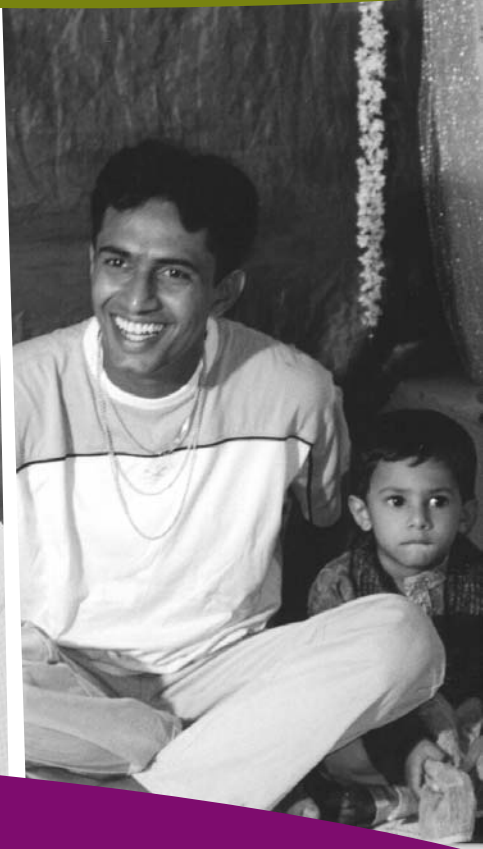


Building a Movement

from the Ground Up



A REPORT FROM THE
FAMILY, COMMUNITY & SEXUALITY PROJECT

Spring **2006** *Summit*
WESTERN STATES CENTER
Building the Progressive Movement in the West

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Western States Center's Family, Community and Sexuality Project and the 2006 Summit would not have been possible without the incredible support of individuals, organizations and foundations.

Many thanks to the foundations that have supported the development of the Gender Justice Program and the Family, Community and Sexuality Project, including:

- ♦ **Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation**
- ♦ **General Service Foundation**
- ♦ **Mary Wolhford Foundation**
- ♦ **Gill Foundation**

Thanks to **Pride Foundation, Elaine Nonneman** and **Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation** for providing specific support to make this Summit inclusive of voices from the many organizations and communities across our region.

We also would like to express our gratitude for the general support Western States Center receives from the **Ford Foundation**.

SPECIAL THANKS

The development of the Family, Community and Sexuality Project and the implementation of this Summit have been a collaborative effort. We extend our thanks to the Center's **Gender Justice Advisory Committee** (see page 3), who provide energy, expertise and accountability for our gender justice work year-round. Special thanks to the **organizations and individuals** participating in the 2006 Summit—especially to **Amy Herzfeld** for her logistical support and to **Debra East** for organizing a Wyoming delegation. Sincere gratitude to **Gloria Muñoz** for on-site translation. Thanks to the **Pro-Choice Public Education Project** and **Scot Nakagawa** for research and analysis support.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Overview of the Family, Community & Sexuality Project	3
The Gender Justice Advisory Committee	3
Research	5
Goals and Methods	
Repercussions of Defining the Nuclear Family	
What Do Families Need?	
Marriage Promotion	
Sexuality and Families	
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Queer Issues	
Reproductive Justice	
The Role of Government	
Exploring Challenging Concepts	11
Learnings from the Summit	
Next Steps	14
Progressive Family Values Principles	15
Organizational and Individual Participants	17



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Family, Community and Sexuality Project** is a part of Western States Center's commitment to supporting a multi-issue, multi-constituency movement for gender justice in the Pacific Northwest, Northern Rockies and Great Basin. ***Building a Movement from the Ground Up*** reports on the regional Summit held in Boise, ID, March 31st through April 1st, 2006.

Western States Center developed the Family, Community and Sexuality Project to support organizations in our region that are fighting attacks on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) families and the further erosion of support for reproductive health and rights in state legislatures and at the ballot box. Additionally, we seek to support organizations that are working to create public policy that provides families with meaningful support such as extending food stamps to immigrant families or funding at-home infant care—regardless of families' shape or size.



Yasmeen Perez, Seattle Young People's Project & Member, Gender Justice Advisory Committee

ABOUT THE SUMMIT

Western States Center's ***Family, Community and Sexuality Summit*** was the **culmination** of an intensive **regional discussion** about gender justice, which we see as analysis and action to address the intersection of **sexism, heterosexism** and **trans oppression** in the context of **racial and economic justice**.

The Family, Community and Sexuality Summit was the culmination of an intensive regional discussion about gender justice, which we see as analysis and action to address the intersection of sexism, heterosexism and trans oppression in the context of racial and economic justice. We choose to approach the work through the lens of challenges and opportunities facing families and communities.

The Summit experience included a pre-Summit research project that involved 175 staff and leaders in grassroots conversations about family, sexuality, LGBTQ equality and reproductive justice. At the Summit itself, we created an opportunity for 17 organizations across the region to build upon the research to develop a shared understanding of how race, gender, economics, sexual orientation and identity shape how we define family, who we take care of, and how that is reflected in public policy. Even more important, the Summit provided a space to envision a gender justice agenda in the form of progressive family values principles.

Overall, there was significant consensus through the research and discussions at the Summit that:

- ♦ The current definition of the nuclear family (father, mother and children) that serves as a basis for government practices and public policy undermine families throughout our region.

