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CRITICAL ASPECTS OF
GENDER IN CONFLICT
RESOLUTION,
PEACEBUILDING, AND
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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“THE PHRASE OF THE DAY”:
EXAMINING CONTEXTS AND
CO-OPTATION OF REPRODUCTIVE
JUSTICE ACTIVISM IN THE
WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

Zakiya T. Luna

ABSTRACT

Using data from a multi-method study with a national reproductive justice coalition, this chapter examines the emergence of the US reproductive justice movement. I first examine how reproductive justice emerged in relation to the mainstream women’s movements. Then I demonstrate how, due to the relationship between reproductive justice and social identity, the boundaries of the reproductive frame and movements are simultaneously broader and more constrained in meaning than reproductive rights. Finally, I show how (perceived) co-optation leads to tensions between movement sectors and weakens the potential for reproductive justice to reinvigorate activism around reproductive issues. I conclude with how the success of the reproductive justice movement, including diversity and coalition building, can inform other social movements.

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INTRODUCTION

Political, social, and cultural conditions are constantly changing, requiring social movements to face continually the challenge of maintaining and gaining supporters while remaining relevant. This challenge is particularly salient in the US women's movement, which some sociologists (Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005) have pointed out has continually been identified as declining by mass media and scholars who analyze social movements through the lens of contentious politics. When we look at the claims of leaders of long-standing mainstream women's rights organizations, we see that scholars and media outlets are not the only ones at fault for this particular claim.¹ For example, a recent *Newsweek* piece that sought to answer why "young voters are lukewarm on abortion rights" featured the president of NARAL Pro-Choice America Nancy Keenan insinuating that young women not actively supporting abortion rights will lead to the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*. In the same piece, the author observes,

Keenan considers herself part of the 'postmenopausal militia,' a generation of baby-boomer activists now well into their 50s who grew up in an era of backroom abortions and fought passionately for legalization. Today they still run the major abortion-rights groups, including NARAL, Planned Parenthood, and the National Organization for Women. (Kliff, 2010)

While generational tensions have certainly been a contentious issue in the women's movement (Bailey, 1997; Reger, 2005), in this popular press article, Keenan describes herself as part of an older generation of feminists committed to protecting abortion rights specifically.

Perhaps high-profile organizations like NARAL, National Organization for Women (NOW), and Planned Parenthood that are currently led by middle-class white women (and often, although not exclusively, led by them in the past) are facing reduced support that translates into reduction of staff or the closing of state offices in some cases (e.g., NARAL closed its Georgia state office in 2003). However, I would argue that shifting the lens through which we view reproductive activism reveals vibrant and growing activism that is coalescing around the frame of "reproductive justice" in a movement that emerged in part to resist multiple exclusions from other movements while also building the inclusive space other progressive movements have long tried yet failed to do. The reproductive justice movement challenges what is considered a legitimate reproductive issue around which to organize. In doing so, the reproductive justice movement is attempting to move beyond divisive abortion politics to expand support for a range of reproductive freedoms.

In this chapter, I ask how self-identified reproductive justice activists understand "reproductive justice" and its emergence. What role does identity play in these understandings? How does conflating "reproductive justice" with "reproductive rights" affect the future of the larger women's movement? On the basis of my findings, I develop three arguments. First, "reproductive justice" signals a new, more resonant, frame in the women's movement that emerged due to the reproductive rights movement's exclusion of particular women's experiences. Second, the boundaries of the frame and movement are simultaneously broader and more specific in meaning than reproductive rights. Finally, due to these boundaries, the usage of "reproductive justice" by reproductive rights and health organizations results in co-optation that increase tensions in the women's movement and weakens the potential for reproductive justice to reinvigorate activism around reproductive issues and the women's movement.

In this chapter, I first discuss how historical marginalization of women of color's experiences by reproductive rights movements that focused on legal rights, helped set the stage for a new movement that could better meet their needs. Then I briefly discuss data and methods. In the result section I demonstrate how reproductive justice appeals to a range of potential participants whose experiences with reproduction are excluded as the reproductive rights movement promotes the image of an autonomous woman whose reproductive choice is constrained primarily by lack of access to abortion. Then, I analyze the role of identity in this challenge to exclusion. Finally, I discuss how, as reproductive justice becomes more successful in challenging the narrower approach of the reproductive rights movement, there is increased tension around perceived co-optation by women of color over the reproductive justice term by mainstream organizations. I conclude with implications for the women's movement and social movements more broadly.

SHIFTING THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT: HISTORICIZING REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Two issues that many contemporary U.S. movement actors face underlie the emergence of the reproductive justice movement: determining the most effective long-term strategy and negotiating the relationship between identity and social movement participation, goals and framing. The first issue considers whether using a legal strategy that focuses on the courts is worth the

cost to movements. On one hand, rights hold symbolic power so contemporary U.S. social movements have consistently looked toward the courts to institutionalize their social change efforts. On the other hand, focusing on gaining and then maintaining rights through courts requires movements to make heavy financial investments, thereby directing attention away from other movement activities such as organizing (McCann, 2006). Rights claims can be effective, but rights must be sustained through political and legislative action, not only through the courts' protection of legal rights (Tushnet, 1989). Rosenberg (1991) suggests the cost of a legal strategy extends beyond financial outlay because "symbolic victories may be mistaken for substantive ones, covering a reality that is distasteful. Rather than working to change that reality, reformers relying on a litigation strategy for reform may be misled (or content?) to celebrate the illusion of change" (p. 340). Furthermore, once rights are "won," movement supporters may feel a reduced sense of urgency to support the ostensibly successful movement, whereas counter-movements can gain strength or develop where previously there have not been organized counter efforts (McCann, 2006).

