The flip side of apocalyptic thinking is the longing for magic-bullet solutions, such as nuclear power as the answer to climate change.

9. Shifting the blame for the climate crisis to the Global South prevents international solidarity.

If the U.S. is to enter serious climate negotiations on the international stage, it must do so from a position of taking full responsibility for our own greenhouse gas emissions, past and present, and for the culture of greed and waste that has become the hallmark of American consumer capitalism.

10. Inserting population into the climate change debate divides the environmental movement at a time when we should be coming together.

The implicit and explicit race, class and gender biases of population control are detrimental to building an inclusive movement for climate justice. This narrow worldview also blocks a deeper understanding of the powerful economic and political forces that both drive climate change and prevent effective solutions.

There are many positive linkages between struggles for climate justice, environmental justice and reproductive justice. A focus on population distracts us from finding those intersections and working together to "create" a greener, more equitable and more peaceful world.

Betsy Hartmann is the director and Elizabeth Barajas-Roman the associate director of the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. For more on these themes, see "Ten Reasons Why Population Control is Not the Solution to Global Warming" and "Reproductive Justice, Not Population Control: Breaking the Wrong Links and Making the Right Ones in the Movement for Climate Justice" on <http://popdev.hampshire.edu>.

Gardasil Update

Gardasil was the first vaccine offered by a pharmaceutical company to protect against cancer. Created by Merck, it appeared to offer a chance to prevent cancer in young girls by preventing HPV or the Human Papilloma Virus. HPV is a common virus that infects the skin and mucous membranes. There are more than 100 types of HPV. When the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved this HPV vaccine in June 2006, SisterSong and others questioned the wisdom of encouraging and even requiring all young girls to be vaccinated. It seems our cautious approach was warranted.

While Gardasil may protect against viruses that cause cancer, new research indicates that protection doesn't last very long. By the time the typical girl becomes sexually active, Gardasil may no longer protect her against most viruses that cause cervical cancer or genital warts. In fact, Gardasil might be more effective for older teens and young adults. Encouraged to rush to protect their daughters, parents and taxpayers have spent billions of dollars for short-term protection to vaccinate girls who are not yet teenagers.

This is an example of how we have to be cautious as women of color in embracing a new technology for which the benefits and long-term effects are still unfolding. Thanks to all the SisterSong members, especially Fay Williams, who warned us to go slow and let the information be better researched.



The ACLU works every day to secure a world where everyone has the resources they need to lead healthy lives, build strong relationships, and raise healthy families. We protect access to contraceptives, safe and legal abortion care, comprehensive sexuality education, and other important reproductive health services.

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Old Evil, New Twist: Environmental Racism

By Richard Leiter

Sheila Holt-Orsted was a very healthy young woman. An aerobics instructor and fitness trainer, she was named Miss Tennessee Bodybuilding Heavyweight and Mixed Pairs Champion in 1991. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003 she asked herself, as so many women do, "What did I do to get this?" What's unusual in Sheila's case is that she found an answer, one that involves the EPA, the state of Tennessee, the town and county of Dickson, and an insidious system of social injustice that Sheila is working very hard to correct.

The Holt family owns 150 acres of rural Tennessee acreage that they've lived on and farmed for four generations. They're part of a small African-American community—only 4.5 per cent of the otherwise white population—in Dickson, Tennessee, about 35 miles west of Nashville. Sheila's childhood was in many ways idyllic; she ate fresh corn and apples from the family orchard and drank cool, sweet water from the family well.

In the 1960s, the town leaders of Dickson converted the city's only park in a Black neighborhood, located next to the Holt farm, into a landfill. Into this landfill went decades of untreated industrial waste, including three to four truckloads a week of the carcinogen trichloroethylene (TCE). The TCE was used by automotive manufacturer Scovill-Schrader—now named Saltire Industrial—and, as was the practice at the time, was simply collected in oil drums and dumped in the landfill along with all the rest of the town's toxic waste. Sheila was first exposed to the TCE-tainted water in 1964; she was three years old.

With the groundswell of environmental interest in the late 1980s, the Holts' well water was tested by the Environmental Protection Agency and found contaminated by TCEs. It was subsequently retested twice and labeled "safe"—even though the EPA found that the TCE levels were dramatically above safe guidelines. The Holts continued to drink what they had been assured was the safe water from their well. But Sheila, returning to her home on family visits, began to notice some alarming coincidences. Her father fell victim to, and died from, prostate and bone cancer. Her aunt who lived next door got cancer. Her uncle died of Hodgkin's disease. Three cousins who lived nearby got cancer. And then, in 2003, Sheila was diagnosed with HER2+ node positive breast cancer.

During her treatment, Sheila and her young daughter returned to Dickson for the support of still-healthy family members. Even though she had in hand the letters from the EPA and the town of Dickson assuring her family that their well water was safe to drink, she couldn't accept the impossibly high cancer incidence, localized in her community, as coincidence. In 2003, sick with the side effects of chemo and radiation, she dragged herself down to the state environment and conservation offices in Nashville and requested information on water testing in her city. She was casually handed a cardboard box filled with paper, and what she found astonished her.

At the same time that the county of Dickson was mailing letters to Black families assuring them that their well water was safe, the same officials were sending letters to white residents warning them to stop drinking their well water and to switch to the municipal water supply.

Sheila knew she had to do something, but she didn't know what. She'd been trained as a bodybuilder, not an environmental activist. Trying to be supportive, her husband gave her a video of the film Erin Brockovich, and emulating the Julia Roberts-portrayed main character, Sheila talked to any expert who would listen: college professors, chemists, engineers. They all pointed her to one man: Dr. Robert Bullard, director of the

Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University and one of the nation's leading experts on environmental racism.

