Reproductive Justice in Communities of Color

Facilitated by Jenny Torres
Who I am

Child of immigrants
Social Work Graduate Student
Experience in medical settings translating for Hispanic patients
NARAL Pro-Choice MD Research & Policy Intern
Why Are We Here?

Consider the context of historic, cultural, political and economic roots of American feminism and its impact on advocacy, specifically in communities of color.

Understand that American conceptualizations of reproductive justice and our social policy responses to women's issues is a complex matter with competing values and interests.

Reproductive rights are centered around the legal right to access reproductive health care services.
Don't forget: White Women Voted for TRUMP
The Arrest of Dr. Kermit Gosnell for performing illegal abortions in filthy conditions, primarily to low-income minorities and immigrants

Canadian senator calls for a nationwide review of the forced sterilization of Indigenous women

Alabama Human Life Protection Act was passed (now blocked) making performing an abortion at any stage of pregnancy a felony punishable by up to 99 years or life in prison for the abortion provider.

Detained migrant girls are being denied requests for abortion
Who are Women of Color [WOC]?
An umbrella term derived from the 70’s women's liberation movement
Meant to be a unifying term amongst all female minorities that has political and social roots.
Demonstrates how the struggles of other women who fall outside the black-white binary in the American setting are inextricably linked with the oppression of others.
Not all non-white female minorities identify with this term.
What is Feminism?

The advancement of women’s rights, status, or condition as a group in both the public and private sphere.

&

The reduction or elimination of gender-based hierarchy or patriarchy that underpins basic inequalities between men and women in the public and private spheres.
The Women’s Liberation Movement

Largely based in the United States during the 1960s and ’70s that sought equal rights and greater personal freedom for women.

Part of the “second wave” of feminism

The predominant antiviolence political strategies demanded state support services and juridical responses to violence against women.

Violence in the home understood through violent structural inequalities based on race and class.
The Women’s Liberation Movement

Socioeconomic shift in the aftermath of WW2 – more job opportunities available but continued reinforcement of gender roles.

*Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949; *The Second Sex*), by Simone de Beauvoir.

Raised feminist consciousness by stressing that liberation for women was liberation for men too.

*The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan.

Spoke of the problem that “lay buried, unspoken” in the mind of the suburban housewife: utter boredom and lack of fulfillment.
“therapy” vs. “therapy and politics.”

“One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems.”

“Can you imagine what would happen if women, blacks, and workers would-stop blaming ourselves for our sad situations? It seems to me the whole country needs that kind of political therapy. That is what the black movement is doing in its own way. We shall do it in ours.”
The Disconnection of Women’s Liberation with Women of Color

Fighting on Many Fronts of Oppression

Racism
   Post-Jim Crow era

Classism
   Discrimination through formal and informal mechanisms (redlining)

Sexism
   Told to sideline women’s issues for the sake of racial solidarity

Heterosexism
   Religious and cultural persecution
The Disconnection of Women’s Liberation with Women of Color

Denial of Lesbian/Biological Separatism

“As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic.”

“..must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.”

[Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977]
The Disconnection of Women’s Liberation with Women of Color

Risks of Engaging in Activism

Psychological toll of retaliating against discrimination.

Disrupting conservative gender roles.

Negative cultural association with white feminists.
WOC Organizations

"Reproductive justice—women having power over our own bodies—is the crucial first step toward any democracy, any human rights, and any justice."

Gloria Steinem

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE
An Introduction
What Does Reproductive Justice Mean?

WE BELIEVE THAT REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IS...

A human right.

About access, not choice.

Not just about abortion.

TO ACHIEVE REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE, WE MUST...

Analyze power systems.

Address intersecting oppressions.

Center the most marginalized.

Join together across issues and identities.
The Challenges of Communities of Color

- Cultural
- Sociopolitical
- Economic
Cultural Barriers

Collectivist Cultures – difficulty establishing relationships and trust with “outsiders”.

Linguistic Diversity – variances in accent and dialect weaken communication.

Patriarchal systems – male dominance creates a gender power imbalance.

Stereotypes – emphasize negative qualities or data as the general reflection of a race.
### A History of Coercion and Mistrust

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<th>Cultural Barriers</th>
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<td>Forced sterilization</td>
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<td>Enslavement of African-Americans, Removal of Indigenous Americans, and Political Exclusion of Asian and Hispanic immigrants</td>
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Sociopolitical Barriers

American Elitism
• Certain members of society exercise disproportionate influence over American public policy.

Institutional Racism
• Discrimination in the form of denial of access to basic societal necessities such as education, housing and employment.

Manipulation of Social Service Benefits
• Threatened loss of benefits if refused sterilization procedures, work requirements, & invasive relationship standards.

The Hyde Amendment
• More than half (58%) of the women affected by the Hyde Amendment are WOC.
Economic Barriers

- High rates of poverty in communities of color.
- Restricted use of federal dollars to cover abortion services for poor women since 1976.
- WOC in the 70’s had little control of finances and marginal employment opportunities.
Recent Data in Reproductive Health Disparities

African-American, Native American and Alaska Native women die of pregnancy-related causes at a rate about three times higher than those of white women.

In 2017, 17.8 percent of the Hispanic population was not covered by health insurance, as compared to 5.9 percent of the non-Hispanic white population.

In 2014, White women accounted for 39% of the abortion rate in the U.S., whereas African-Americans accounted for 28%, Hispanics for 25%, and Asian/Pacific Islanders for 6%.

