



**The EMERJ Reproductive Justice Lens Toolkit:
Identifying reproductive justice issues in your community**

INTRO TO THE EMERJ RJ LENS

The EMERJ Reproductive Justice (RJ) Lens is a tool for identifying reproductive justice issues in your community, and to make connections between communities impacted by reproductive oppression. The RJ Lens helps us focus on the challenges that people are facing to having self-determination over their gender, bodies and sexuality.

Lifting up RJ issues in your community

The reproductive justice framework encompasses a range of issues related to the controlling and regulation of our gender, bodies and sexuality. The RJ Lens brings attention to the specific issues that particular communities experience. EMERJ believes that you are the expert on the reproductive justice issues impacting your own community, which is why we're so excited about collaborating with you to help lift up and bring national attention to these issues!

Connection to movement building

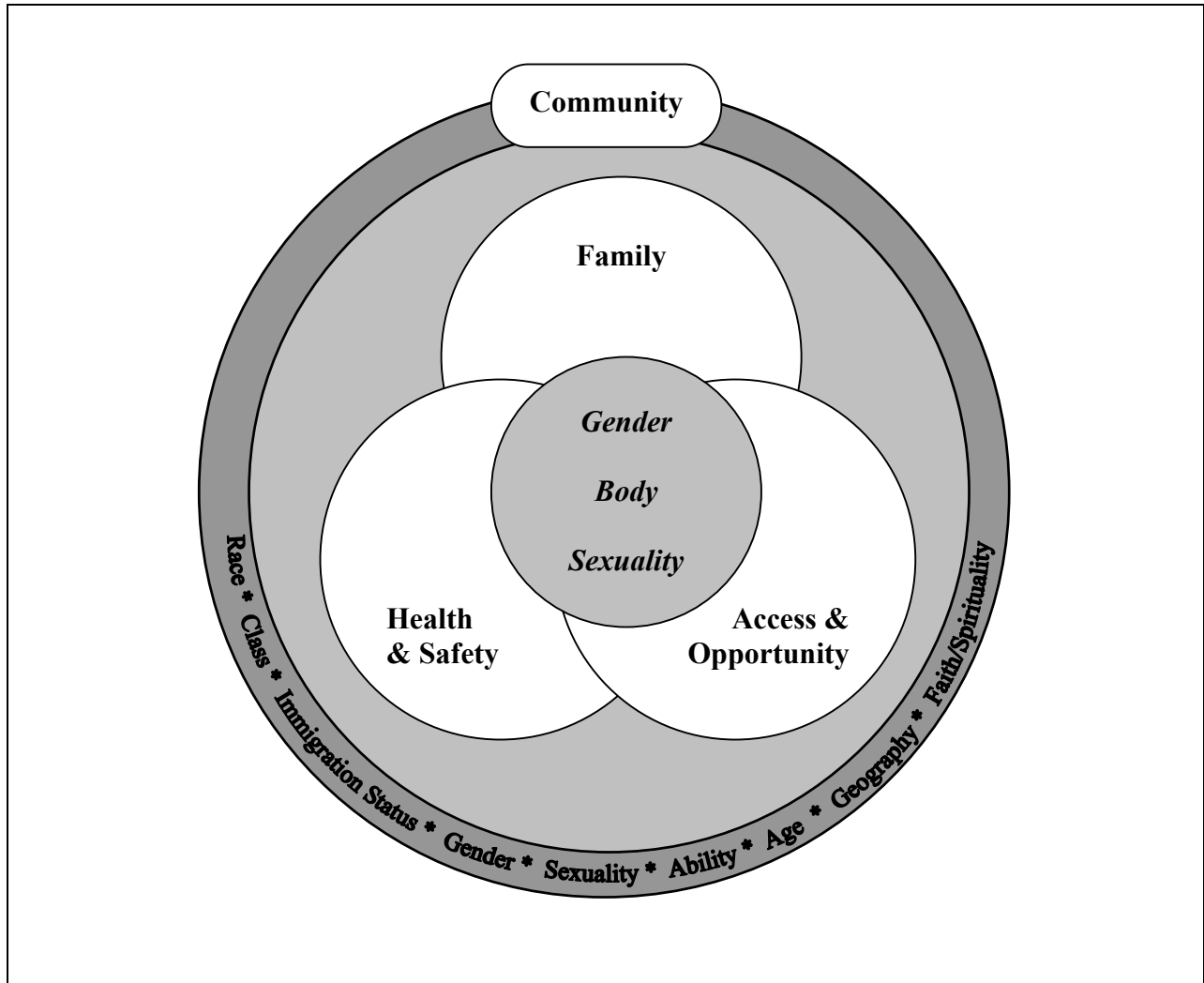
Using the RJ Lens to focus on specific issues in various communities, we are able to make connections between communities impacted by reproductive oppression. By helping us see how our communities are facing similar injustices to our gender, bodies and sexuality, the RJ Lens can create opportunities for building alliances so that we can move our work forward together toward the same vision of reproductive justice.

