

# Intersections of Environmental and Reproductive Justice: Intersectionality as a Collective Action Frame to Address Toxic Exposures and Reproductive Health

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# Overview

- Background on toxic exposures, reproductive health, and advocacy
- Research objectives and methods
- Findings: Intersectionality as collective action frame to break free from identity-based, issue-based, and movement-based silos
- Implications and recommendations

# Toxic Exposures, Reproductive Health and Advocacy

- Large body of research evidence linking toxicants to adverse reproductive health outcomes<sup>1</sup>, with disproportionate impacts on communities of color, Indigenous and low-income communities<sup>2</sup>
- Policies are critical because individuals have a limited ability to avoid environmental exposures<sup>3</sup>
- Social movements can help translate research into policy
- Interest among activists and funders in fostering collaboration between the environmental justice (EJ) and reproductive justice (RJ) movements<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) et al., 2013; Wigle et al., 2008

<sup>2</sup>Gallo et al., 2016; Morello-Frosch et al., 2011; Morello-Frosch & Shenassa, 2006 <sup>3</sup>ACOG et al., 2013 <sup>4</sup>Khan, 2009; Zimmerman & Miao, 2009; Ross, 2009

# Research Objective

- Identify collective action frames (CAFs) of advocates working to protect vulnerable communities from toxicants harmful to reproductive health
- CAFs involve three core tasks:
  - **Diagnostic framing:** How do advocates conceptualize the problem?
  - **Prognostic framing:** How do advocates conceptualize potential solutions to the problem?
  - **Motivational frame:** How do advocates motivate people to take collective action?

# Methods

- 36 qualitative interviews with EJ/RJ advocates and 4 interviews with EJ/RJ funders
- Grounded theory approach
- Demographic survey
- Analysis of >65 organizational documents
- Organizational resource list
- Member checking

# Findings: Intersectionality as a Collective Action Frame

- Advocates are approaching toxics and reproductive health using intersectionality as a core analytic and organizing principle
- Intersectionality theory<sup>1</sup> :
  - Inequities do not result from single, distinct factors.
  - They arise from intersections between different social locations (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class), power relations and experiences.
  - Individual experiences are shaped by interrelated structural systems of privilege and oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism).

<sup>1</sup>Hankivsky, 2014; Bowleg, 2012

# Breaking Free from Identity- Based Silos

You do not have to choose one identity over another:

*“[With] the civil rights movement, women—particularly Black women—were having to put their race in front of their gender [and] in the feminist movement, Black women and women of color were supposed to put their gender in front of their race. [...] RJ is really that kind of spot in between where women can be both women and whatever other identity they bring to that. [...] and they don’t have to put one in front of the other first. You don’t have to choose.”*

– Nourbese Flint, Black Women for Wellness

# Breaking Free from Identity-Based Silos (continued)

Creating welcoming advocacy spaces:

*“We're creating the kinds of comprehensive and holistic space that people can bring their whole selves to. So I can show up to a [rally] and say, “I am a Black queer woman living in the South,” and understand that all of those things and all of those identities impact me and my ability to participate in this work in a certain way.”*

– Nia Martin-Robinson, Sierra Club

# Breaking Free from Identity-Based Silos (continued)

Allows advocates to bring critical issues to the forefront:

Examples:

- Toxic hair relaxers (intersections of race and gender)
- Toxic effects of scented feminine hygiene products (intersections of race/ethnicity and gender)
- Exposures to toxic beauty products among nail salon workers, and pesticides among farmworkers (intersections of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and immigrant status)

# Breaking Free from Issue-Based Silos

A holistic approach that better addresses the complexity of life:

*“The issues that you face in your day to day intersect with one another and so by addressing multiple issues that affect communities at one time as opposed to forcing people to choose to center their advocacy around one thing is more responsive to the way that we view the world and the way that we experience the world around us.”*

– Participant (anonymous)