Sheila tried reaching the busy environmental activist for six months but got no response. Finally, on a fluke, Bullard picked up the phone one evening and heard her story. At first he was disbelieving. No official, he said, would be foolish enough to leave a paper trail of racism. But he was wrong; Sheila had photocopies of the actual letters that had been sent to both the white and the Black families.

Bullard, finally convinced, joined the fight. Sheila had found an ally who would uncover a systematic abuse of environmental guidelines, civil rights laws, and simple human decency. Not only had the county whitewashed the risk to Black families, but it had paid to switch over the white families' water supply to the municipal water system and delivered bottled water to them in the interim. In 1991, a state water official discovered the potential for toxins in the Holts' water supply and alerted the EPA to the danger. The federal agency

pooh-poohed the state's concern and Tennessee went along with the EPA's conclusions, even as more and more tests confirmed that the level of TCE in the Holts' water supply was 24 times the EPA's recommended level.

Beginning in 2003, attorneys filed lawsuits on behalf of 12 Holt family members against the city, county, and

state for negligence in not warning them of the man-made dangers in their water. And in 2007, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund filed an amended complaint claiming discrimination as well. Last year Sheila added Hillary Clinton to her long list of supporters when the senator invited her to Washington to testify before the first-ever environmental justice congressional hearing.

The Holts have clearly suffered at the hands of public officials. In addition to the sickness and death from various diseases, their longtime family home and farm has become worthless. To make matters worse, Sheila recently experienced a recurrence of breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy.

But all this seems to make Sheila Holt-Orsted's passion burn even hotter. She has converted her minivan into a mobile activism center and—when her treatment schedule allows it—is in constant battle with the status quo: "We were the wrong complexion for protection," she states, echoing Robert Bullard's rallying cry. "But all that's going to change."

Breast Cancer Action applauds Sheila Holt-Orsted in her commitment to reversing social inequities on behalf of not only her family but all of us.

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"We were the wrong complexion
for protection but all that's
going to change."





When Movements Join Forces

By Women's Voices for the Earth

When is the environment a women's issue? Historically, the environmental movement has widely been seen as one of conservation, wilderness preservation, and wildlife protection. But a women-centered movement has emerged that fuses environmentalism with women's health and empowerment. What has inspired such a movement? A threat to the health of our reproductive systems.

The threat looms in the form of environmental pollutants, specifically the toxic chemicals intimately impacting women's lives and the lives of our families. We're talking about chemicals that are linked to breast cancer, birth defects, children's asthma, decreased fertility, learning disabilities, children's cancer and other illnesses.

One of the most prevalent threats from toxic chemicals comes from consumer products in our own homes. Every year thousands of chemicals are placed in products and released into our environment with virtually no information

on the potential consequences for human health and little government oversight. The impact of toxic chemicals on women is of particular concern:

Women more frequently come into contact with toxic chemicals in the home. Women use a significant number of personal care products including soaps, cosmetics, and lotions—on average 12 products a day. Similarly, women frequently come into contact with chemicals in cleaning products; a national study showed that typically, women today do more than 70 percent of the housework. Both personal care products and cleaning products have been proven to contain toxic chemicals linked to chronic disease.

Women carry the impacts of toxic chemical exposure differently than men. Many chemicals build up in fat and women generally have a higher percentage of fat tissue than men.

We're seeing an increase in women's health problems potentially related to environmental chemical exposure. Over the last 70 years, breast cancer rates rose from a risk of 1 in 20 to 1 in 8; the onset of puberty is occurring at an earlier age among young girls; endometriosis, a leading cause of female infertility, is far more common today than it was 50 years ago.

Women of color in the United States bear a greater burden of chronic diseases that have been linked with exposure to toxic chemicals. Black women are more likely to die of breast cancer than are women of any other racial or ethnic group. Autoimmune diseases such as lupus affect Black women at three times the rate of white women. Black, Native American,

and Puerto Rican infants have higher death rates than Caucasian infants.

Women are the first environment for the next generation. Many chemicals stored in a woman's body are passed on to her child during pregnancy and later through breastfeeding. Although breastfeeding remains the best option for building infant immunity, synthetic chemicals are so prevalent in a woman's breast milk today that if bottled for sale, most breast milk would not pass FDA regulations.

So what are women in this modern movement doing about it?

We're raising our voices to change weak government and corporate policies that wreak havoc on our ability to keep ourselves safe. Women have incredible social, political and economic power, and we're using it.

Because of the power of our voices, corporations are beginning to make their products safer. Cleaning product companies, nail polish companies, and baby bottle companies have all recently announced the removal of toxic chemicals from their products.

And this is only the beginning.

You can add your voice to ours by joining organizations like Women's Voices for the Earth and SisterSong, organizations that are building bridges across the women's, environmental and reproductive justice movements to reach our common goals of empowering women to eliminate threats to our health.

Empower yourself. Visit

www.womenandenvironment.org.

Glossed Over: Cosmetic Toxins and Reproductive Justice

By Jamie Silberberger and Alex Gorman Scranton (Women's Voices for the Earth), Priscilla Huang and Nancy Chung (National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum), and Julia Liou and Anuja Mendiratta (California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative)

HEALTHCARE



be inhaled or absorbed through the skin, some accumulating in the body over time. Childbearing women may also pass these toxins to their fetuses or breastfeeding newborns. Many API nail salon workers—recognizing the potential health threats to themselves and their future children—report that they plan to quit their jobs when pregnant to avoid toxic exposures.