In the case of reproductive politics, abortion does not encapsulate the entirety of women's reproductive experiences but protection of legalized abortion has been the most visible activity associated with reproductive rights organizations. In a few decades, abortion specifically transformed from an issue not addressed on presidential platforms to a divisive moral issue that determines how many constituents vote (Daynes & Tatalovich, 1992). The 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that decriminalized abortion was the result of decades of activism by both feminist activists and the medical community. Since then, mainstream pro-choice organizations have remained in lockstep battle with the pro-life movement. Reproductive rights organizations have had to continue to work to protect a ruling based on privacy and freedom from government interference that legal scholars debated as extremely flawed (Balkin, 2005). The *Roe* ruling led to an almost overnight shift in consciousness for many pro-life advocates who quickly committed themselves to developing a cohesive countermovement movement to repeal this major win for what was understood as the "abortion rights" movement (Luker, 1985). After the 1989 *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* decision, the National Right to Life Committee began a concerted campaign to restrict abortion through enacting laws limiting access (Tribe, 1990).² In response, powerful reproductive rights groups narrowed their focus to maintenance of *Roe v. Wade* while battling for territory against the pro-life movements, which polls and popular media suggest continue to gain an increasing share of the "hearts and minds" of the U.S. public (Bazelon, 2010).

With abortion remaining one of the most contentious issues in contemporary politics, in practice, many other reproductive concerns remain peripheral to the mainstream agenda. However, the limitations of a movement focus on abortion and protecting "choice" have not only been a concern for women of color as demonstrated by critical analyses provided by White allies. For example, long time reproductive activist-scholar Fried (1990) observed:

In trying to hold onto past gains, the pro-choice movement has failed to pursue new ones, either by solidifying its own membership or speaking out to the public. *Roe v. Wade* was not the first step of a feminist agenda for reproductive control; it turned out to be the *only* step, defended by appeals to the right to privacy – the importance of keeping the government out of our personal lives – and to religious tolerance. (p. 6)

This emphasis fits with how many Americans feel is the ideal way for a government to interact with its citizens: with limited interference.

The second issue is the relationship between identity and movement development, a challenge that movements explicitly engaging with identity have faced in recent decades. Multiple scholars (Bernstein, 2005; Hunt & Benford, 2004; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Taylor & Whittier, 1992) have examined the link between (collective) identity and participation in a range of movements. More specific work has examined how race and gender identity shape movement recruitment (Irons, 1998), framing choices (White, 1999), leadership roles (Barnett, 1993), organizational forms and tactics (Poster, 1995), and daily interactions within social movement organizations (Ostrander, 1999; Ward, 2004).

Social movement organizations arrange their views of social problems and solutions through frames, ideally aligning them with the individuals' interpretations of social problems so people are attracted to those social movement organizations (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Despite the popularity of "rights talk," and use of rights frames to mobilize supporters, they can represent the preferred tactic of movement elites who, in arguing for rights, miss opportunities to use alternative frames offered by marginal social movement supporters that could resonate beyond said elites (Hull, 2001).

In discussing the cultural resources available for social movement frame development, Zald (1996) noted:

"A woman's body is her own," frames a problem and suggests a policy direction for women in relation to abortion policy and the medical establishment. But it makes sense only in a cultural discourse that highlights notions of individual autonomy and equality of citizenship rights: autonomy because it focuses upon individual choice, equality because it presumes women are equal citizens. (p. 267)

This brings us to the problem with the continued approach toward reproduction taken by mainstream reproductive rights organizations. The language of reproductive rights has cultural resonance with many women who have evidence that, but for their gender, they could participate fully in society. However, when we ask the question to which “culture” women feel they belong, the limits of emphasis on rights and autonomy emerge. An individual focus around reproduction highlights the feminist principle of women needing to be able to control their own bodies to control their lives. Yet, this focus on denial of choice to have an abortion fails to address how marginalized communities have historically been denied the choice to have children. The myriad of ways some women’s childbearing has been historically encouraged (and continues to be) while others were not, is one of the larger questions contemporary reproductive justice activists have continued to neglect. Continued critical analysis about the role race, gender, and other social identities in social movements is needed to understand the limits of particular rights strategies in attracting social movement participants. Concerns around the privileging of dominant social groups in movements to the exclusion of less privileged groups are central to understanding the development of the reproductive justice movement.

The example of forced sterilization illuminates how these underlying issues intersected to propel the development of the reproductive justice movement to move beyond abortion politics and address a range of reproductive issues. While record keeping varies, some statistics show that upwards of 150,000 women were forcibly sterilized annually with the support of the federal government as late as the 1970s (Roberts, 1997).³ In the 1970s, some particularly startling cases of forced sterilization made national headlines, such as that of the 12 and 14 year old Relf sisters (*Relf vs. Weinberger*). Medical personal administered birth control to the sisters, who had mental disabilities. The sisters were eventually sterilized with the “consent” of their illiterate mother, who was told her daughters were receiving additional birth control. The response to the revelations of these and other cases of unwitting sterilization varied to some degree amongst women along lines of race and class, demonstrating the complexity of the underlying implications of these situations. Many African American, Latina, and poor White women organized campaigns for explicit informed consent and mandatory waiting periods because many other women who had been sterilized were coerced through financial inducements (e.g., requiring sterilization to obtain welfare benefits) or had the decision made for them (e.g., as in the case of Relf sisters or of women who were sterilized by doctors immediately after childbirth) (Gutiérrez, 2008; Schoen, 2005).

Middle-class White women, on the other hand, found that when they tried to be sterilized, paternalistic doctors doubted their decision and would impede the process.

In 1970s New York, these differing experiences resulted in organizations like the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse proposing guidelines that they felt would reduce coercion. National organizations, NARAL, and Planned Parenthood, however, opposed those suggested guidelines (Roberts, 1997). For many of the women who were supporters of NARAL, Planned Parenthood, and NOW, increased consent procedures would add another barrier to controlling their fertility.

While sterilization had the same medical consequence for these groups of women – termination of possibilities of future childbearing – the reproductive concerns of women of different statuses varied due to complex racial and class dynamics that impact public health policy. Using this historical example, we see how the reproductive justice movement, while still maintaining autonomy from the reproductive rights movement which has emphasized legal activities and attention to the courts, is influenced by and sometimes been in opposition to the expressed reproductive concerns of racially and economically marginalized women.