- ♦ There is a critical need for comprehensive public policies that provide access to health care, education and economic safety net programs.
- ♦ Our communities strongly desire the tools and resources to talk about, respond to and take care of our families' needs around sexuality, sexual health and family planning.

The areas of the research and Summit discussions where there was less group consensus led to the following learnings for the Project and participants:

- ♦ In the research process, predominantly white organizations tended to ignore the impact of institutions and policies that adversely affect families in communities of color, such as the criminal justice system or immigration policy. The need to link gender justice to racial justice is explicitly stated in the progressive family values principles developed at the Summit.
- ♦ The research and Summit discussions showed a spectrum of sentiment about how government and public policy can support families, including at times a palpable mistrust of government.
- ♦ The research and Summit revealed clear community needs around a broad reproductive justice agenda. It also showed a potential disconnect between a reproductive justice framework and how people are thinking about sexuality, sexual health, family formation, abortion, etc.

At Western States Center, we believe that being clear about the role of government and public policy, the intersections of gender and racial justice and supporting a broad reproductive justice agenda are essential components of building a movement for gender justice. While the **Progressive Family Values Principles** do reflect this analysis, the critical movement-building work requires deeper political education at the grassroots level. As the Family, Community and Sexuality Project moves forward we will continue to find opportunities to explore these questions with the grassroots base of participating organizations.

The proactive vision developed through the research and Summit is encapsulated in the 10 **Progressive Family Values Principles** developed by Summit participants (see page 20 for full principles).

1. Families are defined by the communities they are a part of and reflect the cultural and historical contexts from which they arise.
2. Self-determination and self-expression for communities are interconnected with family security and safety.
3. Supporting families and communities requires justice and equity at all levels of our education systems.
4. Relationships between families and communities are more important than national borders.
5. Gender Justice work requires a clear racial justice analysis and strategy.
6. Gender Justice must address gender roles and sexism.
7. Gender justice demands alternatives to state forms of power, like police and courts, in order for families and communities to thrive.
8. Valuing human rights over military power supports families.
9. Valuing people's multiple identities is necessary for creating solutions to the problems we face.
10. Progressive family values must address basic family needs of security and human dignity.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

BUILDING A MOVEMENT FROM THE GROUND UP:

Overview of the Family, Community and Sexuality Project

The Gender Justice Advisory Committee

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Montana Human Rights Network

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Community Alliance of Tenants

Western States Center developed the Family, Community and Sexuality project to support organizations that are fighting attacks on LGBTQ families and the further erosion of support for reproductive health and rights in state legislatures and at the ballot box. Additionally, we seek to support organizations that are working to create public policy that provides families with meaningful aid, such as extending food stamps to immigrant families or funding at-home infant care—regardless of their shape or size.

From the outset, we realized that progressives in the West and nationally are facing a number of organizing challenges including:

1. The Religious Right's skillful use of wedge issues, like abortion and LGBTQ equality, to turn back basic family support programs and advance their conservative family values agenda;
2. Broadening the base of support for LGBTQ equality and reproductive justice organizing when these issues are often divisive within our own organizations; and
3. Ensuring that the priorities of growing immigrant and refugee communities, other communities of color, and low-income communities in the region are reflected in the public policy debates around family security, LGBTQ equality and reproductive justice.

The history of the Right's organizing in the West makes the first challenge especially daunting. The Right has had success through years of using the ballot box in our region to build both political and cultural power. Issues around family, marriage and sexuality are dividing progressives and isolating us from our most likely base of support. They have placed abortion, family planning, sex education, marriage promotion, low-income family security and other issues in the context of "family values." Many grassroots groups remain uncertain of their members' agreement around these issues. At the same time, these groups face an overwhelming array of attacks in state legislatures focused on low-income families, immigrant families and families in communities of color.

In spite of many successes, progressives have been unable to respond to the conservative family values agenda with a coherent or proactive strategy or to project our own vision of progressive family values. Yet it is critical that we develop a progressive worldview and strategy on core issues of marriage, family and sexuality. The Family, Community and Sexuality Summit was designed to be an opportunity for organizations in the region to do just that.

In developing the Summit, the Family, Community and Sexuality Project started with two assumptions:

1. *Don't set the table and then invite folks—start where they are.*

While many national organizations are working on issues of reproductive rights, welfare reform or LGBT issues, very few actively seek to engage their grassroots base. Instead, policy proposals, media materials, and even staff are distributed to groups who are expected to plug into standardized approaches that may be inappropriate or undesirable strategies in their communities.

To guarantee that the Summit started at the base, all organizations participated in a pre-Summit research project. The purpose of the research was to talk to grassroots members on the core issues around reproductive justice, LGBTQ discrimination and barriers to family and community. The research was implemented through focus groups or one-on-one interviews with organizational members and constituents. The conversations were guided by tools developed by the Center's Gender Justice Advisory Committee to elicit core shared values as well as places where people are divided. The results of the research were compiled and presented back to the participants at the Summit as a starting point for discussion.

2. *Invite folks to the table who are most at risk within all of these policy debates.* Communities of color and low income communities are most at risk from a conservative family values agenda. The Right frames poverty as a result of bad moral character, the break down of family, and a poor work ethic. Bring in a race analysis and it becomes more clear that false stereotypes of people of color frame multiple policy attacks on the stability of families in communities of color. From the war on drugs to criminal justice policy to inadequate health care, communities of color are routinely undermined in their ability to have healthy and safe families. Yet, the voices of these organizations and communities in these policy battles are seldom at the table or informing policy debates.