"You can't imagine how many chemicals are being used by workers in nail salons everyday. Most do not have any knowledge about the health hazards of the products they are using," says Connie Nguyen, a California cosmetologist who has suffered respiratory problems from working in beauty salons for 13 years.

The top three chemicals of concern in many nail polishes are toluene, formaldehyde and dibutyl phthalate, also known as the "toxic trio." These chemicals have been linked to cancer in addition to reproductive harms including miscarriages, infertility, and birth defects. However, despite the health impacts associated with the toxic trio, there is very limited governmental regulation or review over them and the 10,000 other chemicals used in cosmetic and personal care products. By law, nail products sold in the U.S. must be free of poisonous or deleterious



Over a decade ago, the environmental justice movement emerged and expanded the definition of "environment" to include not only wild habitats, but also the places where people live, work, and play. The new definition helped to uncover the disproportionate health impacts of occupational exposure to toxins on people of color. Despite this revelation, years later, we are yet grappling with a regulatory system that still fails to protect vulnerable populations like nail salon workers who are exposed to a number of toxic chemicals daily. There are over 380,000 nail salon workers in the U.S. cosmetology industry, of which 96% are female and predominately of reproductive age. The typical nail salon worker earns less than \$18,200 a year, lacks health care coverage, and is an immigrant Asian and Pacific Islander (API) woman with limited English language skills and education.

To address health and safety concerns of the national nail salon workforce, the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, the National Asian Pacific American's Women Forum (NAPAWF), and Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE) formed the National Healthy Nail Salon Alliance (NHNSA) in 2007. NHNSA's goal is to connect efforts across the U.S. to protect and improve the health and welfare of women working in nail salons.

One of the NHNSA's biggest challenges lies in convincing US federal agencies to hold the beauty and personal care industry to a stricter standard to assure better protection for workers, owners, and the general public. On a daily basis and often for long hours at a time, nail salon technicians are exposed to substances such as toxic solvents, chemical solutions, glues, and cosmetic products, which contain thousands of chemicals; including some that are known to be carcinogenic or suspected to cause reproductive harm or other negative health impacts. These chemicals may

substances that might harm users under normal use. Nonetheless, the U.S. Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has no authority to require that cosmetic products be tested for safety before they go on the market. Instead, the FDA only asks that cosmetics manufacturers voluntarily report any adverse reactions or health risks. Moreover, the FDA lacks the ability to require recalls of products found to be harmful. Thus, any recalls result from the voluntary actions by the manufacturers themselves.



The NHNSA is addressing these deficiencies by working to pass federal legislation to prohibit the use of toxic chemicals in cosmetic products, and to give the FDA the authority it needs to properly regulate cosmetic ingredients. In the short term, the NHNSA is pushing manufacturers to reformulate nail products to eliminate known toxic ingredients, and working to increase salon owner and worker awareness of protective safety measures, including advocating for better safety information and training on toxic exposure. Underlying all of these efforts is the need to conduct more research in order to examine the long term health effects of working in nail salons and in the broader cosmetology industry. Women working in this low-wage sector should not have to choose between protecting their health and well-being, and protecting their livelihood.

For more information about the nail salon industry, see <http://womenshealthandtheenvironment.org> articles and other resources in English and Vietnamese.

Bridging the Communications Gap: An Alternative Approach to Achieving Environmental Justice

By Lakeisha R. Harrison, SisterSong Public Policy & Research Committee

Environmental justice is a very important issue for the reproductive health of women of color. There are many legitimate concerns that need to be addressed regarding the impact various industries and operations have for women of color. The relationship between industry and the community has, at times, been very contentious over the years, creating a spirit of distrust on both sides of the issue. This distrust has impeded much needed progress on environmental justice issues. If there is to be any increased success in the future, it is imperative that the impacted community and industry find a way to bridge this trust gap and begin working together toward a solution and improved conditions.

Communities have a right to demand environmental justice from industry and to hold those companies accountable that do damage. Many companies in industry have made improvements and instituted environmental justice programs and initiatives. Others have a long way to go. If industry wants to avoid or minimize negative interactions with community, they would do well to engage with the community and work with them in a co-operative manner.

But the same is true for the community. There are more ways to accomplish environmental justice besides the use of antagonistic tactics. There is an old saying that one can catch more bees with honey than with vinegar. While communities that have been damaged often have a right to be angry and distrustful, it is still important to channel that energy into constructive action. Part of that action can and should include partnership opportunities with industry on scientific research, on impact of operations on community, technological advancements, and mitigation measures.

It may seem counterintuitive for communities who have been discriminated against, harmed or put at risk of harm from industries to form partnerships with them. But it may prove just as effective, or more so than protests, boycotts, and litigation. Likewise, if industry wishes to see a reduction in antagonistic tactics from the community, then industry should be more open and transparent in their operations and be willing to work with the community. These actions must also be self-initiated. If negativity is the only thing that motivates industry to institute environmental justice measures, then negative tactics are the only actions the community will utilize. Trust must be earned and that does not happen with secrecy, avoidance, or dismissive attitudes toward impacted communities. Industry must demonstrate its sincerity with tangible activities that represent real and substantive change.

On the other hand, communities may be suspicious of company attempts to reach out to them and work cooperatively. While there is nothing wrong with healthy skepticism, when industries attempt to reach out to and work with the community, it is in the community's interest to keep an open mind and find a way to make the situation work. Nobody wins when each side stands at extremes and refuses to come together and talk. Both sides need to educate each

other about their side of the issues. Obviously, some environmental justice problems between industry and the community are irreconcilable and may never be resolved. But for those problems that can be resolved, both sides should make an effort to try. While talking may not convert the opposition, talking can result in incremental relationship improvements that increase trust, thus potentially allowing both sides to achieve their environmental justice goals.