DATA AND METHODS

In 2007, I began a formal study of SisterSong Women of Colour Reproductive Health Collective (SisterSong).⁴ However, due to SisterSong’s structure, my data (from interviews, document analysis, and participant observation) produced a broader study of the reproductive justice movement.

In 1997, the Atlanta-based SisterSong coalition was founded by 16 organizations equally representing African American/Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latina, and Native American women. Since then, the coalition has grown to include Arab American/Middle Eastern women and caucuses for men of color and white allies. The coalition is composed of over 80 women-of-color-focused member organizations (e.g., state-wide organizations such as California Latinas for Reproductive Justice to local organizations such as Tewa Women United, an indigenous women’s organization in New Mexico), and ally organizations that serve but are not exclusively focused on or led by women of color (e.g., Choice USA and Planned Parenthood Federation of America). In addition to organizations, the coalition includes hundreds of individual dues-paying members. People can subscribe to the

listserv without formal membership. The name was changed to SisterSong Women of Colour Reproductive Justice Collective in 2010.

The 55 semi-structured interviews focused on interviewees' relationships to reproductive justice activities and SisterSong, their understanding of concepts such as reproductive justice, and perspectives on social issues. The interviewees came from many types of organizations. Some organizations identified themselves as reproductive justice organizations (e.g., through mission statement) and others did not, in part for reasons that are briefly discussed below in the results section. Interviewees largely identified as women (54), with one identifying as a transgender man. Interviewees ranged from 20 to 56 years old at the time of the interview. Twenty-eight interviewees identified as Black/African American, 9 as Chicana/Latina, 9 as white, 7 as Asian/Pacific Islander and 2 as Native American. All but three interviewees had completed at least a college degree.

I met over half of the interviews at SisterSong events before the interview. Because interviewees lived throughout the United States (15 states and Washington, DC), many interviews were conducted over the phone. After the interview, interviewees received the transcript and were given the opportunity to provide clarification, to make it anonymous or remove portions of the interview. The majority of interviewees approved use of their transcript including real names, but a name in quotes designates a pseudonym. With permission of interviewees, organization names are provided to demonstrate the range of organizations represented in my sample, but the names do not indicate official organization positions unless stated explicitly.

Primary documents were collected from the Sophia Smith Collection, the SisterSong national office and organizations. I also conducted over 170 hours of participant observation at SisterSong events and in the national office. These events included national membership meetings and conferences, workshops, and volunteering in the national office. Interviews and select documents were coded using Atlas.ti. I first coded for broad themes. Within those themes, I coded for similarities and differences in responses. I took notes during participant observation and logged those into my data management program noting how the observation supported or contradicted the other data. In the next three sections, I discuss the development of the reproductive justice movement, the role of identity in the movement and concerns raised by activists about co-optation of reproductive justice by other sectors of the women's movement.

“YOU’RE SORT OF INVISIBLE”: EXCLUSION AND THE RE-CLAIMING OF REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS WORK

In examining feminist activism beginning in the 1960s, Benita Roth (2004) argued that Black and Chicana women developed feminist movements in response to challenges they faced in both movements for racial/ethnic equality and in interaction with other movements leading to multiple feminisms rather than a unified “second wave.” This history influenced the development of the reproductive justice movement.

In the 1980s, Loretta Ross organized the first Women of Colour and Reproductive Rights conference when she was working as Director of Women of Colour Programs at the NOW. The workshops at this 1987 conference focused on topics such as racism in the pro-choice movement, Medicaid funding for poor women, genetic technology, and men's roles in the movement. The conference was advertised as “for and about” women of color, about 400 of whom attended. A group of pro-life women of color that were picketing the conference were invited in for discussion with attendees, suggesting a willingness to engage in dialogue with the “opposition.” After this conference, various networks of women of color working in the reproductive rights movement were developed but none had the longevity or success of the coalition under study. While the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this chapter, social movement scholars (Roth, 2010) are beginning to explore how, for some groups, decisions to join coalitions extend beyond strategic calculations to further individual organizational interests, because they are intricately linked to social identities.

The term “reproductive justice” is traced to a 1994 meeting of a Black women's caucus during an Illinois pro-choice conference, when they defined it as “reproductive health integrated into social justice” (Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, 2005; SisterSong, 2006). In 1995, Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice wrote President Clinton in support of Henry Foster's nomination as surgeon general. Some women from that coalition participated in the formal women of color delegation to the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing where they learned about gains women in other countries were able to achieve using an international human rights framework. Two years later, with input of some of the same coalition members and Beijing participants, SisterSong Women of Colour Reproductive Health Collective formed.

While initially focused on building capacity of its member organizations, SisterSong expanded its focus to other organizations and movement building. Its first conference in 2003 brought together hundreds of women of color in what “Jayne,” an Asian Pacific Islander interviewee, described as a “homecoming event.” At this conference, many women of color, from throughout the country, working on reproductive rights issues used analyses that often challenged the underlying assumptions of mainstream reproductive rights groups. For women of color feeling excluded from other spaces, this conference, and others like it, provided an opportunity to strategize on their own terms.

Recent research has drawn attention to how movement actors use storytelling to exaggerate their influence (Meyer, 2006) and to increase frame resonance (Polletta, 2006). My results reveal the degree to which movement stories can exclude or lead to non-resonance of frames. Like many people who become involved in movements, like-mindedness was a key factor in interviewees’ interest in reproductive justice activities. Thus, the question of whose voices are (not) heard in reproductive rights activism is a major concern to reproductive justice activists. Many interviewees emphasized that the reproductive justice movement attracted them in part because it was composed of people “like me,” whose experiences more closely mirrored their own than mainstream group members’ did. Amy, a Latina who serves as the Executive Director Pro-Choice Public Education Project reflected:

And I think for a long time the reproductive health and rights movement has made people feel that if your story doesn’t match mine exactly the way I want it to, then you don’t have a place here ... if you don’t vote certain ways ... engage in certain activities, like, again, you’re sort of invisible.