Unintended pregnancy rates are highest among low-income women, women aged 18–24, and WOC.
The Intersectional Feminist

Kimberlé Crenshaw:

“Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”
The Challenges of Today

General lack of coherence, both domestically and internationally, on addressing the reproductive rights of women.

Republican-majority administration decreasing reproductive health access.

Coronavirus pandemic underscores reproductive justice issues.
Legislative and Political Barriers.

As of 2014, 89% of U.S counties lack an abortion clinic.

People in 27 US cities must travel over 100 miles to reach an abortion facility; the state with the largest number of such cities is Texas (n=10)

Texas has the second highest population of Latinos in the country, comprising nearly 40% of the state's population.

Between 2011 and 2017, states enacted 401 new abortion restrictions, accounting for more than one-third (34%) of restrictions since Roe v. Wade.

23 states have anti-choice governments vs. 13 states that are pro-choice.
Legislative and Political Barriers

Anti-immigrant rhetoric and induced fear
- Trump administrations selective immigration policies
  - Introduced separation of detained families, shackling of pregnant women, the public charge rule

Title X Domestic Gag Rule
- Title X provides federally funded family planning programs.
  - New rules designed to gut the program’s ability to provide a full range of information and services.
Disinformation & Fake News

Living in a Post-Truth World

a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not. (McIntyre, 2018)

Politically motivated Think Tanks/Organizations

The Center for Medical Progress fabricated recordings to falsely accuse Planned Parenthood of profiting from fetal tissue.

Religiously affiliated health care facilities

In 2016, one in six U.S. acute-care hospital beds was controlled by a Catholic hospital. Catholic hospitals must follow the Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs) by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
Lack of information in non-English languages

Stigma against conversations on reproductive health and seeking help

Association of Feminism/Abortion Advocacy/Pro-Choice with Western Culture

Continued coercion and mistrust
  Between 2006 and 2010, the California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation illegally sterilized nearly 150 female inmates.

In 2017, a Tennessee judge was reprimanded for offering to reduce convicted women’s jail sentences if they got sterilized, claiming the offer was made to repeat offenders so they could “make something of themselves.”

South Dakota’s Medicaid program refuses to cover removal of contraceptive implants, stating in the billing manual that the state “will not reimburse for the removal of the implant if the intent is for the recipient to become pregnant.”
Economic Barriers

Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPC)
Fake health clinics that strategically use deceptive and aggressive tactics to take advantage of individuals seeking reproductive health care.

2018 decision NIFLA v. Becerra ruled that California could not force CPCs to disclose availability of state-funded abortion care services or post signs that the CPC was unlicensed.

Targeted Anti-Abortion Billboards
What does this mean for the Future?

An intersectional feminist perspective on reproductive health should have importance to social policy development, practice, and research.

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030.
- Need for interrelation of social movements in addressing root causes.

“Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.”

[Lorde. A, 1984]
Building Awareness and Leadership

**Sexual Health Education**
medically accurate; evidence based; trauma-informed; and culturally competent with respect to race, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status, gender, and sexuality.

**Consciousness-Raising Sessions**
Can be in-house meetings, focus groups, interviews or done through community outreach and events.

**Community Base Building**
Social institutions should be viewed as a ‘bearers of justice.’

**Supporting Indigenous Leaders**
Acknowledging the already existing leadership in communities and/or fostering leadership of WOC.
Cultural deprivation becomes an omnibus explanation for the disparities of communities of color (Victim Blaming).

**Racism, discrimination, segregation, and the powerlessness of WOC are subtly, but thoroughly, downgraded in importance.**

Info provided is known by WOC and least likely to be known by White people.

Result of education on the history of Women of Color, government suppression, and a general evasion of discussion surrounding these topics.

Part of being an ally to other movements and social causes is recognizing that you, as a White person, benefit from a myriad of forms of structural oppression and are capable of perpetuating that harm on WOC. If this statement causes any discomfort, it is intentional.
“I think we who work full-time in the movement tend to become very narrow. What is happening now is that when non-movement women disagree with us, we assume it’s because they are ‘apolitical’, not because there might be something wrong with our thinking. “

“What I am trying to say is that there are things in the consciousness of ‘apolitical’ women (I find them very political) that are as valid as any political consciousness we think we have. We should figure out why many women don’t want to do action.”
Navigating Reproductive Justice Discussions

The politics of WOC come directly from their own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression.

Generations of WOC have been told that the burden lays with them to explain to the rest of the world how to address systemic issues.

There is no panacea for approaching WOC, nor will it be produced.
1. It takes more than just asking questions to get answers – trust is not automatically given to share personal stories.

Navigating Reproductive Justice Discussions
2. Be prepared to discuss issues of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression.
3. Acknowledge any privileges you may hold – allows for a more honest and open dialogue.
4. Speak from personal experience and learning – avoid storytelling and citing media examples that may generalize WOC.
5. Challenge ideas rather than people — goal is to question and negotiate practices of reproductive health, including underlying assumptions and ideologies involved.
6. Frame questions respectfully - ask for additional information or for clarification, but refrain from judgmental or explanatory questioning (ex. Why would you....)
7. Rushing to conclusions – Don’t try to rush to end on a happy-note or positive statement. WOC should be allowed to dictate how conversations of their lives go.
8. Monitor your reactions – WOC tend to be labeled as “aggressive” or “threatening” when discussing serious topics, often due to the listeners bias or prejudice.
9. Avoid Centering – Keep the focus on the speaker, avoiding to add in your difficulties in discussing reproductive justice topics
Thank you!