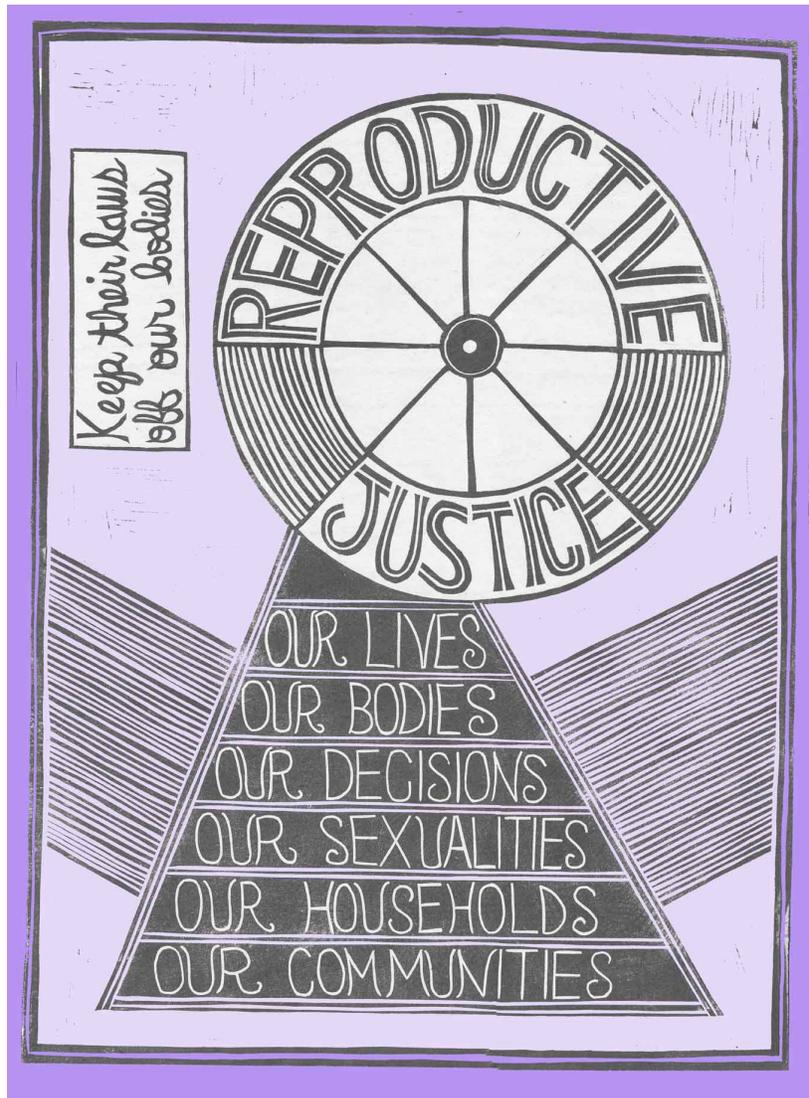


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Reproductive Justice

by Sarah E. Chinn and Kimberly Mutcherson



"REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE" BY MEREDITH STERN VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

Reproductive justice is a challenging concept for many people, not least because it puts marginalized people, especially women of color, at its core. As formulated by a group of Black women in advance of the UN's 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, reproductive justice (RJ) pushes beyond the politics of what in the 1990s was decorously and euphemistically called "choice."¹ As Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice (WADRJ), this organization bought a full-page ad in the Washington Post and in Roll Call (the publication that covers Congress) laying out their agenda.²

Unlike their mostly white counterparts in mainstream reproductive rights advocacy organizations like NARAL and NOW, WADRJ saw abortion as just one part of a larger fabric of reproductive and maternal health issues that Black women faced – issues that were inextricable from structural racism and generations of unequal access to healthcare. Their broadside aimed to intervene in the ongoing debates over the national healthcare system proposed by Bill Clinton, and to bring an intersectional analysis of gender, race, and class to the mainstream conversation that went beyond rights that often existed only on paper for their communities. While they were unabashed about their insistence on extensive access to abortion – they ended one paragraph with the all-caps demand "WE WILL NOT ENDORSE A HEALTH CARE REFORM SYSTEM THAT DOES NOT COVER THE FULL RANGE OF REPRODUCTIVE SERVICES FOR ALL WOMEN INCLUDING ABORTION" – they recognized that abortion should not be the central element of the broader array of needs that Black women had and that RJ was broader than reproductive healthcare. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was still raging (AIDS mortality would not peak until 1995, with 50,000 dead that year) and the US medical establishment had long ignored the specificity of women's HIV disease symptoms, cutting off thousands of women from access to Medicaid funding to treat them. As it is now, maternal and infant mortality rates for Black women were much higher than for other demographic groups, exacerbated by insufficient access to high-quality and consistent prenatal care, a higher rate of hypertension, uneven access to the full panoply of contraception, and the myth among healthcare professionals that Black women had higher pain thresholds.³