Multiple interviewees were aware of what they felt was the common story about becoming engaged in mainstream reproductive rights work in that, when explaining their path to reproductive justice, they prefaced it by saying theirs was not the typical story.

Many interviewees articulated feeling that experiences similar to theirs had not been effectively integrated into the reproductive rights movement, thus their experiences were not reflected in the legislation fought for by the movement. There have been visible women of color participating in mainstream women’s organizations and specifically reproductive rights work for decades. For example, in 1978 when Faye Wattleton was elected president of Planned Parenthood, the election was significant because she was the first woman to serve as president since Margaret Sanger had led

decades prior. She was the first (and only) African American to lead the organization and at 34 years old, the youngest. At the time, Wattleton felt the organization needed to “return to its original purpose and activist roots” (Wattleton, 1996, p. 178–9).⁵ Stories like Wattleton’s demonstrate that women of diverse racial backgrounds have indeed influenced major mainstream reproductive rights and health organizations. Still, these stories do not appear to be able to counteract the contemporary interpretation by movement participants of continued exclusions from, or isolation within, reproductive rights and health organizations.

This perceived and real exclusion potentially stems from the unintended consequences of strategic decisions made by mainstream women’s organizations. In her work comparing frame resonance in the United States and Germany, Ferree’s (2003) interviews with leaders of Feminist Majority Foundation, NARAL, and NOW revealed how many of their strategic decisions resulted in consistent marginalization of women of racial minorities. This was most clearly by a consultant for the “core” (mainstream) organizations who “detailed efforts to address women of colour and specifically acknowledged that ‘the things that the groups decide not to go after are those things that affect poor women, a disproportionate number of whom are women of colour’” (1998 as cited in Ferree, 2003, p. 331). More recent research in political science (Strolovitch, 2006) has demonstrated that a range of national advocacy groups focused on marginalized populations (e.g., women, racial minorities) focused on issues that they *interpreted* as affecting the majority of their membership base. In the case of women’s organizations, leaders were significantly more likely to say that issues that affected advantaged subgroups (e.g., affirmative action) affected all their members than they were to say the same about issues that affected disadvantaged subgroups (e.g., welfare reform). Thus, their activities were more likely to be concentrated on the issues facing their relatively advantaged members.

Multiple interviewees working in reproductive rights organizations saw this historical marginalization of issues as having continued consequences in the women’s movement. Katherine, a bi-racial Black/White woman who served as the State Program Director of the Center for Reproductive Rights, explained:

[T]he reason the reproductive justice movement has come about and why it’s so important is it recognizes that, for those folks that are in the margin, they’re not always protected by the law ... the U.S. constitution doesn’t recognize poverty as a protected class. And there are concessions that the reproductive rights movement has made at the detriment of poor women and who are disproportionately women of colour.

Katherine mentions poverty specifically as a reason some people may not receive the benefits of laws because the law can only address concerns of certain classes of people. Thus, a more inclusive reproductive justice analysis is not constrained by the narrowness of a legal strategy aimed at protecting abortion rights, a strategy that cannot include everyone because the law does not allow for those considerations. The movement provided space for multiple stories (e.g., experiences) excluded by the mainstream narrow focus. In the next section, I discuss how my interviewees conceptualized the nuances of reproductive justice as a frame and movement.

“WITH REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE, IT’S THE ENTIRE PERSON”: HOW ACTIVISTS DIFFERENTIATE REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Many of the activists I interviewed, including those who identified as white and/or were affiliated with organizations that explicitly defined their work as reproductive rights, understood reproductive *rights* as based on the experiences of white, middle-class women. In this understanding, they also defined reproductive rights work as “mainstream.” This contrasted with reproductive *justice*, which most interviewees described as related but distinct from reproductive rights.

While interviewees constructed reproductive justice in many ways, common themes emerged from the descriptions. First, reproductive justice extends beyond reproductive rights and “choice” because it emphasizes how diverse social identities influence access to rights in an unjust society, including reproductive rights:

1. When I think of reproductive health, I think of the entire body. With reproductive justice it’s the entire person, it’s the entire aspect of being a woman and dealing with society, culture. (Thalia, Latina, Marketing Coordinator, Feminist Women’s Health Center)
2. [I]t’s more about intersectionality of issues that affect women and reproduction than just about the laws that affect reproduction. So all the other parts that come into our decisions or our lack of decisions around reproduction, so class stuff, race stuff, disability stuff, ethnicity stuff, language, access, I mean all these things that have effects on how we have children and don’t have children and how we make those decisions, I think. And also understanding that like laws only mean so much and that there’s a lot more to life than if something is legal or not legal. (Dessa, White, former Lead Organizer with a state Planned Parenthood)

Interviewees perceived the reproductive justice movement as more diverse due to the movement being composed of and led by visible women of color,

youth, queer people, people with disabilities, and immigrants (leaders who at events often vocally identified themselves as members of more than one of these groups). Following from that, interviewees understood a focus on marginalized people as another core principle of reproductive justice as both a frame and movement. As described by Gabriel, Black transgender youth organizer with a Southern reproductive justice organization, reproductive justice was “doing the like sexy action work and ... mobilizing people quickly to fend off ... and then at the same time you’re doing the long-term like relationship building, community building, policy building ... [while] people at the margins ... are actually doing that work.” Others echoed the importance moving marginal voice to the center of movements.

When I describe RJ, I talk about it as a framework or an analysis where I’m looking at the multiple realities of women, and women of colour in particular ... making sure that ... the ones who are most affected by an issue are also the ones who are leading the solution to that ... I think it’s important to note it’s a movement that’s also rooted in a human rights and social justice frameworks, where you work, you start building from the community level. (“Lin,” Asian/Pacific Islander, formerly with a national minority women’s organization)

According to Gabriel and Lin, reproductive justice should focus on the people most affected by policy decisions, often people with intersecting subordinated identities, should be engaging in the work to create social change. Interviewees regularly contrasted this approach to that of mainstream organizations that focus on current legislative targets. Some interviewees suggest that electoral work is important but leaves out populations that cannot vote, such as minors and undocumented immigrants. Furthermore, this type of work is of limited appeal to their many community members who are disillusioned with the possibilities of (short-term) electoral politics to create positive change.