KEY DEFINITIONS & CONCEPTS

- **Reproductive justice** exists when all people have the social, political and economic power and resources to make healthy decisions about our gender, bodies and sexuality for our selves, our families and our communities.
- The core problem that we are trying to address is **reproductive oppression**, which is the controlling and regulation of our gender, bodies and sexuality.
- The reproductive justice framework draws on the **intersectionality** of identities and experiences that affect individuals and communities, including race, class, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, ability and age.
- A reproductive justice analysis recognizes that all of us come from **community** and that our communities are vitally important, and applies community-centered framing and approaches, rather than individualistic.

HOW THE RJ LENS WORKS

This is the RJ Lens. Read the instructions below to see how it works!



Step 1: Define your community:

Circle	Description	How it applies to the RJ Lens
Community	Communities are defined by the identities in the outer circle – race, class, immigration status, gender, sexuality, ability, age, geography, and religion/faith – and at the intersections of these identities. They can be general (African American women) or specific (LGBT immigrant youth in Chicago).	The RJ Lens focuses on how the identities that define your community impact your experience of reproductive oppression (the controlling and regulation of gender, bodies & sexuality) both in terms of negative impact and strengths of resistance in addressing the issue.

Step 2: Focus on the 3 arenas of Family, Health & Safety, Access & Opportunity

Circle	Description	How it applies to the RJ Lens
Family*	Family means any way that you define a family – it can be the family you’re born into, the family you choose to create, and those who share their lives with you.	There are many ways in which we are denied the ability to have and maintain our families, make decisions about pregnancy and childbirth, and raise our children. The RJ Lens focuses on how this inability either a) occurs because of, or b) results in, the controlling and regulation of our gender, bodies and sexuality.
Health & Safety*	Health & Safety means complete well-being: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.	There are many ways in which our health and safety are compromised. The RJ Lens focuses on how these compromises either a) occur because of, or b) result in, the controlling and regulation of our gender, bodies and sexuality.
Access & Opportunity*	Opportunities can be around access to health care, education, jobs, housing, and to have a life where you can thrive.	There are many ways in which these opportunities are taken away from us. The RJ Lens focuses on how a lack of opportunities either a) occurs because of, or b) results in, the controlling and regulation of our gender, bodies and sexuality.
*These are the three arenas that EMERJ Strategy Team has prioritized. These core arenas may change depending on the priorities of each community.		

Step 3: Identify issues of reproductive justice

Circle	Description	Critical questions
Gender Body Sexuality	<p>Gender:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gender roles & expectations -Gender identity & expression -Gender-based oppression <p>Body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Physical control: detention, separation from family -Physical conditions: work, home, neighborhood -Health care: withheld or forced <p>Sexuality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sexual health -Knowledge about sex -Sexual identity, expression & behavior 	<p>When you look at your community through a Reproductive Justice Lens, within the three arenas of Family, Health & Safety, and Opportunity, what are issues that come into focus / what do you see? In other words, how are people in your community facing challenges to having self-determination over their gender, bodies, and sexuality?</p> <p>As you identify the reproductive justice issues in your community, remember to also think about how the identities that define your community impact your experience of reproductive oppression both in terms of negative impact and strengths of resistance in addressing the issue.</p>

SEE THE RJ LENS IN ACTION!