In organizing the Summit, the Family, Community and Sexuality Project, we worked to change this trend. The first day of the Summit was a working session for women of color and trans people of color to ensure that the entire process of the Summit was grounded in an integrated analysis of race and gender. The overall participant demographics of the Summit represented the true depth of leadership within the communities most affected by the conservative family values agenda.

These ingredients proved a recipe for an incredibly rich and productive set of conversations and interactions that led to the creation of shared progressive family values principles. These principles will guide the further development of the Family, Community and Sexuality Project as we continue to work with groups to engage their grassroots base to build momentum for strategic action to change public policy.



WHAT THE RESEARCH TOLD US

RESEARCH GOALS AND METHODS

The pre-Summit research process achieved three goals. The first was to create a structured opportunity for participating organizations to have open conversations about potentially divisive issues. In some cases, these were the organization's first structured conversations about LGBTQ issues and reproductive justice.

The second goal was to ground the strategic direction of the overall project in the experiences of communities of color, low-income communities, immigrant communities, rural communities and LGBTQ communities. Too often, conversations about what families look like and need are based in the assumptions of professional organizers, or the terms of debate are set by better resourced national or regional reproductive rights and LGBTQ networks.

Lastly, the research was an important first step in building a shared vision of the role of government and public policy in supporting family and communities. In our region we are finding ourselves in reactive battles around LGBTQ equality, attacks on reproductive justice and immigrant rights and an unraveling safety net that disproportionately affects communities of color and low-income communities. It is not enough that we react and respond to the Right's family values agenda and other public policy fights putting our communities at risk; we also need to proactively define our visions and solutions. The research process was also a visioning process that was continued throughout the Summit.

The research highlighted a number of opportunities and challenges for building a base of support for a progressive family values framework. In some areas there was enough consensus that we took the results

to the Summit as a grounding point for our discussions.

These areas of consensus included:

- ♦ The current definitions of a nuclear family as a father, mother and children that serve as a basis for government practices and public policy undermine families throughout our region.
- ♦ There is a critical need for comprehensive public policies that provide access to health care, education and economic safety net programs.
- ♦ Our communities strongly desire the tools and resources to talk about, respond to and take care of our families' needs around sexuality, sexual health and family formation.

In other areas of the research there was less agreement. Since the goal of the Summit was to move this regional discussion toward a progressive family values framework, we identified these as fruitful areas of discussion.

These areas included:

- ♦ Predominantly white organizations in our region tend to ignore the impacts of institutions and policies that adversely affect families in communities of color such as the criminal justice system or immigration policy.
- ♦ There is a continuum of sentiment about how government and public policy can support families.
- ♦ And, while there are clear community needs around a broad reproductive justice agenda, there is also a disconnect between a reproductive justice framework and how people are thinking about sexuality, sexual health, family formation, abortion, etc.

"It's a Family Affair" Roundtable Discussion at
Community Strategic Training Initiative, July 2005



FAMILY AND INSTITUTIONALIZED OPPRESSION

For communities of color, institutionalized racism is at the top of the list of challenges facing families. African-American, Latino and Asian Pacific Islander individuals all named the criminal justice system—from police, to drug laws to courts and sentencing, to the emphasis on building prisons rather than schools—as devastating to their communities.

REPERCUSSIONS OF DEFINING THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

A narrow definition of nuclear family has very little resonance in the actual lives of people and how they form their families. Most people do not define their families as a heterosexual nuclear family with marriage at the core. As a single mom from Seattle shared, "What is defined as 'normal' is not statistically the norm—most of us are leading 'deviant' lives." We also found that the challenges facing families in these communities arise, in some cases, from the definition of family itself.

Some families are penalized because they are too big. Many families function economically and socially as inter/multi-generational extended family networks or multi-household units, with some biologically and some not biologically related members. One South Asian respondent used the example of social security or health insurance laws that favor nuclear blood relations over other relationships. Other families are penalized for being too small. A young person who is estranged from his parents noted that there are many laws which restrict access to resources without permission from parents.

LGBTQ people emphasized extended family as including "chosen" community because of conflict with their biological families due to tension over their sexual orientation or gender identity. Concerns about health insurance for domestic partners was a high priority for LGBTQ families. Trans respondents shared how the definitions of gender and family institutionalized in systems from students loans to welfare demand that they share intimate knowledge about their bodies and identities in order to receive the same rights and resources available to non-trans people.

What is defined as 'normal' is not statistically the norm—most of us are leading 'deviant' lives."

Immigrants of color shared additional examples of institutional oppression. Responses from Latino, Asian Pacific Islander and South Asian individuals, described the immigrant experience in the US around family as dominated by enforced separation. Global economic policies force immigration while immigration policies criminalize, detain and deport immigrants and don't recognize same-sex relationships.

The USA PATRIOT Act and the "war on terror" are only exacerbating these challenges to family stability.

In addition to specific policies and institutions, people articulated the historical impact of structural oppression. Both Asian Pacific Islanders and African-Americans argued that the legacy of slavery and the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII undermine their community's resilience and ability to create and support families. LGBTQ people expressed a similar sentiment in describing effects of oppression as often leading to increased risk for depression, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and decreased capacity for family stability.