Thus, reproductive justice activists challenge mainstream organizations’ choices that they feel can lead to short-term political gain but consistently marginalize some communities. The many issues on which reproductive justice activists organize that have not traditionally been on the agenda of the aforementioned reproductive rights and health groups exemplify this. For example, groups such as Rebecca Project for Human Rights, National Advocates for Pregnant Women, and SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW have worked on anti-shackling legislation that would prohibit the use of restraints on incarcerated women giving birth. While states such as California, Texas, and Washington banned the use of restraints during birth, 40 states still allow or do not explicitly prohibited shackling, a situation receiving attention in recent popular media (see Hsu, 2010, for coverage of the

issue by National Public Radio). These types of campaigns provide activists opportunities to connect reproductive issues to various forms of inequality while developing relationships with the broader swath of the population, including legislators. The emphasis in the reproductive justice movement on moving marginal people's voices to the center serves as a call to engagement in prefigurative politics (Breines, 1980). Movement participants suggest that to produce a more just society, the movements working to create the change must integrate more just internal practices as well.

Of note is that while interviewees often discussed how the reproductive rights movement's continual emphasis on legal access to abortion left out many of their concerns, many had mobilized in support of abortion access. For example, the November 2009 SisterSong meeting that some interviewees attended coincided with when the Stupak-Pitts Amendment to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was up for a vote. After a half-day of information gathering and deliberation, on the Saturday evening of the conference 300 attendees visited legislators about their opposition to the Stupak-Pitts amendment and amendments to restrict immigrants' access to health care. On Monday, the planned lobby day, many visited legislative offices to discuss inclusion of reproductive health care and culturally appropriate health care provision. In December 2009, SisterSong organized a delegation of 50 participants from the U.S. South to lobby in opposition to the Stupak-Pitts Amendment (SisterSong, 2010). SisterSong's National Coordinator, Loretta Ross, noted the high participation of women of color specifically would not have been possible without years of reproductive justice organizing (Ross, 2010, personal interview), for which the electorally-focused approach of many national organizations does not allow.

EXPANSIVE LIVES: IDENTITY AND CONTINUED CONSTRAINTS IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Having discussed emergence of the reproductive justice and its framing of reproductive issues, I now move to more extended discussion of the role of identity in the women's movement as it relates specifically to the reproductive justice movement.

When reflecting on the roots of reproductive justice, interviewees noted the interplay between identities in reproductive justice. "Inez," a Chicana/Native American/white woman who worked as a community doula suggested, "Reproductive justice work has to come from a place of having a frank

recognition of oppression that exists and doing that assessment on many lines of oppression." As was present in multiple interviews, here we see an emphasis on active systemic oppression that produces unjust conditions (rather than accidental inequality). This interviewee went on to note that reproductive justice work also focused on conditions of mothering in a way that reproductive rights work, which focused on abortion rights, did not. Another interviewee felt that the reproductive justice movement's emphasis on multiple aspects of a person's life was more congruent with her life experience:

This movement allows me to be like one hundred percent. And also I feel like it prepares me to do that cross-movement building work that we need to do ... And for some people that really means like 'oh, it's so broad' And I think that's something that's so funny. It's like our lives are so broad ... how could you think about working in a movement that wasn't so expansive when your own life is so expansive? (Paris, African American, Executive Director, SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW)

Even though the reproductive justice movement was founded by women of color, multiple White interviewees also noted that reproductive justice encouraged them to reflect on their multiple identities including race. This simultaneous engagement of identities is not easy, but this is what is actively worked toward rather than held as an ideal to achieve once the work of keeping abortion legal is done.

The gap between ideals and practice documented in other movements poses a challenge in the reproductive justice movement as well. Yet, in many ways reproductive justice organizations occupy a better position to move the women's movement forward than do reproductive rights and health organizations that have historically been at the helm of the women's movement. In the experience of interviewees, mainstream women's organizations have yet to address successfully issues of race. However, in reproductive justice organizations, which address race as it intersects with gender and class, there is less intramovement conflict around these particularly salient identities (although it remains). Conflicts do exist around areas such as sexuality, disability, and immigration status among others. However, for many people coming into reproductive justice work these appear to be newer areas of exploration of personal identity, particularly if they are privileged along these axes. Since participants are actively learning about new ways to understand these issues *in* reproductive justice spaces, newer participants perceive the reproductive justice movements as a safer space to grow personally and contribute to a movement in their own way rather than having to fit in a movement created based on what appears to be someone else's (relatively privileged) experience.

As Oliver (1989) has reminded us, different wings of movements do not control, but rather influence each other. Others have noted that the organizations working within the same movement develop niches, yet remain structurally interdependent (Levitsky, 2007). In part due to a widely circulated position paper by Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, reproductive justice activists sometimes differentiate reproductive justice in similar ways. Specifically, they identified reproductive justice as part of a trio of larger movement strategies through which reproductive health providers focus on services, reproductive rights proponents work through courts, and reproductive justice activists organize with communities to change oppressive structures that manifest in reproductive oppression (see Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, 2005). Organizations working within these three wings of the women's movement agree that reproductive freedom remains an elusive goal and have developed strategies for addressing this problem based on their constituency and expertise.