Below are examples of how the RJ Lens has been used to identify issues of reproductive justice in two communities.

Community:	Vietnamese Nail Salon Workers in California
Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Family	The products used in nail salons are unregulated by the cosmetics industry. They contain ingredients that have never been tested for health impacts, many of which are known to be toxic. Many of them contain toxic chemicals that are harmful to workers, who work up to 10-hour shifts daily and are constantly exposed. Two common ingredients in nail polish, toluene and dibutyl phthalate (DBP), have been linked to harmful impacts on a woman's reproductive health and children's development. Most nail salon workers are women of reproductive age, and are vulnerable to even low levels of toxic exposure can be potentially harmful. Little research has been done on the pregnancy outcomes of nail salon workers, but stories of miscarriage, stillbirths and birth defects are not uncommon. Many women quit their jobs when they become pregnant in order to avoid toxic exposure to the fetus. With a lack of alternative economic opportunities, women are being forced to choose between working to provide for their families and ensuring that they can carry their pregnancies to term and give birth to healthy children.
Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Health and Safety	The toxins in nail products can also cause acute health problems such as asthma, headache, dizziness, fatigue, and irritation to eyes and throat, especially since many salons are poorly ventilated. By law, manufacturers are required to provide material safety data sheets (MSDS) to their customers that outline safety information about hazardous chemicals in their products. Unfortunately, this law is rarely enforced and MSDS sheets are often inaccessible to the average nail salon worker. The health impacts on some workers are so severe that they are unable to do their work safely or have to take off from work to feel better. Furthermore, nail salons are among the many industries that rely on low-wage immigrant labor in which Asian women are concentrated, which in addition to hazardous work environments have no employer-based health insurance. Therefore, even though their work environment is making workers sick, many of them have trouble accessing health care.
Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Access & Opportunity	Vietnamese immigrant women make up the majority of nail salon workers in California. They are drawn to this industry because there are few requirements for education and English proficiency, cosmetology training can be completed in just 10 weeks, and job opportunities spread quickly through familial and community networks. With limited economic opportunities, it is a viable job option that supports entire communities. Nail salons and workers must be licensed and are regularly inspected, but the inspections process is obscure. Information on most fines for health and safety violations is not covered in cosmetology schools, workers are rarely updated about new regulations, and they often receive fines without being told why. Language barriers and mistreatment by inspectors exacerbates this problem. Women workers are sometimes physically harassed and violated by male inspectors

	<p>who subject them – without explanation – to bodily inspections in the presence of their co-workers, employers, and customers. There is a clearly evident power dynamic between the male inspectors from state agencies and the low-wage immigrant women workers, who must struggle not only with having to pay the exorbitant fines but also the humiliation of being mistreated.</p>
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Community:	LGBTQ people of color
<p>Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Family</p>	<p>All LGBTQ parents must battle with the lack of social support for their role as parents. Whether interacting with schools, religious institutions or social services, parents are often forced to mask their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of heightened discrimination against their children. Furthermore, the lack of legal recognition of non-biological children, or legal bias against trans parents, can result in losing custody. Many LGBTQ couples raising children are people of color, making them more likely to experience this discrimination, which in addition to various economic and social barriers jeopardizes their ability create families that feel safe and secure in their integrity and relationships.</p>
<p>Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Health and Safety</p>	<p>People of color who are LGBTQ face threats to their health and safety as a result of harassment and violence. From bullying in schools to physical assault on the street, people who are perceived to be LGBTQ are targets for attack. This vulnerability is compounded for people of color. Unfortunately, the response of institutions such as the police to incidents of harassment and violence often range from unsupportive to hostile. In fact, for many LGBTQ people in communities of color, police violence and repression is a consistent threat to their safety and well-being. Communities under attack through interpersonal and institutionalized violence face everyday threats to their health and safety, with limited options for where they can turn to for support.</p>
<p>Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Access & Opportunity</p>	<p>Due to stereotypes and discrimination, LGBTQ people face disproportionate barriers to employment, housing, education, and health care. Institutionalized racism adds an additional layer of barriers for LGBTQ people of color. Across most of the country, LGBTQ people can be denied housing or employment just for being who they are – a severe form of discrimination that is particularly directed toward transgender and gender non-conforming people. Health information and services are frequently withheld from LGBTQ people due provider bias and discrimination, which is compounded by the unequal treatment of people of color within the health care system.</p> <p>In schools, LGBTQ youth of color rarely receive relevant information about sexual health, since even “comprehensive” sex education provides misleading or limited information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and safer sex practices for LGBTQ people. Educational opportunities in general are threatened for students of color, who are often the target of punitive school policies, and LGBTQ youth of color are vulnerable to further discrimination, violence and harassment.</p>