Equally importantly, conservative politicians who argued vociferously for the value of the life of fetuses had little interest in protecting or caring for their mothers either during pregnancy or when the newly born emerged from the womb. WADRJ insisted on a fully funded suite of reproductive health care for all women, from pap smears to mammograms to prenatal care, regardless of race, class, age, (dis)ability, or sexual orientation. They further demanded the inclusion of Black women in healthcare policy and decision making because good policy cannot be crafted in the absence of the voices of Black women and other women of color.

This radical statement was of a piece with the long-time activism of women of color around reproductive health and women's health more generally. An important forerunner of WADRJ (and that shared a number of

members) was the Women of Color Coalition for Reproductive Health Rights (WOCRRHR), which organized in the early 1990s around the 1992 March for Women's Lives. Their mandate was to encourage women of color to attend the march and at the same time pressure march organizers to fully represent the issues of women of color both in their promotional materials and on the platform.

In the mid-1990s and before, women-of-color groups were organizing forums to bring health professionals, educators, and activists together with policy makers to identify the most important reproductive health issues facing women of color. Out of these discussions came what is arguably the defining organization in the RJ movement: SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective. Drawing on and expanding the work of WADRJ and WOCRRHR, SisterSong laid out the foundational principles of RJ: "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities."⁴

Each element of this apparently simple statement carries with it a broad and deep set of necessary conditions for RJ to be realized. Defining reproductive freedom as a human right is a bold claim, and one that has been a sticking point for international organizations like the United Nations, which (in theory) is the protector and defender of human rights around the world. It obliges us to attend to the constraints on bodily autonomy imposed by structural racism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, transphobia, and other systems of hierarchy and discrimination. More importantly, it reimagines the model of human rights – which have more often been understood as abstract values like freedom of speech or freedom of the press – as inextricable from women's embodied experiences. To acknowledge women's bodily autonomy as a human right transposes conditions usually seen as "women's issues" (sexual assault, intimate partner violence, child marriage, and the like) into paramount concerns.

Even more radically, the founding mothers of RJ insisted that their movement center the intersectional experiences of Black women and other women of color. It was these women who understood the deep history of reproduction as a site of oppression in the United States. They gave voice to the powerful and enduring legacies of the commodification of the bodies of enslaved Black women, sterilization abuse of women of color around the United States, and the weaponization of the family policing system. The RJ lens has continued to expand over the years to embrace the experiences of trans and other gender non-conforming individuals, which is a testament to the core principles that founded the movement. As was true at its inception, RJ rests on the premise that it is only through an intersectional lens that justice can be attained, and justice can not be found only through achieving rights.

That claim to personal bodily autonomy generates any number of related rights: not just to have or not have children, but the guarantee of humane medical treatment and healthy communities in all contexts. Bodily autonomy

for all means that forcing incarcerated women to give birth while chained to a bed and then taking their babies away is a violation of human rights. Bodily autonomy for all means that prosecuting pregnant women for using drugs or alcohol rather than providing prenatal care and access to treatment is a violation of human rights. Bodily autonomy for all means that prohibiting medical and psychological care around gender transition and nonconformity is a violation of human rights. Bodily autonomy can only exist in “safe and sustainable communities,” that is, in communities with well-maintained and academically excellent schools that offer a range of different learning options, access to fresh food, jobs that pay adequate wages, freedom from violence, affordable and culturally competent healthcare, and, finally, a justice system that is reparative rather than punitive.

Ultimately, RJ links to every other kind of justice movement: prison abolition, mutual aid, environmental justice, abolition of the family policing system, food justice, and, of course, reproductive freedom. The claim to bodily autonomy offers a different model from the traditional formulations of human rights, one based on both lived experience and political analysis rather than the disembodied and abstracted “individual” that is the supposed subject of human rights. It challenges some of our culture’s most deeply held beliefs about pregnancy and parenthood (“of course a pregnant person who’s using drugs should go to prison and their baby should be taken away!” “Of course parents have complete ownership of their children!”), and those challenges can be profoundly uncomfortable. But they engender deep and rigorous conversation about what “bodily autonomy” really means.