Reproductive justice activists are increasingly unwilling to accept organizations in the other niches continuing to operate, without integrating some aspects of reproductive justice into their practice. Multiple interviewees, including those currently employed in mainstream organizations, provided unprompted descriptions of examples of these practices and either unsuccessful attempts to disrupt such practices, or unwillingness to attempt to disrupt them because they were so ingrained in the organizational history. Practically, women and men from a range of social groups can benefit from legal victories of NOW or health care services offered by Planned Parenthood. The concern raised by many interviewees (and other data sources) was not about marginal population being clients of organizations (although some interviewees raised this concern). Rather, there was a questioning of how these marginal populations were integrated into organizational structure. One interviewee pointed out what she perceived as the hypocrisy of working for the state office of a mainstream organization that had images of women from different racial background on its website, but only had one Black woman working there (her, as an intern). Interviewees again echoed the importance of identity when assessing organizational structures implicitly and other times explicitly: Are women of color consistently working in positions of power by serving on boards and guiding overall vision and strategy, or do they remain in positions with little influence on the organization such as receptionists and interns? Do queer people feel welcome in this space? Can young people contribute their ideas beyond one meeting in which they provide "the youth" perspective?

Scholars have become increasingly interested in how social ties determine movement participation (Cable, 1992; Diani & McAdam, 2003). Particular participants are recruited into movements, reproducing that movement's perspectives and practices. Part of what appealed to interviewees was the feeling that they were finally at the center of a movement, something the reproductive rights movement cannot claim for its history appears to rest primarily on the experiences of white women. Individuals within reproductive rights and reproductive health organizations can be sympathetic to a reproductive justice approach and be inspired to use elements of the analysis in their work. Interviewees suggest, however, that the foundation and organizing principles of these types of organizations would have to change to embody the reproductive justice principles many interviewees valued. Such change is difficult when decades of their organizational tactics and strategies stem from assumptions about the political world and have seeped into organizational practice, which multiple interviewees provided unprompted examples of during the interview.⁶

In the next section, I discuss increasing concerns by reproductive justice activists of co-optation of its frame and movement, leading to a discussion on the implications for the women's movement.

**"I'M SCARED THAT IT'S GONNA BE CO-OPTED
BY RADICAL, PRIVILEGED WHITE WOMEN":
CO-OPTATION OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE
BY THE MAINSTREAM?**

While academic literature has only begun to contend with these changes in ideas and language around reproduction,⁷ activists have noted that more organizations have become interested in this language of reproductive justice. As an example of this growth, at the first U.S. Social Forum in 2007, a multi-day gathering of over 10,000 progressive activists, "reproductive justice" was in the title of four workshops sponsored by three different organizations. When the second Forum occurred in 2010, eight different organizations sponsored eight presentations with "reproductive justice" in the title. Only one of the sponsoring organizations – SisterSong – presented at both of the Forums, suggesting an increased interest in the language and concept by activists. In 2007, the national organization Law Students for Choice changed its name (and therefore the names of its 80 chapters) to Law Students for Reproductive Justice after much deliberation "to more

accurately reflect the spirit of our intersectional perspectives, inclusive values, and collaborative strategies, as well as the substance of our work” (Law Students for Reproductive Justice, 2009).

While the term has become more common, the reasons for this are varied, and usage of a term does not mean understanding its origins. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the role of the 2004 March for Women’s Lives in increasing the usage of the phrase, “reproductive justice,” by mainstream women’s organizations (Luna, 2010). Interviewees expressed concern over what they perceived as co-optation by other women’s organizations, particularly mainstream organizations that were founded by White women and continue to be led by them or their successors. As these mainstream organizations continue to battle their own decline in membership, they seek new approaches to increasing visibility, as do all social movement organization when faced with such a problem. Since the more inclusive approach of reproductive justice is attracting new constituencies to reproductive justice organizations, the terminology would reasonably appeal to mainstream organizations looking for ways to maintain relevance. Mainstream reproductive rights organizations’ use of “reproductive justice” is likely not intended to demobilize the reproductive justice movement as social movement scholars understand co-optation in relation to the state. Interviewees from a range of organizations, however, echoed each other in expressing anxieties about co-optation.

One interviewee shared her observations of reproductive rights organizations developing relationships with questionable political allies:

[A] lot of the other pro-choice organizations were co-opting the term reproductive justice ... switching it in and out for “pro-choice” and just saying, “Oh, yeah, we do reproductive justice work,” but still being led by these like 50 year old, 60 year old White women who really just want to wine and dine conservative ... or liberal Republicans and thinking that that’s reproductive justice work and not reflecting any type of like diversity in their staff ... and just kind of having a revolving door of, you know, tokens really. (Mia, Asian/Pacific Islander, co-director, Georgians for Choice)⁸

Another interviewee saw mainstream organizations’ use of “reproductive justice” as creating negative feelings between organizations:

Reproductive justice is the phrase of the day ... And I think it’s quite, actually, to be honest, offensive when many of the national rights and health organizations in the reproductive spaces say that they’re RJ when they’re not. And I think that that’s created a lot of tensions within the community when the RJ term is co-opted. (“Karin,” Black, national reproduction health and rights organization)

Some reproductive justice activists may find what they see as nonchalant usage of “reproductive justice” particularly frustrating in light of to their

own organizational deliberations about the term. A couple of interviewees discussed how their organization had significant conversations reflecting on whether their work was “real” reproductive justice work, and being cautious about using the term if they were doing work that to them looked more like that of a reproductive rights group (e.g., legal advocacy). One interviewee whose organization was having this conversation observed:

And I think the future of reproductive justice can look any way we want it to be, which has its pros and cons. You know, I’m scared that it’s gonna be co-opted by radical, privileged White women, as they are starting to use the language a lot more when the language was created because ... women of colour weren’t at those tables, and our full identities weren’t considered when at those tables. (Zahra, Black, Associate Director, Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health)

There are visible concerns about who is doing work that is labeled reproductive justice. The invocation of fear of co-optation is a reminder that frames are embedded with emotions, as are disputes about them. These tensions have the potential to derail efforts at coalition building within the women’s movement. While there are explicit concerns about the ideas of women of color being co-opted by mainstream organization, there are White allies who consciously reflect on their status in the reproductive justice movement.