APPLY THE RJ LENS TO YOUR OWN COMMUNITY!

Now it's your turn to use the RJ Lens to identify issues of reproductive justice in your community, or your organization's membership or constituency.

In the chart below, write the community/constituency you're choosing, and fill out one issue each within the arenas of Family, Health & Safety, and Opportunity that comes up when you look through an RJ Lens, which puts our focus on how people experience the controlling and regulation of their gender, bodies and sexuality. Remember to also think about how the identities that define your community impact your experience of reproductive oppression both in terms of negative impact and strengths of resistance in addressing the issue.

Community:	
Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Family	
Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Health and Safety	
Reproductive justice issues within the arena of Access & Opportunity	

TELL US HOW YOU'RE ORGANIZING!

Thank you so much for sharing the reproductive issues that folks in your community are facing. If your organization is organizing around the issues that you've identified, that you'd like to share with others, we'd love to hear about it! Here are some questions to guide your thinking.

Critical questions:

Which of the reproductive justice issues that you've identified above are you organizing around?

What are the organizing activities that people in your community are involved in?

How is the organizing building the power and leadership of the communities most affected?

How is the organizing creating social change at the individual, community, institutional, and societal levels?

What are some of the desired concrete outcomes of the organizing in terms of increasing people's self-determination over their gender, bodies and sexuality?

MOVEMENT BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Share your RJ Lens and learn about others'!

Activists and organizations from around the country are collaborating with EMERJ by using the RJ Lens to lift up the issues they see in their communities. EMERJ will be putting these community-specific RJ Lenses on our website so that we can share our stories with one another. By doing so, EMERJ will be creating movement building opportunities in various ways:

- **Creating awareness:** For folks living and working in a similar community to yours, who may not have previously seen or thought about issues of RJ in their communities, will become more aware of RJ issues that might be impacting their own communities.
- **Making connections across communities & fostering alliance:** Seeing that the RJ issues your community is experiencing are similar to the ones impacting other communities will help foster alliances between communities that may have not previously existed. This allows us to reach out and make connections across different communities, support each other and figure out ways to work together.
- **Supporting organizing:** By learning about how other groups are organizing to fight reproductive oppression in their communities, we hope that activists and organizations will be inspired to take action to addresses similar issues in their own communities.
- **Changing policy:** From analyzing existing policies to creating and implementing new ones, understanding the nuances of reproductive justice within specific communities allows us to make real changes in the lived experiences of the communities most impacted by reproductive oppression, rather than assuming that all communities are or will be affected equally.
- **Sharing organizing models:** Groups that are, or are thinking about, organizing for reproductive justice in their own communities can learn from the experience of others, and apply existing approaches to their own organizing.

Thanks for collaborating with EMERJ on this exciting project! Check out our website at www.emerj.org for more information on EMERJ, and to check back for updates as we start sharing the community-specific RJ Lenses online.