Of course, we can’t discuss the complexity of RJ without mentioning the most recent dismantling of the already greatly limited right of Americans to abortion: the Supreme Court’s decision in the 2022 case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and any federal constitutional right to abortion.⁵ There is little for us to say here that hasn’t already been said over the past two years, except that this iteration of the Supreme Court is determined to claw back any and all access Americans, especially Black people and other people of color, have to the vote; to clean water, air, and soil; to abortion; to shelter; and to protection from gun violence. It will take a very long time to undo the brutal damage that has been codified in Supreme Court decisions.

When we decided to edit this issue of *Radical Teacher* on “Teaching Reproductive Justice” we didn’t know what kind of essays we were going to receive. We crafted a cfp as broad as possible to reflect the many possible meanings of RJ, and reached out to scholars we knew who did work in the subject.

Each of us has a different history with RJ: Kim is a law professor who has spent much of her career researching and writing about law, bioethics, and reproductive justice, especially the racial and other

disparities of the fertility industry. Her work cracks open normative assumptions about who gets to control their fertility and who must be supervised by punitive state power. Sarah is a scholar of nineteenth-century US literature with both an abiding interest in how bodies are constructed and represented within regimes of race, class, and gender (among other things) and a history of direct-action activism for queer liberation and reproductive freedom.

Our hope that submissions would explore the breadth of reproductive issues was realized. Essays topics ranged from transnational classes in menstrual health education to the history of herbal abortifacients to networks providing education for self-administered abortion via mifepristone/misoprostol to drawing upon pro-abortion movements in Latin America for lessons in resisting the consequences of *Dobbs*, and beyond. Fortuitously, Kim was about to participate in a roundtable of prominent reproductive rights legal academics talking about how to reimagine RJ work after *Dobbs* and did the onerous work of transcribing the event so that it could be published in this issue.

These essays represent just a fraction of the radical teaching that is going on around RJ in the US and internationally. Our students will learn that personal bodily autonomy is a human right that must be preserved, no matter the political and cultural obstacles. As so often happens, women of color have provided a blueprint for what needs to be done. Let’s get to work.

Notes

¹ In an impressive feat of rhetorical legerdemain, Murphy Brown (played by Candice Bergen), the eponymous protagonist of the popular 1990s sitcom, managed to discuss her unplanned pregnancy and her decision to continue it without every saying the word “abortion,” and instead substituting the word “choice.” In an article discussing the episode, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted local NOW chapter coordinator describing the brouhaha that surrounded the issue as saying “She made a choice, and that’s what it’s all about” <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-21-me-168-story.html>. By 2003, NARAL – originally called the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, and after 1973 renamed the National Abortion Rights Action League – changed its name to NARAL: Pro-Choice America.

² This is not to say that earlier generations of feminists had not agitated for an expanded definition of reproductive issues. Black civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer spoke often about her forced sterilization and the eugenic logic that led to the disproportionate sterilization of poor Black women in the South. In the 1970s Boricua physician Helen Rodriguez-Trias co-founded the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), in large part in response to the unofficial

policy of forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women from the 1940s onwards, as well as the ongoing abuse of sterilization against Black and Indigenous women. CARASA in particular linked abortion access, sterilization abuse, poor reproductive healthcare, and insufficient sex education to a larger critique of capitalism, US colonialism, racism, and misogyny.

In 1984, Loretta Ross – later a member of WADRJ and herself a survivor of sexual violence and involuntary sterilization – co-produced a pamphlet that contained the seeds of the reproductive justice movement, [We Remember: African American Women Are For Reproductive Freedom](#). The pamphlet laid out many of the core principles of reproductive justice: not just access to abortion, but the freedom not to have children, comprehensive sex education, high-quality and affordable prenatal care, and the like.

For the text of the WADRJ statement, see <https://bwrj.wordpress.com/2012/08/08/black-women-on-universal-health-care-reform/>.

³ Linda Villarosa has done groundbreaking research on all these issues, many of which she analyzes in her 2022 book *Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation*. Most recently, she published an astounding article in the New York Times Magazine on the connection between the hormone disrupting chemicals in hair relaxers and conditions caused by hormonal irregularities, including early-onset menstruation, uterine fibroids, pre-term labor, infertility, and reproductive cancers. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/13/magazine/hair-relaxers-cancer-risk.html#:~:text=The%20research%20has%20finally%20begun,of%20the%20reproductive%2Dhealth%20issue> S.