The Environmental Injustice of Beauty: Health Repercussions of Chemical Hair Products For Black Women

By Ami Zota and Trina Jackson

Over the last three decades, the environmental justice movement has been highlighting the impacts of structural racism on the health and environment of communities of color. The severe environmental degradation within our communities not only permeates where we live, work, and play, but it also affects women's bodies, the first environment for all of us. Chemical exposures encountered by the fetus in the womb can have long lasting effects on the reproductive health of our children and likely play a role in the disturbing and ever increasing health conditions within the Black community including low birth weight, obesity, early puberty, and breast cancer mortality especially among young Black women. In this article, we seek to raise awareness about an emerging reproductive justice issue – the environmental injustice of beauty – by discussing social constructions of beauty, resulting coping mechanisms including chemical hair products and their public health repercussions.

The dominant culture of the U.S. idealizes the physical characteristics of White women and measures women of color against this arbitrary standard. As a result, natural, kinky hair—which is most associated with blackness—has been tied to inferiority in the United States. Even, within the African American community, there exists a stratum between those with "good hair" and "bad hair." In these terms, "good hair" is associated with being straight, smooth, long, and easy to manage. "Bad hair" is associated with being kinky, short, rough and hard to manage.

These mainstream notions of beauty and attractiveness have not only been reinforced by the media but also by our families and community social norms causing a lot of stress and self loathing in Black women. As a result, Black women have turned to the widespread use of chemically-intensive hair straighteners as a form of self-medication, a hypothesis that suggests that Black women have used and often abused chemical hair products to cope with the constant assault of White beauty standards.

Chemically relaxed hair is currently the most popular style choice for Black women. In a recent study, 80 percent of the Black women surveyed responded that they believed relaxed hair is more easily maintained than natural hair. Black women spend approximately \$50 million per year on chemical straighteners alone. Walk into any pharmacy and you'll see a deluge of harsh chemical products that promise black women "unnappy hair".

However, little attention has been given to the safety of chemicals in hair creams and lotions. Many hair products marketed to the Black community contain placenta, hormones such as estrogen, and toxic chemicals that have the ability to mimic our bodies' natural hormones. Synthetic hormones, such as hormone replacement therapy, increase breast cancer risk. Animal studies show that estrogen-mimicking chemicals cause mammary gland tumors, and affect sexual and reproductive development so even small exposures to these chemicals during critical periods (like pregnancy and early childhood) can have a large public health impact. It is difficult to know if personal care products contain dangerous chemicals because manufacturers rarely list all the ingredients. Silent Spring Institute, a nonprofit researching women's health and the environment, is currently testing African American hair products for hormonally active ingredients to advance our understanding of how hair products may increase health risks in women of color.

In the meantime, we need to educate ourselves and our communities and push for healthier, less toxic hair products. More importantly, we must avoid blame, and recognize that similar to other forms of substance abuse, the widespread use of hair straighteners is a coping mechanism to internalized racism and systemic oppression. Change must occur both on the personal and community level.

Dr. Ami Zota is a research scientist at Silent Spring Institute where she researches environmental health risks in collaboration with communities of color struggling for environmental justice. Trina Jackson is an activist, educator, and organizer, and chairs the board of Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), a grassroots organization in Roxbury, MA that builds the power of communities of color to achieve environmental justice.



SisterSong Brings New Voices to the Movement



Arielle Knight, an Advocacy and Membership Intern, is spending her next college semester in a submersion program in Argentina.

Arielle Knight, Advocacy and Membership Intern
rielle is from Stone Mountain, Georgia and a rising junior at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut where she is pursuing a B.A in African American Studies and International Relations. After graduation, she plans to join the Peace Corps helping refugee women and children who live in developing countries in Africa and the Diaspora.

This summer, she served as an intern at SisterSong under the supervision of Heidi Williamson, its Advocacy and Membership Coordinator. She says the summer experience was incredibly rewarding both personally and professionally. She had the opportunity to work with women who each offer something invaluable to the organization. Her internship at SisterSong has provided some insight into the many facets of working for a non-profit organization. She has seen that it takes the coordinated efforts of many extremely dedicated people working both individually and collectively.

For the two months that she worked with SisterSong she assisted with the preliminary planning for the Urban Initiative conference to ensure that the event will be attended by government officials, individual members and partner organizations. She also helped create a map of SisterSong's widespread membership network and participated in a Reproductive Justice training which provided a strong sense of how SisterSong's mission is implemented. Her contributions and experiences were equally valuable this summer.

Arielle says, "Through the Self-Help training, I gained a full understanding of the importance of individual well-being in a social movement. My experience at SisterSong has been incredibly rewarding and I will undoubtedly return because this organization has left a lasting impact on me."

Shanel George, Advocacy and Membership Intern

Shanel is from Grenada and Trinidad and majoring in economics and minoring in language and culture minor at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. She will begin her senior year this fall. Starting her higher education at a later age allowed Shanel to have life experiences and lessons that have helped her to survive living in a foreign country independently. It also allowed her to approach the next stage of her life with maturity.

This summer, she included a journey at SisterSong as an intern from the Civil Liberties & Public Policy program at Hampshire College. She worked with Heidi to plan for the Urban Initiative and to re-vamp the collective's membership program. She conducted a research project that explains to women of color in the U.S. the oppressions that Caribbean women and girls experience in domestic violence and sexual violence in the West Indies.