As evidenced by these concerns, very few of the current trends in public policy toward "marriage promotion," abstinence-only-sexuality education, or reducing public assistance for needy families can be seen as actually supporting families. Real family promotion would begin from an extremely broad definition of family and would seek to dismantle the systems and laws which have and continue to erode family networks and bonds.



WHAT DO FAMILIES NEED?

Families are without a doubt feeling the pressure of current political and economic policies that are systematically cutting the economic safety net out from underneath most communities.

Health Care for Whole People

Virtually all agree that ***"The current healthcare regime hurts families."***

Participants described health care broadly—including access to physical, dental and mental health care for all people regardless of age, marital and citizenship status. They described a health care system that integrates reproductive and sexual health including family planning, access to abortion and sexual health education, and strategies for preventing and treating sexuality transmitted infections and preventing HIV.

Many people also identified ways in which health care access needs to be culturally appropriate. Spanish speakers said they need Spanish speaking health care providers—not translators—because having information translated about private aspects of your body and life is uncomfortable. South Asian respondents wanted cultural competencies in the particular needs of South Asian women who are not prone to wanting to see a doctor. Trans people wanted awareness of trans health and culturally appropriate care. They ***"don't want to have to all stand in line on 'trans-health night' at the county clinic to get their annual exams because there is one doctor with the information to provide competent care."***

Education for Life

The second most frequently mentioned element of family security and well-being was education. People want to attend well resourced schools and have access to higher education. They talked about the need for adult education around job skills, parenting, financial management and ESL. There is strong support for comprehensive sexuality education in the schools and education for adults that addresses the rights and responsibilities of sexuality and how to prevent and

access resources to address sexually transmitted infections, HIV and pregnancies. Some women of color also spoke of the educational needs of women to learn not only their rights but how to achieve pleasure in their sexual relationships.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- ♦ 175 people in 6 states
- ♦ Between the ages of 15-91
- ♦ 60% of people of color
- ♦ 30% immigrants to the U.S.
- ♦ 32% LGBTQ
- ♦ 48% household income between \$0-25k per year

Demographic information is for 142 participants. The additional participants were from a large LGBTQ youth discussion group.

We Need a Safety Net

The long list of economic resources needed by families in our region reflects the fact that over half the participants for whom we have demographic data report household annual incomes between \$0-\$25,000. Families don't have enough money to survive and desperately need living wages, affordable housing, affordable childcare and financial safety net programs like TANF, SSI, food stamps, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, etc.

PROMOTING MARRIAGE TO PROMOTE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Marriage promotion through TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), abstinence-only-until-marriage sexuality education and other faith based initiatives are some of the most visible faces of the Right's family values agenda. There was a wide range of opinion about marriage among research participants. Some people described marriage as beneficial in providing economic security, emotional security and in creating a supportive environment for raising children. Some Latinas saw marriage as a double edged sword—increasing both the accountability of men to their families and the authoritarian role of men in the family. The largest group of youth felt that the impact of divorce in their lives outweighed the benefits of parents being married. An Indigenous man from Idaho described marriage promotion as promotion of white middle class Christian culture. ***"My Indian culture is an example of this fact. Marriage does not equal family."***

Regardless of whether people saw marriage as beneficial or not, almost no one thought it was appropriate for the government to be promoting a form of marriage that most people see as religiously or culturally based. The people most adversely affected by current marriage promotion policies, low-income single moms, adamantly

oppose marriage promotion and feel strongly that **their families "don't need to be fixed."**

BUT WHAT ABOUT GAY MARRIAGE?

In spite of the general sentiment that government should not be promoting marriage, most groups and individuals expressed that if government is going to define marriage, then it needs to include gay marriage. Some LGBTQ people of color voiced concerns that the fight for gay marriage supports traditional notions of marriage and blurs the separation of religion and state.

In the words of one participant, **"Promoting traditional marriage supports traditional notions of families— notions that have their origins and raison d'etre in misogyny, heterosexism, racism and capitalism."**

Another participant shared, *"laws (about marriage) were started just about ownership and who gets what."*

SEXUALITY AND FAMILIES

Throughout the research, respondents shared strong concern about the lack of information or misinformation about sexuality. People said fear and shame is created by the way we talk, or don't talk, about sex and is compounded by high levels of abuse around sexuality. Whether in the home or at school, the lack of access to sex education and health services makes the problem worse. People also linked questions of sexuality to broader concerns.

Sexuality and Gender Roles

For many communities, sexuality is bound up in gender roles and sexism. Gender roles shape sexuality. People shared that men and women have very different relationships to questions of how often you are supposed to have sex, with whom and why. In other words, women noted that they, not men, were supposed to be virgins until marriage and to have sex only for creating children, not for pleasure. But the intersection of sexuality and gender roles extends far beyond actual sexual behavior.

- ♦ A man from Wyoming described one aspect of the problem: **"Men are supposed to provide and be the caretaker and dominate. No boundaries are taught. There needs to be boundaries set and respect taught with regards to women."**

- ♦ Women of color respondents linked sexuality to gender roles in terms of jobs and wages. Latinas spoke specifically about machista men and the need to develop women's self-esteem and skills so they can take leadership roles in their families and communities.
- ♦ People noted that men are not often acknowledged as parents and that this has negative effects on both moms and dads. Concern was also shared about social norms that deny men the ability to express feelings and emotions.
- ♦ Domestic and sexual violence against women was also linked to gender roles and sexism.