On the subject of the myth of Black people's lower pain threshold, the Association of American Medical Colleges, an organization that oversees medical schools and other training programs, published a blog post by Janice A. Sabin entitled "How we fail black patients in pain." In the 2022 essay, Sabin cited a 2016 survey of medical students in which almost half reported believing that "Black people's nerve endings are less sensitive than white people's," "Black people's skin is thicker than white people's," and "Black people's blood coagulates more quickly than white people's." She also noted a 2012 meta-analysis of two decades of disparate treatment of pain along racial lines that found that Black patients were 22%

less likely to receive the same amount of, or any, pain relief than white patients. They were also more likely to be assessed as drug-seeking rather than needing actual help with pain. <https://www.aamc.org/news/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>.

⁴ <https://www.sistersong.net/about-x2>

⁵ Of course, access to abortion had been chipped away over the fifty years that Roe was the law of the land: the Hyde Amendment in 1979 that prohibited the use of federal health funding (i.e. Medicaid) for abortion care with very limited exceptions; the shrinking time frame within which abortions could legally be performed; the 2021 anti-abortion bill in Texas that not only limited abortions to six weeks but also provided cash incentives starting at \$10,000 to turn in anyone involved in breaking the law, including providing transportation to a state with less draconian regulations.

Sarah E. Chinn teaches English at Hunter College, CUNY. A member of the Radical Teacher editorial collective, she's the author of four books: *Technology and the Logic of American Racism: A Cultural History of the Body as Evidence* (2000), *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (2009), and *Spectacular Men: Race, Gender, and Nation on the Early American Stage* (2017); and *Disability, The Body, and Radical Intellectuals in the Literature of The Civil War and Reconstruction* (2024). She's the co-editor with Brigitte Fielder of *J19: The Journal of 19th Century Americanists*.

Kimberly Mutcherson is an award-winning professor whose scholarship focuses on reproductive justice, bioethics, and family and health law. She has presented her scholarship nationally and internationally and publishes extensively on assisted reproduction, families, and the law. She has been a Scholar in Residence at the Birnbaum Women's Leadership at NYU Law School, a Senior Fellow/Sabbatical Visitor at the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law at Columbia Law School, and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



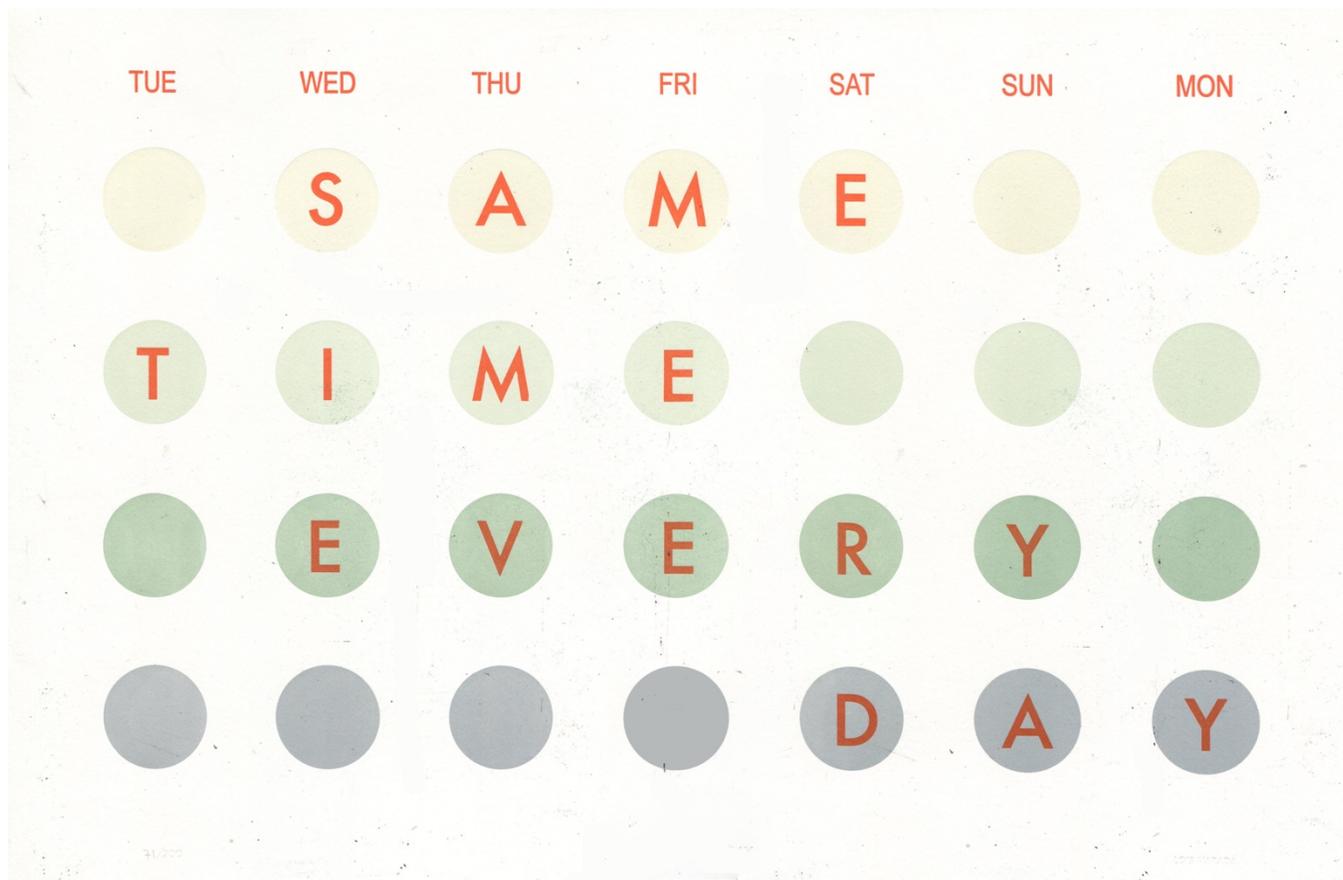
This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Taboo Topics: Menstruation in a Global Context