"I am led to learn more about my community on the outside looking in to see how life could be better and beneficial for women and girls and how they could in turn empower themselves," she says. "Being here has made a significant change in my life – showing me that I have a voice and that it should be heard! I have also had the opportunity to learn about other organizations that are members of SisterSong which I wouldn't have otherwise, to get to know that there are people out there fighting everyday for human rights, reproductive rights, reproductive health, and immigration rights."

Shanel says this was definitely a path in her life that she had to take – advocating for the rights of women of color and Indigenous women – which has truly made her feel a part of the movement now.

Maame-Mensima Horne,
Communications Intern

Maame-Mensima earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Florida, Gainesville, May 2008. While attending the university she was the treasurer of both the UF African Student Union and Esquire Minority Pre-law Society. She also served as executive secretary of volunteers for

department because of her desire to utilize media to make an impact in various social justice movements. She hopes to learn more about print and broadcast media from Serena Garcia, SisterSong's communications coordinator, while bringing her social media experience to help organize movement through the web.

Already she has written her first article in Collective Voices, chosen and edited photographs and sent her first E-newsletter. She looks forward to executing more projects and is appreciative of SisterSong's mission.

Betsy P. Dobson, Digital
Arts Service Corps VISTA,
Multi-Media Assistant, Communications

A graduate of the American InterContinental University, Betsy received her Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Digital Design. During her studies, she was part of the Federal Student Worker's Program where she assisted professors, school administrators, and students in the Student Services Department. Betsy contributed her artistic skills on projects such as designing a calendar that contained multi-ethnic historical facts as "themes" for each month. In addition, she assisted the director of student services in maintaining the international students' personal files and supported other departments as needed.

Through her college and volunteer activities with non-profit organizations, she has been inspired to give back more to the community as a Pacific-islander. It is not a surprise that the doors of SisterSong opened up to Betsy and she plans to use her digital/graphic



SisterSong's newest Advocacy and Membership Interns this summer were Shanel George and Arielle Knight (not pictured). The Communications team consists of Maame-Mensima Horne, ongoing Communication Intern and newest yearlong staffer, Betsy P. Dobson, Digital Arts Service Corps VISTA, Multi-Media Assistant.

International Student Affairs, assistant director of Multicultural Student Affairs and a program planner for Black History month 2007. Her service extended beyond the campus by serving as a community mentor for Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Gainesville and active in the African dance community.

Maame-Mensima recently moved to Atlanta where she connected with SisterSong's communications

talents to promote the organization's mission. To her, it will be gratifying on many levels because not only will she be able to contribute to the community but also she will also be creating alliances and building experiences that will be immeasurable.



Reproductive Justice and Climate Change Justice in the U.S.

By Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice

Are you curious about how the changing climate affects women's reproductive justice? Do you want to learn more about global warming and environmental degradation? Are you ready to take action to confront climate change and advance reproductive justice? Then download Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice's (ACRJ) new report *Reproductive Justice and Climate Change Justice in the U.S.* right now! Here's a snapshot of what you'll find...

Effectively solving the climate crisis demands that the mitigation and adaptation measures we employ align with a justice agenda that improves the circumstances of poor people, people of color, women, and children. If we fail to make synergistic efforts to protect the planet and lift up the most vulnerable among us, we are doomed to recreate an unsustainable system that demands little of those with the most to give and the most of those with little to spare. Our mission is to construct a new economic and political system that is both sustainable and just.

Women, who have and will continue to bear an increasingly disproportionate share of the climate change burden in coming decades are central to the success of this mission. The current working paradigm regarding women and climate change focuses on the fact that women, specifically women

of color, are disproportionately impacted by disasters and environmental degradation caused by global warming. Women make up approximately 70% of those living in poverty, and low-income women, women of color, and immigrants will be most impacted by the severe weather events, heat waves, and increases in disease rates that will characterize Earth's changing climate. Hurricane Katrina, which hit African American, immigrant, and Indigenous women in Southeast Louisiana the hardest, cruelly exemplified this increasingly accepted gender analysis of climate change.

But while Katrina brought shape to the emerging understanding of women and climate change in the U.S., the scope of the climate crisis demands much more: that we not only address how women will be impacted—and how to protect their rights—but also how women's lives are wrapped up in both the causes of, and potential solutions to, the climate crisis.

Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, an organization with significant experience working at the intersections of women's health with the economic and environmental justice, has begun to explore the ways that empowering women in their homes, workplaces, and communities can contribute to climate justice. We hope to further deepen the current gender and climate change paradigm by understanding the disproportionate impact of hardships on women in

the U.S. due to climate change and bringing a greater understanding of how to apply a reproductive justice lens to climate change justice in order to further both.

In our new report *Reproductive Justice and Climate Change Justice in the U.S.*, we argue that in order to create the sustainable and just society necessary to effectively confront climate change, we should look for ways to both confront the causes of climate change and protect the health and well being of historically marginalized communities. We describe how "looking both ways" — not only through the lens of climate change mitigation but also at the reproductive justice needs of women and girls — fosters new and innovative strategies, partnerships, and leaders to emerge. We explore how "looking both ways" at reproductive justice and climate change justice will protect the reproductive justice of women of color, low-income, and immigrant women during climate change crises. As well, we discuss workplace changes to improve reproductive justice and at the same time mitigate climate change. Finally, we examine how a reproductive justice lens can be applied to climate change policy at the city, regional, state, and national levels.

Stay tuned on ACRJ's website for a downloadable copy of the new report *Reproductive Justice and Climate Change Justice in the U.S.* at www.reproductivejustice.org or call them at 510.663.8300.



