

## **Can't We All Just Get Along! Ethnic Tensions among Women of Color**

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Our society tells us that women of color, in particular, are catty, difficult and have attitudes. These are stereotypes we believe about each other and are present with every interaction. We see it when a woman walks into a room full of other women—we examine her clothes, her make-up and make quick assumptions about her. But this stigma isn't just restricted to idle gossip in the ladies restrooms or social functions. It's a sickness that is also poisoning the women's reproductive health and sexual rights movement.

Many of us have worked with organizations dedicated to the women's rights movement only to resign due to internal conflict with other female counterparts. Some have bounced around to different organizations, leaving them feeling frustrated and even refusing to work with other women of color in the future. This disease is known as internalized racism and crossracial hostility. Internalized racism is the belief in all oppressive stereotypes, like dark skin is inferior, women are inferior and should be controlled, Black women are angry, Asian women are submissive, Native women are earthy, etc. And in an effort to disprove the erroneous beliefs we have about ourselves, we strive to mirror the "prototype" standards of the dominant society. Cross-racial hostility is racism among people of color. We believe the oppressive stereotypes about one another. It prevents us from seeing our similarities in the history of oppression, cultures, and beliefs, and prevents us from appreciating our differences. Internalized racism and crossracial hostility, as well as homophobia and heterosexism keep us from forming lasting coalitions and relationships.

Although this country claims to be a melting pot, it is a Eurocentric society, which forces people of color to abandon their culture. And since this white-dominant society considers some of our cultural practices savagery and uncivilized, some of us choose assimilation, forsaking our culture and adopting superior pretentious behaviors. In essence, we are taught that anything not exhibiting characteristics of the dominant culture is inferior and must be subdued. If we continue abandoning our cultures, racial harmony will never materialize.

In order to end internalized racism and cross-racial hostility, each of us must face our demons, those stereotypes we have about each other and ourselves. SisterSong has developed an intense, yet effect counseling process for women of color called Self-Help. It identifies the origins of our racist attitudes and works to eliminate all stereotypes. While it may be a long process, its lasting effectives help create a new relationship between women of color, giving us the strength to challenge oppression and racism together and thus, birthing a new society.