by Madhu Kushwaha and Elisabeth Fost Maring



"SAME TIME EVERY DAY" BY LOIS HARADA VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

Inadequate menstrual health education is a global public health issue. Menstruation matters because it either facilitates or impedes the perception of a range of human rights. In 2019, United Nations human rights experts asserted, “the stigma and shame generated by stereotypes around menstruation have severe impacts on all aspects of women’s and girls’ human rights, including...equality, health, housing, water, sanitation, education, freedom of religion or belief, safe and healthy working conditions, and to take part in cultural and public life without discrimination” (United Nations, 2019). According to the World Bank (2022), an estimated 500 million menstruators lack access to menstrual products, effective education, adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities and a supportive environment to manage their menstruation.

A New Approach to Teaching

Teaching Menstrual Health: Dispelling Myths and Misconceptions is an International Virtual Exchange (IVE) course, also known as a Global Classroom. It was designed for undergraduate students in the United States and Bachelor of Education students in India and is situated at the intersection of gender, culture, and health. The course, first offered in 2022, explores how menstruation is addressed in different cultures and misconceptions that impact individuals and communities. The course emphasizes menstrual health as the complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to the menstrual cycle (Babbar et al., 2021) and the costs of not educating youth about this fundamental process.

The fifteen-week course is divided into three sections: defining myths and misconceptions, health and human rights, and developing interventions. In the first weeks, lectures and discussions focus on critical concepts: decolonizing global health; patriarchy and power; and theoretical perspectives on menstruation and its impact on menstruators’ lives from cross-cultural perspectives. The focus on health and human rights links the fields of public health and education. Students examine the Sustainable Development Goals, a call to action from the United Nations with a universal goal to end poverty and specific targets for taking action to address menstrual health. The course requires *Period. End of Sentence* by Anita Diamant (2021) as a textbook along with readings, films, and other media. Much of the course involves students working together in mixed gender, cross-cultural groups to develop projects in both English and Hindi that address stigma around menstruation.

While taboos and menstrual misinformation impact women’s health globally, this Global Classroom course is rooted in India and the U.S., where its co-instructors reside. In many South Asian countries, women endure health problems due to lack of awareness, poor hygiene, and psychological distress. In South Asia, approximately one in three girls do not know about menstruation before their first experience with it (UNICEF, 2018). In India, a survey of 880 adolescent girls from rural Jharkhand found that 13% of girls believed menstruation was an illness (Jha, 2023). Poor hygiene-related practices during

menstruation increase the likelihood of Reproductive Tract Infections (RTI’s) and contribute to female morbidity and mortality (Garg et al., 2022; Anand, Singh, & Unisa, 2015). Women are also prevented from events and places (e.g., temples and prayer rooms) during menstruation as they are considered impure (Garg & Anand, 2015; Tuli et al., 2019), which may lead to social and psychological distress. Furthermore, nearly 24% of girls drop out of school in India with the onset of menstruation (Tuli et al., 2019). The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of India (2019-21) showed at least 30% of girls were using “unhygienic” methods of protection – including cloth, make-shift sanitary pads, dried leaves, newspapers or nothing at all. An analysis of the NFHS-5 data found that rural Indian adolescents with higher education, medium mass media exposure and the richest wealth quintile were more likely to use hygienic methods exclusively. Methods of protection also differ along caste lines with lower hygienic methods among girls from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes than those belonging to other castes (Singh et al., 2022).