Sexuality and Homophobia

Most participants talked about discrimination against LGBTQ people in response to general questions about sexuality. National attention to LGBTQ issues is present in the consciousness of everyone who participated in the research and it appeared easier for heterosexual people to talk about homophobia than sexuality in their own experience.

- ♦ In Montana and Wyoming, people talked about a state mythology of "live and let live" while, both consciously and unconsciously, sharing stories of discrimination and decisions by LGBTQ people to be closeted as the result of fear.
- ♦ LGBTQ people of color noted feeling invisible in both gay and people of color communities.
- ♦ Some multi-racial and Indigenous LGBTQ people noted that the whole language and construction of sexual and gender identities doesn't make sense in their cultural context.

Sexuality and Stereotypes

People of color, single mothers and trans people all talked about being seen as overly-sexual or as sexual objects. Many women also commented on the unrealistic and oppressive ideal that they are supposed to be virgins. In a humorous yet poignant statement a low-income single mom noted that **"We have to overcome the stereotype that we are vamps running rampant—in reality we are the most undersexed population because we are so busy."**



LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND QUEER ISSUES

LGBTQ people of color spoke of the discrimination that they experience based on the intersection of heterosexism and racism. One discussion group just submitted a list of problems and issues: childcare, adoption, jobs, education, housing, health, government representation, prisons, homelessness, drug abuse, poverty and suicide.

Other people of color groups, specifically Latinas, talked about their desire to be inclusive in spite of the tension and lack of respect in their communities or organizations for LGBTQ people. They noted that this disrespect comes up most frequently around people who don't outwardly conform to gender roles. All heterosexual Latina groups described a sense that they lack the language and are inhibited by not wanting to offend LGBTQ people.

In the discussion of LGBT issues, misinformation arose as people wanted to discuss "why" people have different sexual orientations and gender identities. At Western States Center we believe that the question of "why" is different for different people and that many attempts to pinpoint "why" are an attempt to figure out how to make "it" not happen. The incomplete or misinformation about "why" included: gay people have double sex organs; violence or something in childhood creates gay people; lack of communication in family creates gay people; and, gay people are the result of a hormonal imbalance in the parents. The perpetuation of myths such as these in non-LGBTQ groups active in social justice movements underscores the damage that can happen when challenging issues are ignored or marginalized.

Another myth and stereotype that arose in some of the responses from white individuals and groups is that communities of color are more homophobic than white

communities. In reality, there was a vast range of experiences described by both LGBTQ people of color and white LGBTQ people within their families.

At Western States Center, our analysis is not that there is more homophobia in communities of color, but that the majority of the resources supporting LGBTQ organizing is directed toward predominantly white communities and institutions. To achieve gender justice, these resources will need to be redirected to support organizing for LGBTQ equality in underserved communities.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

People spoke of a clear link between reproductive health and rights and family security. Yet, the research questions directly focused on reproductive justice received few and short responses and in most cases were much more individually, rather than community, focused. A Western States Center staffer who facilitated three research groups shared how difficult it was even to explain the concept of reproductive justice. We learned through the research that the discussion of reproductive justice in our region starts most successfully from the building blocks of family and sexuality.

One people of color discussion group defined reproductive justice as meaningful apologies and economic reparations for systemic institutionalized abuse. They specifically called for reparations from the US and Japanese governments for abuse and rape of women by military forces; for additional reparations from the US government for policies and practices that have forced sterilization of women of color; and, for reparations from the mainstream reproductive rights movement for not opposing forced sterilization policies.

Other people of color talked about reproductive justice as changing cultural norms. Some Latinas talked about the need to create acceptance for men to have



vasectomies as part of family planning. In addition, they talked about the need for men to be more willing to use protection. One South Asian woman discussed the need to address sex selection that is practiced in South Asian communities both in the US and in South Asian countries.

One of the biggest concerns for LGBTQ people about reproductive justice is their ability to have and raise children. Issues of adoption and custody rights were linked to their personal stories of creating their own families, and in some cases the struggles to maintain relationships with children when marriages or partnerships ended. Other people spoke of access to reproductive technologies like artificial insemination. A lesbian from Idaho described the challenges created by discrimination, ***"Some day we would like to adopt a child, but with the current trend of discriminatory legislation, even making our family bigger will be challenging, not to mention how stressful it is to live under the microscope as a lesbian couple."***

It comes as no surprise that abortion causes the most disagreement among people. Some of the people surveyed believe abortion is wrong. The majority of people felt like there was disagreement in their organizations and communities about abortion based in

moral, religious and/or cultural values and so they don't talk about it. Others said that they've never talked about it in their organization and so they don't know. A few people from organizations whose mission directs them toward addressing divisive issues like abortion said they need to figure out a way to organize around reproductive justice without alienating their members or constituents that oppose abortion.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT and PUBLIC POLICY

This research project asked questions in four sections: Family, Sexuality, LGBTQ Equality and Reproductive Justice. Within each of the subject areas we asked about the role of government and public policy in addressing the challenges that communities face. There were many contradictions between and within the responses to the questions about the role of government. In many cases, groups and individuals outlined clear needs around family security and well-being that government should meet through public policies, although strategies for doing so were less consistent. Regarding LGBTQ issues and reproductive justice, the language changed quite dramatically and showed a tension between a role for the government to protect rights and a desire for the government to "stay out of my bedroom." This subject was further explored at the Summit.