Owing to the leaders’ purposeful inclusion of many voices and linkages with other movements, the reproductive justice movement has to some degree shifted away from binary representations of reproductive issues. However, a potential consequence of co-optation by other wings of the women’s movement is the dilution of the meaning of reproductive justice, as in flux as this meaning may be. However, a potential consequence of what some perceive as internal co-optation is the potential to dilute the power of the movement by leading external audiences, such as pro-life organizations, to believe the concept refers to the same established movement they have been fighting for decades. In this case, by using reproductive justice to describe what is essentially reproductive rights, we end up with pro-life organizations criticizing “reproductive justice” when they are actually criticizing “reproductive rights.” For example, an article titled “Hey Feminists, Reproductive Justice means Supporting Women, Not Abortion” (Polak, 2010) criticized NOW’s emphasis on abortion on the “reproductive justice” page of its website. Luna (2010) has discussed elsewhere how this page and others on the NOW website that use the term “reproductive justice” actually support narrower reproductive rights efforts (e.g., focused on courts) not the expanded idea of reproductive justice to which activists such as my interviewees refer (Luna, 2010).

Support of motherhood *is* a major part of reproductive justice activism, and pro-life and reproductive justice advocates agree there should be more support for them, albeit from different ideological bases. When reproductive justice appears to be defined as narrowly as “reproductive rights” due to usage by organizations that focus on a narrow set of reproductive concerns, the terms of the debate become once again about abortion. The pro-life movement is not the primary audience of the reproductive justice movement and pro-life activists would likely not appreciate the pro-choice and pro-sex stance of many reproductive justice activists. However, pro-life advocates might be surprised to learn that some large reproductive justice organizations such as SisterSong have created space for pro-life perspectives in national publications and public events, in part because they believe that women of color want culturally relevant spaces in which to discuss their range of experiences and feelings around reproductive issues. A founding member of SisterSong who serves on the board wrote a piece for the newsletter in 2004 describing her regret about her abortion and her experiences as “an anti-abortionist” midwife. At SisterSong’s national conferences for reproductive justice activists, the National Coordinator Loretta Ross reminded the audience that not all of the people in the room support abortion, but that these women will not be silenced in the reproductive justice movement as they have been in the reproductive rights movement.

Co-optation of movement frames is perhaps inevitable as frames align successfully enough to garner attention of proximate movements. In this case, data from interviews and participant observation suggest that when identities are integral to framing and strategic choices, co-optation can be perceived by movement participants as attempts to re-marginalize the very people who developed the ideas because of the frame.

In the final section, I discuss how mainstream organizations can employ strategies of the reproductive justice movement while acknowledging reproductive justice activists concerns about defining the boundaries of the frame and movement participation.

WHAT REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE OFFERS TO REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND OTHER MOVEMENTS

In this chapter, I began by demonstrating how grassroots movement participants understand the concept of “reproductive justice.” Most

understood the concept as referring to work developed and led by socially marginalized communities of color, commitment to long-term organizing (not only short-term mobilization), and focus on a range of issues, not just abortion. As they discussed, using the phrase “reproductive justice” to refer to “reproductive rights” or “reproductive health” was not a matter of misnaming but a lack of recognition of the troubled history of reproductive rights and health activism that led marginalized women to a move toward reproductive justice.

Reproductive rights organizations that are led by White women of the self-described “postmenopausal militia,” or appear to be focused on issues that mostly affect privileged women, could remain at a continued disadvantage without adjusting their own practices. Social movement scholars have shown that identification with a movement often requires some sense of a shared identity, concerns about injustice faced by that identity, and a commitment to working on behalf of that identity (Mansbridge & Morris, 2001).

For some movement participants, organizing around reproductive rights fails to provide enough gratification in this case in part because in a politically hostile climate in which the pro-life movement has made visible gains, pro-choice wins are often closer to re-establishment of the prior conditions rather than a tangible gain (e.g., prohibiting clinic protesters from blocking clinic doors.) The costs to the reproductive rights movement have been both financial in continued litigation and loss on the ground support. When movements are no longer providing enough gratification and commitment declines, participants are more likely to leave a movement (Klandermans, 2004).

With the emphasis on the right to *not* have children, reproductive rights organizations can leave unaddressed an array of concerns that reproductive justice activists have taken up under the right to have children (e.g., for low-income women, for queer people) and the right to parent children one already has (e.g., for incarcerated people). This expands the lens to consider what economic and social conditions would be required to raise families (such as jobs that pay a living wage), which, activists argue, would benefit whole communities and not only individual women. Reproductive rights organizations’ activities continue to rest on a shared identity as women, whereas reproductive justice advocates emphasize that women (and men) are also categorized by race, class, and the like. While some reproductive rights organizations have made arguments that abortion rights are essential to reproductive freedom for all women, whether they reproduce or not, they appear to have made little progress making convincing arguments that draw in a wider audience.

Since each organization has its own niche to fill by drawing on its strengths, reproductive rights and health organizations do not need to rush to re-name their work “reproductive justice” and risk further alienating marginalized women. However, based on these data, it appears that using some of the approaches of the reproductive justice movement, it is possible these social movement organizations and those in other movements can strengthen their own efforts without increasing intramovement tensions. This would be done by organizations vocally acknowledging missteps of their own movements, continually assessing their inclusivity or a range of axes, strategizing within and across movement sectors to develop coalitions, and actively linking lived personal experience to a range of political realities.

On the first point, a major concern of interviewees was a lack of mainstream organizations’ ownership of their histories. Organizations understandably shy away from discussing their “dirty laundry,” but newer participants often became aware of these missteps through discussions with other participants or reading critiques of these mainstream organizations. Thus, reproductive justice participants were frustrated if not offended by reproductive rights organizations not discussing concerns like incongruent organization practices (e.g., organizations that do not have adequate health care for their own employees who are organizing for increased access for other people). In the case of highly visible organizations like Planned Parenthood, there was frustration over a refusal to acknowledge not just a past relationship to eugenics, but continued fear of eugenics among African Americans that makes campaigns such as a recent one Georgia equating Black women obtaining abortions with genocide, compelling.