In India, government programs addressing menstrual health have focused on menstrual product distribution. Initiatives such as the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (2010), Suidha Scheme (2019), and the national adolescent health program named Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram have focused primarily on availability of menstrual products and exclusively sanitary pads. The most recent supreme court of India produced a judgment in April 2023 directing the government to make a “uniform national policy” to ensure the availability of free sanitary pads for all girls in sixth through twelfth grades, along with the provision of separate toilets for females in all schools (Kalia, 2023).

In the U.S., the term period poverty is used to refer to the inaccessibility of supplies to manage menstrual bleeding. Menstruators report missing school, job interviews, and both educational and social opportunities for their children because they cannot afford supplies (Rapp and Kilpatrick, 2020). Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health* has the potential to impact the accessibility of education about menstruation and bodies that menstruate. Waldman and Crawford (2022) examine menstruation and how the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* affects the legal future of reproduction-associated bodily processes in the article, *Menstruation in a Post-Dobbs World*. They suggest menstruation be contextualized as one of four reproduction-associated bodily processes along with pregnancy, breastfeeding and menopause. This framing is suggested by the authors to maximize protection against discrimination and workplace leave policies as these bodily processes share biology and symptoms, needs and common social attitudes. However, the *Dobbs* decision, which says that there is no constitutional right to abortion, is important to menstrual advocacy efforts. They note that education about menstruation is uneven and can contribute to stigma and discrimination in the workplace. Lack of education for menstruators as well as non-menstruators in positions of power can also lead to misunderstanding about ovulation,

cycles, and when to measure the start of a pregnancy (Waldman and Crawford, 2022).

Libraries in U.S. schools and communities have been targeted with conservative mores about books that address puberty, sexuality, the reproductive system and menstruation since Judy Blume's first edition of *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret* was published in 1970. Yet, the current context demands renewed attention to educating all students about and advocating against what legal scholar, Margaret E. Johnson defines as menstrual injustice, "the oppression of menstruators, women, girls, transgender men and boys, and non-binary persons, simply because they menstruate" (Johnson, 2019, p 1-2). Johnson suggests that asking the menstruation question: "where is the menstrual oppression in this?" will undoubtedly open dialogue to address the lack of biologically accurate menstrual education in schools and other indignities experienced by menstruators, often at the intersection of race, class, gender, gender identity, and (dis)ability (Johnson, 2021).

In our course, we posit that distribution of menstrual products is important but not enough to dislodge the stigma and shame around menstruation, nor does it contribute to agency for menstruators. More often than not, distribution of sanitary pads in schools is shrouded in secrecy and seldom does it initiate discussion about menstrual stigma at the school, community, or society level. A comprehensive approach to menstruation education is necessary to situate menstruation as a constitutional and human right.

In many cultures, menstruation is inscribed with myths, taboos, and lists of "do's" and "don'ts". Therefore, menstrual health education is essential for the development of a positive self-concept among menstruators as well as addressing misinformation and preventing adverse health outcomes. Although curricula on menstrual education exist, it is limited and none, to our knowledge, within a Global Classroom. We aimed to fill this gap by designing a course for students from India and the U.S. using a decolonized pedagogical approach focusing on commonalities around menstrual health. A global decolonial teaching model is intended to build cultural competency and strengthen global citizenship by addressing power imbalances within and between our own universities (e.g., gender, class, caste, race); emphasizing the examination of individual and group biases; and ongoing reflection about culture, power, privilege, and ideology (Roholt and Fisher, 2013; Kerkhoff and Cloud, 2020; Kwete, Tang, Chen et al., 2022).