Endometriosis: A Reproductive and Environmental Wrong

By Mary Krane Derr

As soon as I started menstruating, ferocious bursts of pain afflicted my whole body every month. But all I heard from doctors was, "It's just cramps, take some ibuprofen." What slight relief. By my 20s, I hemorrhaged and doubled up with pain for a week or more every month. I pushed myself harder and harder to go to school and work to help keep a roof over my family's heads. I knew it wasn't "just cramps,"-but what was it?

I didn't know until I saw a newspaper article about the Endometriosis Association. It offered this checklist of symptoms:

- Pain before and during periods
- Pain with sex
- Infertility
- Fatigue
- Painful urination during periods
- Painful bowel movements during periods
- Other gastrointestinal upsets such as diarrhea, constipation, nausea

So much of that sounded like my life. But wasn't endometriosis an infertility problem? Women of color of all races and ethnicities, and sexual orientations have highly varied plans and hopes for their wombs.

And there was something else, something deeply appalling and outrageous to me. Since the 1990s, scientific evidence has increasingly linked endometriosis to the class of eco poisons known as "endocrine

disruptors." The chief culprits are dioxin and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), a class of dioxin-like chemicals still in the environment though outlawed during the 1970s. Many women with endometriosis, including me, also have other disorders tied to this class of chemicals, including asthma, allergies and chemical sensitivities, and recurrent yeast infections.

Dioxin remains highly prevalent around the historically industrial cities of the Great Lakes, including my hometown. And which women receive the heaviest exposures to these compounds? Women who live closest to current or defunct industrial sites. Frequently meaning: low-income women and women of color. Might it be that women from these particular walks of life actually are more prone to endometriosis? And if this is true-are they underdiagnosed and undertreated because of health education and care disparities?

Endometriosis is not just a disease that happens, and that to only a few. It afflicts the spectrum of womankind. It is inseparable from very large issues of reproductive and environmental injustice. And no woman should have to suffer it, especially in the isolation, lack of knowledge, and disempowerment I once did.

For more information about the Endometriosis Association, visit them at <http://www.endometriosisassn.org>.

Breast Cancer, Yoplait and You – Making Changes to Protect Our Health

By Barbara A. Brenner
Executive Director, Breast Cancer Action

Breast cancer is a disease that touches all of us. African American women know that the disease is often more deadly for them, and that the rates of breast cancer are rising among their sisters in other communities of color.

A great deal of money is raised in the name of breast cancer by companies that put pink ribbons on their products. Doing this boosts sales for the company and raises money for activities like breast cancer research. It's called "cause-marketing," because it involves tying a marketed product to a cause that is important to people who purchase items.

Breast cancer is the focus of much product marketing because so many people care about breast cancer, and because the people most directly affected by breast cancer are women who also make the purchasing decisions for their families.

Sometimes these product sales do more for the company selling the products than they do for women who have or who might get breast cancer. Because there are no rules about who can use pink ribbons on products, some companies use them to sell products without giving much or anything to the breast cancer cause. As cause marketing for breast cancer grew, so did the scams.

(BCA), a national education and advocacy organization based in San Francisco, California, is the leading breast cancer watchdog organization in the U.S. To try to help people sort through the masses of pink ribbon products, and to urge the companies using them to be more accountable and transparent, BCA launched its "Think Before You Pink (TB4UP) campaign in 2002. Every October – during Breast Cancer Awareness Month – we urge people to ask questions about how money is raised for breast cancer through product marketing.

As a result of TB4UP, many more companies are now being more responsible about how they market their breast cancer-related products, providing information about how much goes to the cause, what the money raised is used for, and how much of a difference your purchase makes.

But there are some products that are particularly troubling no matter how much money they raise. These products are made by companies that participate in breast cancer fundraising or "awareness" campaigns but manufacture and sell items linked to the disease. BCA uses the term "pinkwashing" to describe these products. With the growing concern over toxic exposures in everyday life, BCA believes that corporations, especially those claiming to care about breast cancer, have an obligation to make safer products.

Yoplait Yogurt, made by General Mills Corporation, is one of these products. You've probably seen those Yoplait containers with pink lids on them that say "Save Lids to Save Lives" either in a story in your neighborhood or at a conference or meeting where breakfast was served. The yogurt is very popular, and it seems like an easy way to eat good food and support advances in breast cancer.

To make a donation to the cause, consumers send in the Yoplait yogurt lids for a donation of 10 cents per lid. (To make a contribution of \$36, a person would need to eat three yogurts a day during the four months the campaign runs each year. That's a lot of yogurt!)

What was particularly troubling about this was that, up until now the yogurt itself might not have been that good for our health—particularly where breast cancer is concerned. Breast cancer is largely a hormonally-driven disease. The more exposure women have to hormones, the greater their breast cancer risk. Yet Yoplait yogurt for years has been made with milk from cows treated with an artificial growth hormone called recombinant bovine growth hormone, or rBGH (also referred to as rBST), which is injected into cows so they will produce more milk.

Made by Monsanto (until the business was sold

to the drug company Eli Lilly in the fall of 2008), rBGH was approved by the FDA in 1993 on the basis of one study, despite opposition from many physicians, scientists, and consumer advocacy groups. Since then, it made its way into the nation's dairy products without any labeling, including Yoplait. Dairy companies who have pledged not to use rBGH put a label on their products indicating that they are rBGH-free (although companies' right to label their products this way is currently coming under attack). rBGH is banned in the European Union, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

There are a number of organizations working to stop the use of rBGH in American dairy cows, and to stop companies using dairy from cows that have been given rBGH. General Mills, which makes Yoplait, had been approached changing how they make, but said they that they couldn't make their Yoplait without rBGH-based dairy.