RESEARCH ENDNOTES

¹By virtue of the fact that the research was driven by organizations participating in the Family, Community and Sexuality Summit, there was a lot of variation in how each group facilitated the discussions and surveys. Additionally, the participating groups do not have a base in all the constituencies we need to hear from, and some groups were not able to complete the research due to capacity. Although there were individual African-American and Indigenous people who participated in the research, these conversations were not conducted within the context of African-American or Indigenous groups and these constituencies are underrepresented overall in the research. These and other gaps will be addressed in the ongoing program development of the Project.

EXPLORING CHALLENGING CONCEPTS

EXPLORING CHALLENGING CONCEPTS:

Learnings from the Family, Community and Sexuality Summit

Women and Trans People of Color Working Session: Breaking Isolation and Creating a Common Language

The first day of the Summit was a working session for women and trans people of color. More than 25 individuals joined us for a rich dialogue that helped to shape and frame the weekend's conversation.

For women and trans people of color in our region, geographic and cultural isolation form very real barriers to building a progressive movement. In one of the whitest parts of the country, with an overall population of only 16% people of color, activists and organizers of color frequently cite isolation as a barrier to work in their communities.

Many of the groups gathered at the working session are not frequently at the same tables, because participants organize in different parts of the progressive movement. Creating a space where Seattle based Asian Pacific Islander organizers on queer rights could sit at the same table and engage in strategy discussions with Latina immigrants from Boise was a unique opportunity. One participant shared that she **"learned that many other ethnic communities have similarities to my own within this struggle."** While few of these opportunities to cross pollinate exist, participants overwhelmingly articulated a relative ease in understanding the collective experience of people of color in the region.

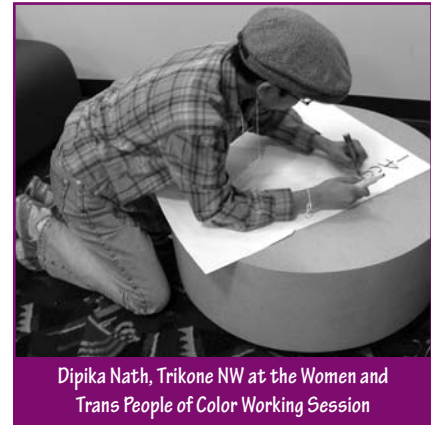
The working session used ethnic community discussion groups to identify critical trends and issues facing each ethnicity and the challenges and opportunities for organizing around issues of family, community, and sexuality. The large group then surfaced the similarities and differences across communities of color.

Challenges that crossed ethnic groups included:

- ♦ Communities struggling with gender preference or bias within the culture
- ♦ Impact of arranged marriage
- ♦ Lack of access, culturally appropriate services, education
- ♦ Racial profiling
- ♦ Immigration laws

"The *Working Session* was extremely helpful to **ground our energies**, to build sustainable energy for the **mixed discussion** (with white people) afterwards. **"**
— participant

"[The working session] was very useful for me coming from an environment of **low interaction** with other people of color and trans people of color. **"**
— participant



Dipika Nath, Trikone NW at the Women and Trans People of Color Working Session

When asked to define what it would look like for families in each ethnic group to "win," winning issues that crossed multiple ethnic groups included:

- ♦ Free health care for all
- ♦ Strong coalitions between first and second generation members of the community
- ♦ Visibility and recognition of our leadership within the progressive movement
- ♦ Respect for multiple national identities within one ethnic group
- ♦ Rewriting history to tell the truth about our communities.

By the end of the working session, participants had identified five progressive family values principles that would allow the full participation of communities of color in the gender justice movement. These principles were further developed throughout the Summit and included in the final ten principles.

Finding the Missing Links: Reproductive Justice

Based on the research, which revealed a lack of familiarity with a reproductive justice framework, we asked Summit participants to explore what reproductive justice means to their communities.

When participants engaged in fluid conversations about family and sexuality, issues of reproductive justice were interwoven into the dialogue with a range and depth of thinking. However, when participants were asked to focus primarily on reproductive justice, the conversation shifted to emphasize choice and the idea that reproductive health and rights were limited to issues about having children or not. In addition, conversations within the reproductive justice framework did not raise issues of infant mortality, HIV/AIDS, or reproductive health issues for men.

At the Center, we believe that reproductive justice serves as an important framework for communities that have been traditionally left out of the

reproductive health and rights movement. Reproductive justice redefines the issues in holistic terms and engages communities most directly affected by attacks on reproductive justice. However, just as we learned in the research, discussions of family and sexuality remained the most effective entry point at the Summit for a holistic approach—using reproductive justice as an opening context for discussion was less engaging.

Talking about Race

The research showed a lack of analysis about the impact of race on organizations primarily working with white constituents, while race was a critical element of conversations in organizations from communities of color. Recognizing the centrality of race in conversations about family, community and sexuality, the Center asked white participants to investigate this omission further.

White organizers were asked to discuss how race is made invisible in their organizing work around family, community and sexuality; why it would be strategic to articulate a race analysis; and how/what concrete actions could be taken to make the analysis more prominent. Small group conversation surfaced the following points:

- ♦ The absence of race in white people's responses led them to question why the definition of "our community" consistently makes invisible people of color who live where we live, or are part of our families.
- ♦ White participants whose organizations provide services to people of color felt they had more skills in areas of cultural competency, but lacked a broader understanding of historical and structural oppression.
- ♦ Through the small group discussions, white participants began to recognize that gender justice issues are inextricable from racial justice issues, and that in order to create effective strategies and solutions, race had to be central to the conversation.