On the second point, systematic and systemic efforts at inclusion at all levels of their social movement organizations and re-evaluation of success at efforts would benefit social movement organizations interested in long-term viability. While researchers agree that a major question for the women’s movement continues to be how to integrate racially diverse constituencies (Roth, 2008), reproductive justice activists attempts to make various forms of diversity the foundation of their work rather than something to integrate into a pre-set agenda. In her discussion on the gay identity movement and criticism it faced from White lesbians, and gays and lesbians of color who felt the movement did not represent their needs, Armstrong (2002) notes that exclusion in movement fields is inevitable. Previous generations of women of color activists and their White allies developed the reproductive justice movement based on their need for a space in which their lived experience would be prioritized. They are providing a space for women (of color) who feel excluded by common strategy of reproductive health and

rights organizations. As this case demonstrates, eventually marginal groups can tire of engaging with the mainstream on its terms and find ways to create their own power base through whole other movements. Thus, movements must recognize that dismissing marginal voices can come with higher costs in the long-term as those voices become more powerful.

On the third point, the case of reproductive justice movement highlights the importance of intra and inter-movement coalitions to draw in more participants. Their coalition work is based on longer-term relationship development in communities about issues that concern them, not just specific legislation. For example, the intersections between environmental degradation and reproductive health are a regular topic of conversation at Environmental Justice/Reproductive Justice Collaborative meetings. Causes in Common meetings occur regularly between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender activists, and reproductive justice activists. This allows for potential development of networks that, while not explicitly strategic in the short-term, are available should they need to be activated.

On the final point, a reason for appeal of the reproductive justice movement is that it returns to the roots of the women’s movement by focusing on lived experience. During the Second Wave of feminism, “the personal is political” was reiterated through consciousness-raising sessions. While many women’s organizations moved toward professionalization and abandoned this process long ago, they may have been too hasty. Because reproductive justice analysis, as interviewees understood it, focuses on lived experience, participants felt more connected and therefore committed to the work. All of this has helped to pique interest and commitment to reproductive issues, and if used to reconfigure other movement niches, will help build a stronger women’s movement that more effectively represents a range of women. Doing so potentially builds a stronger political base from which to make broad-based social change, increasing possibilities for movement success.

NOTES

1. Throughout the chapter, I refer to “mainstream” women’s organizations. The majority of my interviewees mentioned specific national organizations that have state and local affiliates when referring to “mainstream” (e.g., Feminist Majority Foundation, NARAL, NOW and Planned Parenthood). Organizations such as these have endured internal struggles about (racial) diversity and how mainstream or radical they are or should be [e.g., Barakso’s (2004) account of NOW]. When probed about *who* composed the “mainstream” the most common description provided by

interviewees was White and middle class. Interviewee's terminology is used in other cases, for example with racial or gender identification.

2. Pro-life advocates have arguably made more gains through the courts and legislature than their pro-choice counterparts have. In 1976 the Hyde Amendment was passed, restricting federal funds for abortion. Medicaid recipients, federal employees, and military personnel were now some of the groups that could not obtain abortion through health care due to Hyde. The amendment, which was challenged and upheld in *Harris v. McRae*, is attached to the federal budget and renewed each year. Pro-choice advocates argue that recent fetal personhood amendments move toward making abortion illegal by defining a fetus as a person and thus, abortion as murder. Various rulings have imposed further limits on who can obtain an abortion and when. For example, The 1992 Supreme Court ruling on *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* upheld the state's imposition of a 24-hour waiting period between counseling on abortion and obtaining the abortion and parental consent (or judicial bypass) for a minor seeking an abortion. Thirty-four states now have a combination of counseling/waiting periods and some require fetal imaging as part of the pre-abortion counseling. See Guttmacher Institute (http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib_MWPA.pdf).

3. In 2009, the North Carolina government revealed that its now-defunct state eugenics board had approved petitions from doctors, social workers and other authorities that resulted in sterilizations of 7,600 people. People sterilized were primarily women, people of color, poor people, and people with disabilities (North Carolina Department of Administration). The state is considering how to compensate the people forcibly sterilized. See NPR "Why US Continued Eugenics Program Post-Holocaust" (<http://www.npr.org/2011/06/23/137369279/why-us-continued-eugenics-programs-post-holocaust>).

4. In 2006, I conducted an interview with Loretta Ross, the National Coordinator of SisterSong for a public archive. The interview was part of my work as a research assistant on the Global Feminisms Project (see <http://www.umich.edu/~glbfem/index.html>). As I was collecting data for this project, I also completed a year-long MSW internship with a mainstream reproductive rights/health organization. Although neither were formal parts of my data collection, these experiences do inform my understanding of the activities under discussion.

5. *Roe* had only recently been decided and most Planned Parenthood health centers were not offering abortions when she became president. Wattleton felt the organization should prioritize access to abortion along with other programs such as sex education. Wattleton found that many people throughout the organization did not support abortion provisions. Even some of those who did vocally opposed Planned Parenthood becoming involved in electoral politics, through which she wanted the organization to take a stance on the Hyde Amendment. While Planned Parenthood eventually moved toward electoral work, Wattleton argues that Planned Parenthood faced an increasingly hostile political and social environment because the board took years to take the advice of a consultant that the organization focus on elections (as the pro-life movement was doing) rather than only the initial Supreme Court decision.

6. For example, one interview noted frustration that Planned Parenthood continued to bestow "Maggie" awards name for Margaret Sanger despite internal

and external discussion that her association with the eugenics movement makes her an inappropriate hero.

7. Legal scholars (Ehrenreich, 2008; West, 2009) have begun to use the term in writings that reflect on the varying impacts of court rulings and specific policies on women's reproductive lives. In international settings, Georgians for Choice was renamed SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW and is now described as a queer radical organization. (Cook & Dickens, 2009).

8. Under Mia and another interviewee's co-directorship, Georgians for Choice transitioned to what defines itself as a queer radical organization, SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW.

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