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Let's Talk About Sex! Women of Color, Choices and Reproductive Justice
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I am inspired by the work we do at SisterSong because we are about addressing experiences that go beyond "Choice", and instead we advocate for "Choices" – choices about if, when, how, and under what circumstances to reproduce, and choices about how we raise the children we already have. This is especially true for women of color for whom the prolife/pro-choice dichotomy often does not fit our specific experiences.

As part of the process for achieving Reproductive Justice, SisterSong works for the physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic and social conditions for women and all people to be able to make healthy decisions about their sexuality and reproduction. SisterSong believes that these choices must be informed by accurate, accessible and culturally relevant sexuality education; healthy dialogues between young people and their families, peers and communities; and the creation of a positive-sex culture.

SisterSong will address all of these issues in our upcoming conference, "Let's Talk About Sex!" to be held at the Wyndham O'Hare Hotel in Chicago, May 31 – June 3, 2007. This will be a pro-sex conference for the pro-choice movement, and we encourage mothers and daughters, educators and providers; activists and academics to join us in creating a space for truth, dialogue, mobilization, storytelling and healing around issues of sex and sexuality.

The "Let's Talk About Sex!" conference, like the Salt 'n' Pepa' song which inspired its title, will be fun, informative, playful and celebratory! We are particularly determined that this conference create a sex-positive atmosphere for the participants.

What Is a Sex-Positive Atmosphere?

SisterSong believes that consensual sex for procreation or sexual pleasure is a human right that should not only be protected, but also celebrated. The reproductive rights movements have been instrumental in defending women's rights to abortion and privacy in decision-making regarding their reproductive health, as well as in promoting messages and strategies for pregnancy prevention. However, in mobilizing around this work, the messages have not always reflected a positive attitude about developing healthy sexual practices and the diversity of expressions of sexuality. The messages reflect the realities of women's lives, but do not address how they experience these realities.

SisterSong uses the Reproductive Justice framework, which includes a broader sexual rights agenda to connect women's health issues to the rest of their lives. We go beyond advocating for access and equality and encourage talking about, learning about, and celebrating sex! The "Let's Talk About Sex!" Conference will promote this framework within the context of discussions around sex and sexuality.

We are hoping that women and girls, our families, and our communities will participate in these dialogues at the conference. In order to make this possible, SisterSong has established a Mother-

Daughter scholarship fund provided by our sponsors that will offer a companion scholarship to any woman who registers for the conference and plans to bring her mother or daughter. Other scholarships are available in order to make participation in the conference accessible to all. (For more information about conference scholarships, please contact the SisterSong National Office by email at info@sistersong.net).

Over 600 amazing women of color and allies convened and lifted our voices on issues of reproductive health and sexual rights at the first SisterSong Conference held in November of 2003. Three and a half years later, we are excited at the prospect of doubling the number of participants to 1,200 people who will join us in creating spaces to locate these discussions of sex and sexuality within the context of the Reproductive Justice framework. This framework places issues of reproductive and sexual health and rights in the broader social justice and human rights movements. Reproductive Justice speaks truth to the realities of women of color by expressing our human right to a healthy and satisfying sexuality, the right to have a child, the right not to have a child, and the right to parent the children we already have.

What Makes this Conference Different?

This four-day conference will include workshops and plenaries that explore issues of sex, sexuality, and reproductive health, and their connection to other social justice issues. We will look at topics such as birth control, senior sexuality, STDs, microbicides, LGBTQ issues, gynecological health and wellness, erotica, militarism, religion, genetic engineering and more, all through a reproductive justice lens. We will also ensure that each workshop and plenary includes useful tools and/or information that can be taken back to participants' organizations and communities.

Beyond the traditional conference set-up of workshops and plenaries, we want this conference to be interactive, fluid, and sensitive to human needs. In that spirit, there will be specific rooms designated for creative artistic expression, as well as a room for physical rest and emotional healing. Modeling the recent 2006 International AIDS Conference, there will be a space where both conference participants and community members can interact and share information about social justice issues through tabling, presentations, etc. As a part of this area, we will have an open microphone where participants will be free to express themselves through poetry, song, dance, or whatever moves them.

Centrality of Young Women

One of the most exciting elements of "Let's Talk About Sex!" is the involvement of young women in the planning and implementation of the conference. SisterSong brought 20 young people between the ages of 14 and 21 to our 2006 National Membership Meeting in Los Angeles to participate in the process of organizing for our 2007 National Conference. During this meeting, the young women developed a plan for outreach, programming, and fundraising for "Let's Talk About Sex!" They also self-organized into a Youth Working Committee that will ensure the representation and inclusion of young people throughout the 2007 National Conference by assigning youth representatives to each of the Conference planning committees.