Exploring the Role of Government

In the research, there was a consistent belief that through public policy the government is accountable for making sure basic human needs are met around healthcare, education, jobs, housing etc. However, questions about the role of government around sexuality, LGBTQ equality and abortion were less coherent. Our first attempt at the Summit to gain greater clarity on this question was not entirely successful as the group had a difficult time articulating a pro-active vision for public policy that supports a gender justice agenda. We then narrowed the scope of the question to: why is it the government's role to provide comprehensive sexuality education through public schools?

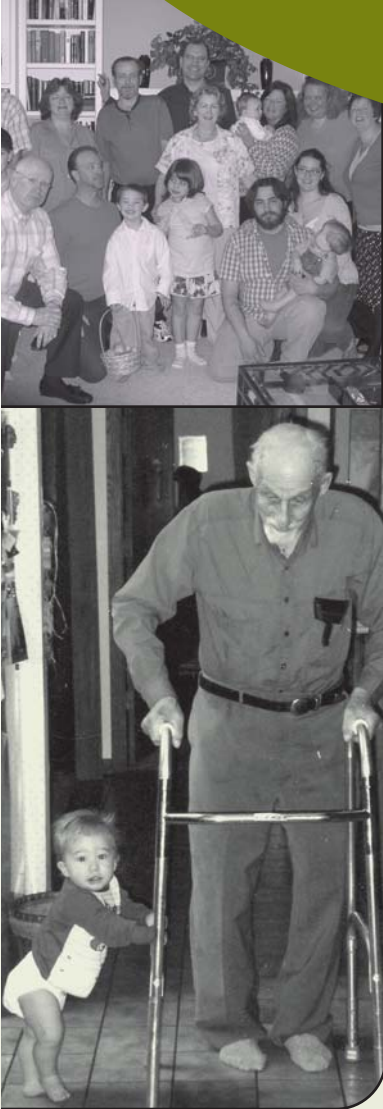
Small and large group conversation led to the following:

- ♦ Government resources are our tax dollars. If we think comprehensive sexuality education is a priority then the government should provide it.
- ♦ In our current context, the most effective way to have broad reach with information is via government.
- ♦ Government has a proactive role in public health and public safety.

Narrowing the scope of the question proved successful in terms of creating a more accessible discussion, but it did not lead to any consensus in the group about how to articulate the role of government within the framework of progressive family values principles.

There was a palpable feeling of mistrust of government arising from the reality that government policies have failed a number of the communities engaged by the research and the Summit as well as from the long-term anti-government (anti-tax) organizing that has been a consistent theme across our region for almost 20 years. At Western States Center, we feel that being clear about the role of government and public policy is a critical component of building a movement for gender justice. As the Family, Community and Sexuality Project moves forward we will continue to find opportunities to explore this question with the grassroots base of participating organizations.





NEXT STEPS

After the Summit I'd like to . . .

- ♦ "do a series of membership meetings on these ten values and get their reaction"
- ♦ "report back on the 10 progressive principles and brainstorm about strategic next steps within my organization and community"
- ♦ "take principles that were generated and use them in leadership classes among low-income women to get them involved in the political process"
- ♦ "go to progressive houses of worship and begin the discussion of defining family, community and sexuality"

—*written evaluative comments from participants*

The Family, Community and Sexuality Summit was a huge success in terms of the goals we set for ourselves. The Summit was both a culmination of regional discussions and a jumping off place for the next phase of the Family, Community and Sexuality Project—supporting political education at the base level to build support for progressive policy change.

In the immediate future the Family, Community and Sexuality Project will engage both Summit participants and other organizations in the region in a process of identifying specific political education tools that are needed. We will then focus on developing, testing and distributing those tools and supporting organizations in implementing them. In August of this year, at our Community Strategic Training Initiative, we will provide training on these tools and on other movement building skills and strategies.

For more information about the Family, Community and Sexuality Project and political education tools, please contact:

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PROGRESSIVE FAMILY VALUES PRINCIPLES

PROGRESSIVE FAMILY VALUES PRINCIPLES

The following ten principles were developed through conversation at the Family, Community and Sexuality Summit. Participants agreed that these principles or values are critical to moving gender justice organizing in ways that can successfully counter the conservative "family values" agenda devastating our communities and offer a vision and strategy for supporting families and communities across issue and constituency.

- 1. Families are defined by the communities they are a part of and reflect their own cultural and historical experiences.** They are seldom solely a mom, dad and children. Families are multi-generational, chosen, multi-household and international.
- 2. Self-determination and self-expression for communities are interconnected with family security and safety.** This self-determination requires resources and infrastructure in our communities so that we can provide for ourselves without cultural or language translation. Self-determination also requires the political power to represent ourselves at policy making tables.
- 3. Supporting families and communities requires justice and equity in education.** Families and communities that have experienced economic and racist oppression must be able to tell their own stories that set the record straight around colonialism and slavery. Gender justice means ridding our communities of the "master's narrative" and taking control of how our communities are studied and explained.
- 4. Relationships between families and communities are more important than national borders.** The current immigration debate is critical and yet it does not explicitly address family security. A gender justice agenda must prioritize immigrant and refugee families and address sexism, heterosexism and the individualistic nature (anti-family and community) of immigration policy.
- 5. Gender Justice work requires a clear racial justice analysis and strategy.** There is a disproportionate impact on communities of color by public policies that undermine women, families and LGBTQ communities. Gender justice organizing must support the leadership of people of color in defining these impacts and proposing solutions. Gender justice organizing must also support white people's development as allies in the struggle for racial justice and create opportunities for white people to educate each other about white privilege.