# Breaking Free from Issue-Based Silos (continued)

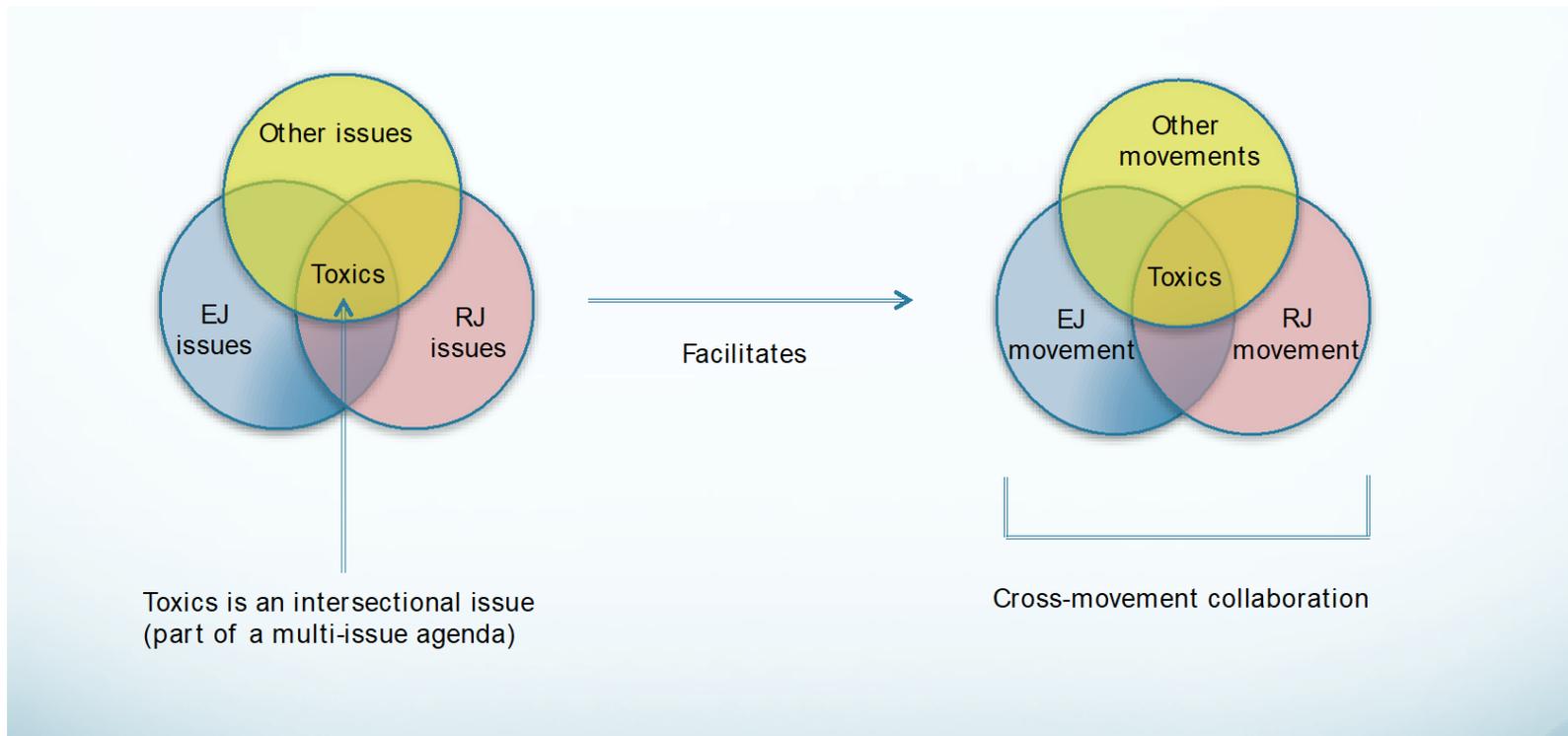
Facilitates talking about multiple issues:

*“[...] we have always thought that our nail salon advocacy work was really close to the heart of our mission and close to the way we do our work, which is intersectional and multi-issue, because it’s such a rich topic that allows us to talk about environmental justice and economic justice and immigrant rights, and immigrant access and reproductive health, rights and justice, and workers’ rights.”*

- Miriam Yeung, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

# Breaking Free from Movement-Based Silos

An intersectional agenda facilitates cross-movement collaboration:



# Breaking Free from Movement-Based Silos (continued)

- Expand bases of support
- Gain new perspectives
- Share resources, information and expertise
- Work towards progressive change

*“[The leftwing] must work together if we are going to have a movement that is sustainable and that can really operate effectively in the face of a very well-organized, well-funded conservative movement. We can no longer exist in silos of LGBT movement, reproductive healthcare movement, environmental justice, racial justice.” -Amy Weintraub, WV FREE*

# Implications and Recommendations

- **For advocates:**
  - Intersectional, cross-movement collaboration can be powerful at the EJ/RJ intersection and beyond
  - Need to invest in supporting inter-group processes
- **For funders:** Need to improve funding mechanisms for intersectional work
- **For policymakers:** An intersectional agenda is compatible with a “Health in All Policies” approach<sup>1</sup>
- **For researchers:** Integrating qualitative methods into studies can help us to understand complex exposure pathways<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rudolph, Caplan, Ben-Moshe, & Dillon, 2013; <sup>2</sup>Scammell, 2010

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