Since many other companies – including Starbucks and Wal-Mart – were making the transition to rBGH-free dairy, BCA knew that General Mills could do it to. And BCA knew that the company would do it if they heard from enough consumers – people just like you – that it mattered to them.

In the summer of 2008, BCA wrote to General Mills, asking for a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer and other appropriate officials to discuss our concerns. We focused on General Mills not just because they were marketing their yogurt with the breast cancer connection, but also because General Mills is an industry leader. We believed that if General Mills changed, other smaller companies would follow their lead.

The company refused to meet with us, or to discuss our concerns seriously with us. So, in October, 2008, BCA launched its Think Before You Pink Campaign with an e-mail asking folks to contact the head of General Mills to stop using dairy stimulated with rBGH. The head of the company got thousands of messages urging that, as a company that has made such a public commitment to ending breast cancer, General Mills should join other businesses and stop using milk from cows treated with rBGH.

At the TB4UP website, we let people know how to tell General Mills to "put a lid" on rBGH in Yoplait.

In addition, we printed postcards that people could simply sign and send off to the head of General Mills. We asked other organizations that care about the issue of hormones in food to pass on the message, and many of them did. General Mills received thousands of e-mails and post cards from people just like you.

While General Mills responded to all those messages, telling folks that they believed there is no evidence that rBGH posed a health problem, they were working to make the change that consumers were demanding.

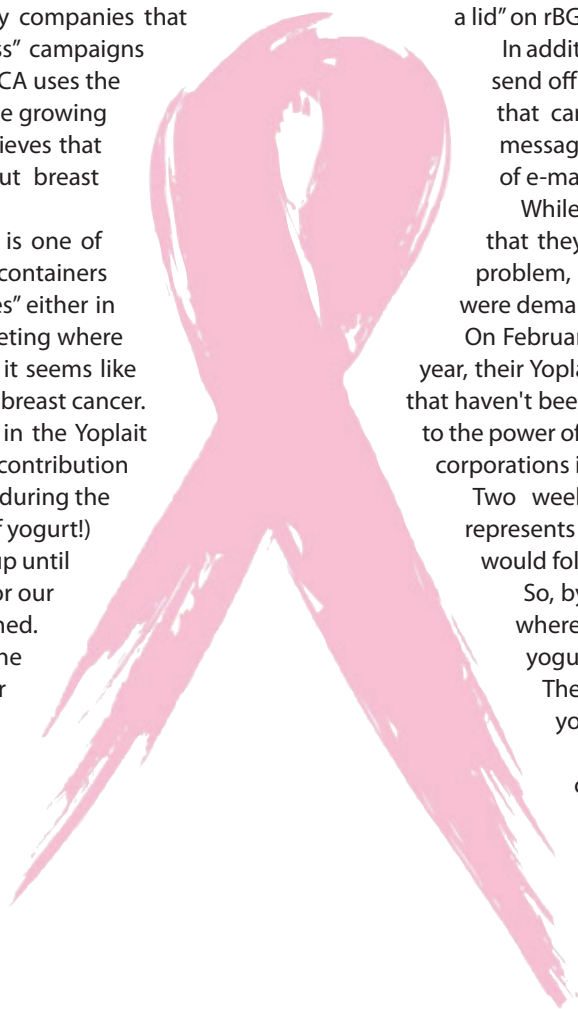
On February 9, 2009, General Mills announced that, by August of this year, their Yoplait will be made exclusively with dairy products from cows that haven't been given rBGH. The announcement was a thrilling testament to the power of consumers to make their voices heard by one of the largest corporations in the world.

Two weeks later, Dannon, a company that, with General Mills represents 2/3rds of the dairy market in the U.S., announced that it would follow General Mills' lead and also go rBGH-free.

So, by September, when you buy Yoplait or attend a conference where Yoplait is being served, you can be confident that the yogurt will be free of any dairy that's been stimulated with rBGH.

The world is becoming a better place because people just like you want it to be a better place.

To find out how you can get involved with activism to change the course of the breast cancer epidemic, visit www.bcaction.org or call, toll free 877-278-6722.





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Milwaukee Women of Color Mobilize Collectively for Change

By Serena Garcia, SisterSong Communications Coordinator

After advocating for reproductive health for a nationally recognized family planning organization, Sarah Noble could not dismiss the fact that Black women were not engaged on a volunteer level and in policy work in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was challenging working as a woman of color within a mainstream organization. Yet, she found sisterhood, education, and motivation in SisterSong Reproductive Justice trainings.

"I found SisterSong by trying to find out who was involved in reproductive justice. (Soon) I organized house parties for Black women to mobilize," says Noble, a former Planned Parenthood employee. She was laid off last August after three years of PP employment.

She says she had to venture outside of her employer to find clear and appropriate messages of reproductive justice. Targeting women of color, Noble's house parties reached over 500 women during the initial eight months.

"The house parties were very successful," says Noble. "It became apparent to talk to each other for information and something different. They wanted to be a part of change and didn't know where to go. Women of color had no idea that legislation was really talking about them."

These house parties demonstrated a need to talk to more people about reproductive justice. She felt a more far reaching venue was necessary for roundtable

issues to be explored. Her mobilization efforts led her to initially gathering Black partners with the link between teen pregnancy and poverty. Reproductive justice provided an avenue for articulating these issues and to explain intersectionality, she says. Soon a range of Milwaukee women of color began talking about the links to other issues.

In October 2008, Noble planned an official meeting of various women of color interested to further mobilization. Diversity came in volumes with Noble's leadership and organizing background. This is when questions of sustainability began to surface.