In the first three weeks of our course, we use conceptual models to launch discussion about addressing power asymmetries in global health. Kwete, Tang, and Chen et al. (2022) name three colonial remnants: perpetuated norms that the global south is incapable of solving its own problems, organizations and regulations that give power to the rich and powerful, and practices that further strengthen unequal power hierarchy. Along with this, we present an adaptation of the Indian folk tale of the blind men and an elephant (Abimbola et al., 2021). In the figure, several individuals (whose gender and other

socially constructed characteristics are not defined for the viewer or reader) are blindfolded and touch different parts of the elephant with "Power and Privilege" boldly painted on its side. The tail, tusks, ear, trunk and other parts that one individual touches each bear a label including: coloniality; lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion; white supremacy and saviorism; foreign gaze; patriarchy; and racism. We urge students to consider how people can be marginalized when our positionalities are experienced while blindfolded. We also nudge the class to see ways that intersectionalities reap greater inequities for people who belong to more than one marginalized group. Our course focuses on menstruation and reproductive justice, but it can be expanded to other cross-cultural contexts and build upon global social justice movements in multiple disciplines.

Our Global Classroom Method

This course was intended to be taught utilizing virtual exchange and digital media. We received a grant to teach this synchronous course with both in person and online components. Once a week, students in India and students in the U.S. are taught separately in their respective locations in the classroom. This face-to-face instruction provides an opportunity for instructors to know their students personally. In the second class of the week, students from both institutions are taught jointly by both the instructors through Zoom. Online sessions are exciting as students from different continents, cultural, and academic backgrounds get to know each other. Initially, we observe general apprehension as well as challenges with language and understanding. However, with time dedicated to building cultural competency and acknowledgement of ethnocentric tendencies, rapport grows, and the students gradually become more comfortable working on teams with members from both institutions. The instructors have weekly online planning meetings for both in-person and online sessions. Lectures, readings, quizzes and assignments are discussed and designed in complete alignment at both institutions. Most materials are provided in Hindi and English. It is a project-based course where students work in cross-cultural teams to develop educational or communication material for a chosen population.

Design Strategies

We use five strategies to create a Global Classroom that challenges students to think critically and step outside their comfort zone; discomfort in a decolonizing pedagogy facilitates building cultural competency (Roholt and Fisher, 2013). Our intent is to create an environment for active engagement by all participants, which can dismantle power relationships. With the topic of menstrual health education, a public health issue with gendered human rights implications, these design strategies are critical.

Strategy 1. Acknowledge Personal Biographies and Biases

As co-instructors of a course, we each bring personal biographies and biases. The India-based instructor is a cis woman from Uttar Pradesh and is a first-generation university learner. She has visited the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar, has language proficiency in Hindi and English and teaches gender issues in education. She has developed an instructional module in Hindi to teach about menstruation to adolescent girls in India (Kushwaha and Maurya, 2022) and has firsthand personal experience with stigma related to menstruation. The U.S.-based instructor, a cis white woman from the Northeast, speaks English, with low language proficiency in a second language. She teaches cultural competency and seeks to build reciprocity in community partnerships. She has traveled to India as a Fulbright Scholar, led study abroad programs, and observed how colonial legacies privilege those with native English language proficiency and white skin.

The instructors share a long professional and personal relationship and are aware of the socio-economic cultural contexts related to menstruation in India and the U.S. As co-instructors, we share identity as feminists and promoters of gender equity and human rights. Our Global Classroom focuses on power in relationships and dismantling colonial remnants and patriarchal practices that impact menstruators' reproductive health and well-being. Possible contentious power dynamics within a Global Classroom include that of members from high-income and low-middle income countries, teachers and students, and by gender and race with systemic privilege associated with maleness and whiteness.

We share a feminist pedagogy focused on teaching methods and concepts from our multidisciplinary foundations (Shrewsbury, 1987). With the interconnected nature of inequity and our own training as instructors each grounded in our disciplines, we incorporate western and Indian perspectives and begin with key concepts that are critical to empowerment of menstruators such as intersectionality and global reproductive justice. Our course pedagogy begins with the notion that all menstruators need safe and affordable reproductive care. Yet, individuals who experience inequities due to race, gender, class, caste, and/or intersectionalities with other social determinants are more likely to experience marginalization and menstrual stigma. We believe it is critical for course instructors to acknowledge and discuss personal biography and bias so that power and labor is distributed equitably, and so students observe modeling that aligns with course intention.

Strategy 2. Language

To develop a Global Classroom using a decolonized lens, we seek to ensure that students who enroll in the course have equitable access to materials. Equitable access means that proficiency in one language is not valued over others. Therefore, our texts and other media have English and Hindi options. When there are no dual language options, we provide translation. In a Global Classroom that decenters English as the primary language, students should feel that their language capability is not a

criterion for acceptance or valued class participation. This practice is critical for decolonization and ensures clear communication, a hallmark of health literacy planning. Studies have shown that the gap between information from health providers and receivers is often language-based (Al Shamsi et al., 2020). Teaching students to be aware of and active in removing health literacy barriers has the potential to improve reproductive care and invite open dialogue in the classroom. Since many students in this course are future educators and health professionals, and all are members of families, democratizing language and improving student's ability to use clear communication has potential to improve reproductive health outcomes for a global citizenry.

