

Editors' Introduction:

Rhetorics of Reproductive Justice in Public and Civic Contexts

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As we write this introduction, George Floyd's body has just been laid to rest, protests in large and small cities around the world continue to call for the end of police violence, and the Minneapolis City Council has approved plans to defund the police. In addition to these social movements, Safer at Home orders have expired, and COVID-19 cases continue to spike in states across the nation. The suffering of Black and Brown communities is on display, and racial justice advocates are demanding action from non-Black folx. No longer can white supremacy maintain its silent power.

As three white women editors, we hear these calls and see a moral exigency to connect the oppression and killing of Black and Brown straight and trans bodies to the founding purposes of the reproductive justice movement. SisterSong, a Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective (Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice),

describes the origins of the term reproductive justice and the movement this way:

“Indigenous women, women of color, and trans* people have always fought for Reproductive Justice, but the term was invented in 1994. Right before attending the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, where the entire world agreed that the individual right to plan your own family must be central to global development, a group of black women gathered in Chicago in June of 1994. They recognized that the women’s rights movement, led by and representing middle class and wealthy white women, could not defend the needs of women of color and other marginalized women and trans* people. We needed to lead our own national movement to uplift the needs of the most marginalized women, families, and communities” (SisterSong).

Acknowledging the Black bodies and authors that founded the term reproductive justice is critical to situating this special issue. We acknowledge that the history of the reproductive justice movement is dependent on Black authors and Black voices—and we want our white readers to acknowledge it as well. We also hope that readers of this issue consider ways they can actively take up the work of reproductive justice in their homes, communities, and workplaces and build allyships with reproductive justice organizations already on the ground. In short, it’s time for non-Black folx to acknowledge and contribute to the work the Black Women of WADRJ began.

We open this special issue with cover art, an infographic and keyword statement, an annotated bibliography, and a toolkit intended to contribute to and amplify reproductive justice work. The cover art, created by Mount Mary University undergraduate art student Meg Novotny, reflects the various ways reproductive justice activism is deeply rooted in social, legal, and community spaces. Melissa Stone and Zachery Beare’s infographic and keyword statement “Technical Rhetorics and Reproductive Justice/Rights/Health” explicates differences between the terms reproductive justice, health, and rights and demonstrates how a deeper understanding of these distinct areas can inform the work of RJ activists in technical rhetorics. In “An

Annotated Bibliography on Rhetorics of Reproductive Justice,” Lori Beth De Hertogh, Maria Novotny, Kimberly Harper, Becca Evans, Philip Meador, Megan Palmer, Jamie Phlegar, and Michelle Smith provide resources for groups and individuals involved in community-focused reproductive justice advocacy. A key departure from other bibliographies in rhetoric and writing studies is the bibliography’s “Community Organizations” section, which lists over twenty organizations directly engaged in reproductive justice activism.

Unique to this special issue is a downloadable, reproductive justice toolkit, designed by Anna Edwards, a graduate student in Rhetoric & Professional Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In assembling the toolkit, we asked each author to identify specific resources and tools to prepare other rhetorical and community-engaged scholars with interests in reproductive justice scholarship. Drawing upon feminist methods, the toolkit situates each author’s relationship to the ideas and communities present in their article and offers suggestions for putting reproductive justice activism into action.

Another component of this special issue is a selection of articles that illustrate how community-engaged methods can amplify and enact reproductive justice advocacy. In “The Role of *Confianza* in Community-Engaged Work for Reproductive Justice,” Rachel Bloom-Pojar and Maria Barker offer a rich dialogue that examines how their community-engaged reproductive justice work with Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin provides reproductive and sexual health education in culturally responsive ways for multilingual communities. Their article examines how the concept of *confianza* (often translated as trust or confidence) can function beyond the literal translation when pursuing community partnerships around reproductive justice. In their multidisciplinary article entitled “We are BRAVE: Expanding Reproductive Justice Discourse through Embodied Rhetoric and Civic Practice,” Roberta Hunte and Catherine Ming Tien Duffley discuss a performative and embodied reproductive justice model based on their production of a community workshop in Oregon called “We Are BRAVE.” This piece artfully demonstrates how a community-oriented performance project can promote legislative action around

reproductive justice and how embodied storytelling can enact public and political persuasion.