"It created a rise in people. They wanted someone else to say it is important to get funded. People saw the difference I could make, yet it wasn't about me. It was about what has got to be accomplished. There's no more powerful evidence of what reproductive justice can do for a community," says Noble.

Then she received a call from The Milwaukee Women's Fund. At that time she may have been the only person in the city calling the movement reproductive justice and word caught fire in the wider reproductive health community. After initial meetings, the Women's Fund and Brico Foundation expressed an interest in Noble's newly created Milwaukee Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. The funders gave her six months to create a sustainability plan for the independent women of color collective. She gladly

accepted the offer.

This February, SisterSong's National Coordinator, Loretta Ross and Communications Coordinator, Serena Garcia met with Noble in Milwaukee to train the newly formed collective and funding supporters in Reproductive Justice 101. Strategic meetings convened involving plans to move the collective forward with support and capacity building assistance from SisterSong as well as funding opportunities with Brico and the Women's Fund.

"As wonderful as this has been, I don't want to say this is just an exercise. I believe SisterSong supports us. They didn't come to tell me what to do. The last meeting was a milestone. We can't treat other women of color the way I have been treated," says Noble. "Our goal is to secure two to three years of funding. I see this as a continuation of what I started at Planned Parenthood and this partnership (with them) will continue. However, I will not make the mistake of succumbing to the pressure of just pulling something together. We will lay a solid foundation and be useful to people. I am inspired and surrounded by great people. There are people (in Milwaukee) who want something different."

Note: If you are interested in forming a Reproductive Justice Coalition in your community through SisterSong, contact heidi@sistersong.net.



Pictured left to right: Tami Whatley, JoCasta Zamarripa, and Sarah Noble.

What's On My Mind

Conference Call Catastrophe!

By Loretta J. Ross, National Coordinator, SisterSong

It happened so slowly I didn't even notice it at first. It was kind of like emails. At first I received a few so I could respond to them the same day. Then it grew from a trickle to a flood, washing away my time like California mudslides down a hill. Now I get so many daily emails that it's impossible to do justice to them, and I'm not talking about spam. I'm talking about important stuff I need to read, respond to, plot into my calendar, follow-up, etc. Just keeping up takes hours each day and I can never make a dent into those that have piled up while I'm traveling, writing, or meeting with my staff.

Now I'm noticing another subtle time theft happening – conference calls. Every since our non-profit community began to take advantage of free conference call services, we've begun to use conference calls as the dominant strategy for planning, for inclusiveness, for collaborations, and for sharing information. The problem I'm experiencing is that we've come to a tipping point that may be unmarked by many suffering from overloaded schedules.

Everything now seems to have at least 2-3 conference calls attached. Need to give a presentation? What about 2-3 conference calls among the presenters to coordinate? Want to plan a meeting? How about 6-8 conference calls to set the agenda, decide on the participants, arrange the facilitator, obtain the funding, etc. Want to write a report? Can we do 10-15 conference calls to decide on the report, the writing process, the subsections of the report, who writes what, who reviews what, etc.?

Beyond the time involved in responding to dozens of emails to schedule the calls, there's the calls themselves, and then reviewing the minutes from the calls, and then the follow-up to the calls, and then the scheduling of the next call, ad infinitum. Then the process starts all over – for each event!

I hope you see our collective problem. If each planned activity generates at least 3-5 conference calls, then the amount of time one spends per event grows exponentially. I looked at my calendar recently and discovered nine conference calls in one week. I just finished two calls today and it's Sunday!

I don't know if anyone else is experiencing this deluge of conference calls, but I'm calling on folks to rethink this nearly invisible time-stealing process. I'm sure we've all done presentations without talking to our co-presenters two or three times before the event itself. How did we used to plan meetings together without 6-8 conference calls preceding the meeting, so that every 1-2 day meeting ends up taking much more time in pre-meeting conference calls to try to predict the meeting outcomes? How did we previously get our work done without weekly face-to-face meetings, but now find we cannot work without weekly conference calls to achieve pretty much the same results?

I feel like I'm being held hostage to process without any noticeable improvement in outcome. I don't mind talking to folks, but is it really necessary to talk to people so much to do what we used to be able to do before without the convenience of free conference calls? I think if we had to pay for conference call services like before when the phone companies charged us hundreds of dollars for each call, we'd use them more sparingly. Just because the costs-per-call have dramatically dropped, we can't ignore the hidden time-per-call costs that now dictate our daily schedules.

I'm asking for help and abstinence. I do have another option, and that is to refuse to participate in the calls at the outset but that feels like a curmudgeonly choice that does not raise the critical question of whether the calls were vital in the first place.

A possible solution is to do more front-end work before initiating these endless calls. Instead of using the calls to do our collective thinking, maybe one or two people can do the thinking/planning ahead of time and use the conference calls only to seek feedback and agreement on ideas that have been carefully thought out. Instead of inviting speakers to our conferences and then laying the burden on them of 2-3 conference calls, why not think out in advance what topics we want them to cover, a potential speaking order, the audio-visual and travel logistics, and then – and only if necessary – one conference call to coordinate content. We can also avoid endless conference call loops that appear to further our work but also drain our energy and time. I believe if we do more advance work before defaulting to the conference call strategy we can improve our processes and our outcomes.

Without some thoughtful budgeting of our time spent on conference calls, some of us may have to announce warnings ahead of time: only one conference call per event allowed or something like that. It may seem harsh, but both my time and my sanity need protection from this growing problem. Help!

SisterSong
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Artwork By Maame-Mensima Horne, Communications Intern, SisterSong