- 6. Gender Justice must address gender roles.** Gender roles are often manifestations of sexism and heterosexism and limit our abilities to create strong families and communities. Within our communities, we must examine and dismantle the gender binary system, acknowledge the fluidity of gender and support women's leadership. All communities are affected by the historical, economic and social context in which they exist. Challenging gender roles may mean drawing upon the strengths of traditional cultural understandings of roles within families and communities that have been damaged by legacies of colonialism and slavery.
- 7. Gender justice demands alternatives to state forms of power, like the police and courts, in order for families and communities to thrive.** Gender justice organizing must build the capacities within communities to create safety and accountability. It must also build support between communities to ensure that there are resources and power at the community level to address violence against women and children, other family violence, intra-community violence and homophobic violence.
- 8. Valuing human rights over military power stabilizes families.** Our families and communities are stronger when we have access to jobs and education and the military is not our only option. Our multi-national families are threatened and killed when the US government wages war to gain power and wealth. Marginalized communities, communities of color, low-income communities and immigrant and refugee communities are targeted by both military recruitment and military violence. A gender justice agenda means directing resources toward building and supporting families and communities and not toward the military industrial complex.
- 9. Valuing people's multiple identities is critical to creating solutions to the problems we face.** The ways that oppressions like sexism and racism are connected affects whole people, whole families and whole communities. Organizational members and leaders have multiple identities and experiences. We must draw on their complex experiences as we develop our analysis and create solutions to the problems we are trying to solve.
- 10. Progressive family values must address basic family needs of security and human dignity** including: comprehensive and accessible health care; food, housing and jobs; safety; cultural and spiritual expression; and access to participation in civic life.

PARTICIPANTS

ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

- 1. Asian and Pacific Islander Women and Family Safety Center's Queer Network Project - Seattle, WA**
 - ◆ Joanne Alcantera
 - ◆ Nhan Thai
 - ◆ Darius Morrison
 - ◆ Jenn Bowman

- 2. Communities Against Rape and Abuse - Seattle, WA**
 - ◆ Theryn Kigvamasud'Vashti
 - ◆ Dione Tyson

- 3. Casa Latina's Women's Program - Seattle, WA**
 - ◆ Maria Reyna
 - ◆ Norma Ortiz

- 4. CAUSA - Woodburn, OR**
 - ◆ Participated in research but was unable to attend the Summit

- 5. Idaho Human Rights Education Center - Boise, ID**
 - ◆ Amy Herzfeld
 - ◆ Texie Evans
 - ◆ Kezieh Sullivan

- 6. The Interfaith Alliance of Idaho - Boise, ID**
 - ◆ Pam Baldwin
 - ◆ Judy Cross
 - ◆ Sue Chew

- 7. Montana Women Vote - Helena, MT**
 - ◆ Jodi Case

- 8. Montana Human Rights Network - Helena, MT**
 - ◆ Kim Abbott

- 9. Mujeres Unidas de Idaho - Boise, ID**
 - ◆ Graciela Fonseca

- 10. Odyssey Youth Center - Spokane, WA**
 - ◆ Janice Packwood
 - ◆ Ann Marie Floch

- 11. Pro-Choice Education Project - New York, NY**
 - ◆ Aimee Thorne-Thompson
 - ◆ Eshanda Fennel

12. Reproductive Freedom Network - Seattle, WA

- ◆ Lauren Trent

13. Trikone Northwest - Seattle, WA

- ◆ Mala Nagajaran
- ◆ Dipika Nath
- ◆ Gita Mehrotra

14. Utah Progressive Network - Salt Lake City, UT

- ◆ Thomas Nelson
- ◆ John Spillman

15. Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition - Seattle, WA

- ◆ Jean Colman
- ◆ Adrienne Wiley Thomas

16. Women's Opportunity and Resource Development, Inc. - Missoula, MT

- ◆ Cristine Mulvey
- ◆ Carol Hand
- ◆ Naomi Thorten

17. Your Family, Friends and Neighbors - Boise, ID

- ◆ Nikki Leonard

18. Western States Center

- ◆ Kelley Weigel
- ◆ Kalpana Krishnamurthy
- ◆ Lucilene Lira
- ◆ Kayse Jama
- ◆ Stephanie Stephens
- ◆ Moira Bowman

In addition to these organizational participants, we were joined by leaders and funders from constituencies or geographies that are not well represented through the above organizations:

- ◆ Amy Markishtum, Seattle, WA
- ◆ Ari Rapkin, Portland, OR
- ◆ Bailey Schriber, Jackson, WY
- ◆ Crystal McDaniel, Boise, ID
- ◆ Emma Medicine White Crow, Seattle, WA
- ◆ Scot Nakagawa, Portland, OR

The following funders also participated in the Summit:

- ◆ Katrin Wilde, Channel Foundation
- ◆ Lani Shaw, General Service Foundation
- ◆ Vanessa Daniel, Tides Foundation
- ◆ Wilma Montañez, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation

Spring **2006** *Summit*
FAMILY, COMMUNITY & SEXUALITY PROJECT

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