This special issue also features pieces that critically reflect on the process of community collaboration within the reproductive justice movement. In their article, “Coalition Building for Reproductive Justice: Hartford as a Site of Resistance against Crisis Pregnancy Centers,” Megan Faver Hartline, Erica Crowley, Eleanor Faraguna, and Sam McCarthy draw from their community-engaged, coalitional work to demonstrate how building alliances with reproductive justice advocates can rhetorically resist deceptive pro-life narratives produced by Crisis Pregnancy Centers. To illustrate what this rhetorical activism looks like, they feature three narratives about their partnership with NARAL (a national reproductive freedom organization) and the ways they collaborated with NARAL to build reproductive justice partnerships. Jenna Vinson offers yet another approach to community-engaged, reproductive justice work in her article “Helping Everyday Rhetors Challenge Reproductive Injustice(s) in Public.” In her piece, Vinson draws from her experience in facilitating a teen empowerment and parenting workshop in Boston, Massachusetts to illustrate how community outreach events serve as critical sites of resistance to dominant narratives that position pregnant and mothering teenagers as “problems” that must be “fixed” or “solved.”

Other articles in this issue take up intersections of social and racial injustice to pregnant, laboring, and mothering bodies. Kimberly Harper’s article, “In the Fight of their Lives: Mothers of the Movement and the Pursuit of Reproductive Justice,” analyzes intersections between reproductive justice and Black motherhood by combining rhetorical ethos, counterstory, and Nommo. Using scholarly frameworks and her own lived experiences, Harper calls out the systemic injustice Black women face in trying to raise their children in safe environments as well as four specific actions advocates and allies can take to dismantle reproductive injustice. In “Complicating Acts of Advocacy: Tactics in the Birthing Room,” Shui-Yin Sharon Yam analyzes how doulas develop what she calls “soft advocacy” to support clients through labor and delivery. Yam suggests that soft advocacy is an affective embodied practice that subtly shifts existing power dynamics between clients and

medical providers, thus creating room for marginalized stakeholders and interlocutors. Brianna Cusanno and Niv Ketheeswaran offer yet another view of reproductive justice and motherhood in their piece “Rhetorics of Motherhood, Agency, and Reproductive Injustice in Healthcare Providers’ Narratives.” Using a Critical Narrative Analysis framework, they analyze how dominant narratives of motherhood naturalize cultural and racial inequalities and offer ways healthcare providers and researchers can cultivate what they call a “reflexive counterstory” to champion reproductive justice in their work.

The pieces in this special issue serve rhetorical and public scholars of reproductive justice in helping shape and define this growing research area. As readers will see, we welcomed shorter pieces and creative approaches in an effort to value methods that are reflective of public and civic contexts that directly engage in the community sites and spaces where activism occurs. Because civic and community-engaged work is messy, complex, and takes time, we circulated the CFP for the issue well before the deadline in an effort to give potential contributors more time to develop their projects.

We made careful choices in selecting these submissions; some of those choices had to do with how the pieces fit together and could thus sponsor and spur particular conversations, and we also wanted to include pieces that represent a variety of lived experiences, languages, perspectives, and backgrounds. As is often the case with special issues, not every piece that we wanted to include came to fruition. Authors, too, are impacted by the worldwide pandemic—and, we might note, those who occupy the most vulnerable identities are likely to be more severely impacted by such circumstances. Following Jung and Booher’s (2018) call to pay attention to rhetorical omissions, and acknowledging that no scholarly work can attend to every important facet of identity, we especially wish that this special issue presented more LGBTQ perspectives.

We made our selections knowing that our audience is mostly academics doing work at the intersections of RJ and civic/public/community activism with the following goals in mind:

- Move rhetorical research on reproductive issues toward community-based scholarship by emphasizing the ways and means through which organizations, groups, and communities engage reproductive rights in civic and public contexts;
- Highlight perspectives different from our own;
- Include not only academic/theoretical work but also practical work that can speak to activists;
- Avoid privileging only traditional media and/or prose (see especially the toolkit and annotated bibliography);
- Use this constellation of topics to suggest future directions for work in rhetorics of reproductive justice.

We believe the field of rhetoric has much to contribute in defense of reproductive justice. Thus, this special issue aims to demonstrate ways rhetoricians can listen, and contribute back to, existing reproductive justice work in spheres relevant to *Reflections*: public scholarship and civic engagement. We want to put rhetoricians hailing from a variety of disciplines into productive conversation with one another and to create a repository of materials that may be of use to both rhetorical scholars and the communities, activists, and allies they work with and among.

REFERENCE

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