Strategy 3. Student Engagement

This course provides a unique opportunity for students to question not only historical power imbalances between countries from global south and global north but also patriarchal power imbalances within each country and how education about menstruation (e.g., information, resources, products) operates within those systems. The course provides a platform for students to engage with media on menstruation from lenses such as race, class, caste, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality. Engagement on the history of reproductive education and bodily autonomy in different cultural contexts and contemporary events that help or hinder are critical discussion in the course. In class, we screen *Long Line of Ladies*, a documentary film on the Hupa tradition of the Flower Dance. We have students reflect on the film and for homework, interview three people about their menstruation experiences. One female student wrote:

A lot of the people that I talked to were my friends and since we are all from the same background being Nigerian, we had similar experiences with menstruation. We were all shown how to put a pad on by either our mother or eldest sister, and although we were between the ages of 10-12 when we got it, to this day as college students, we still use a pad because it is the most comfortable. Because we are all from the same background, we didn't have any ritual that happened when we got our first period, it was something that we weren't spoken about in our household especially when we had men living with us. Our mother and eldest sister never explained much to us about science except we get it once a month, so it wasn't until we got to college that we learned the science behind it. After speaking to my friends and telling them what I learned from the documentary we watched in class, we realized that maybe we should start having rituals with our future daughter as a way to get rid of the stigma, understand the science behind it, and celebrate it and talk freely about it in the house regardless if there is a man in there.

Consistently, men in the course from both India and the U.S. noted their surprise about what it is like for menstruation to come with little to no notice. One commented, "This was a very interesting fact to me because it helped me to realize just how difficult it could be to have to go through this every single month. One

other thing I learned about menstruation was that there is not one set age for when it starts. It can vary from person to person. When I noticed this, it immediately stuck out to me because this went even further to show how hard it is to be prepared and know when to expect this process to start.”

Data collected in anonymous evaluation surveys revealed student insights about how they engaged with content. For example, one student wrote: “I will ensure that my next and future generations will not have to feel shy while talking about their periods.” Another stated, “Personally, I want to be more intentional about advocating for myself and other females when it comes to menstruation justice. Especially in the workplace. I also want to be more aware and intentional about teaching/explaining menstrual health and justice to the next generation (boys and girls alike).”

Student engagement as an instructional objective is universal among educators (Groccia, 2018; Harris, 2008). Yet, engagement is defined differently depending on cultural norms in educational systems. Some educators' expectations for engagement are concrete behaviors such as attendance and completing assignments. Others may expect engagement to reference internal states such as excitement or curiosity. As co-instructors, we define engagement to include wrestling with power, experiencing states of discomfort, and more concretely, working together to complete projects. We build opportunities for engagement through an iterative design process that incorporates student voices and concrete deliverables. Students in mixed gender, cross-cultural teams developed games, infographics, interactive teaching material, and handbooks to educate a target audience about menstruation for a very diverse category of menstruators. This engagement is exciting for us as instructors and was rewarding for the students. One student noted, “I learned that when I am on a team of highly motivated students, it doesn't matter whether we are at the same school or 1000s of miles away, we will collaborate and make a good project.” Another shared, “I learned how fortunate I am to live in a time where making connections to others who live across the world is possible. Even further, it was incredibly rewarding to experience this class with others from another culture.”

Strategy 4. Co-Learning

Sharing of personal experiences is a powerful pedagogical tool that helps forge relationships in the classroom (Rhodes, 2019; Pugach, 2018). From a feminist research and teaching standpoint, co-learning involves sharing personal experiences that may manifest shame, awkwardness, bullying, ignorance, or indifference (Shrewsbury, 1987). In our course, sharing was encouraged to build trust and rapport among students. In anonymous feedback, one student shared, “The communication, I mean at first I myself found...uncomfortable talking about it with my male counterparts. But then talking, communicating and sharing made everything easy. And also, I can convince people and help out many there.” Co-learning helps students approach an issue from a decolonial lens, finding

commonality and perhaps, a shared narrative about mind-body duality within which the bodily experience of menstruation is a universal basis of discrimination (Spelman, 1982). In another example, a student stated, “I learned from a global perspective that we face the same conflict yet have different experiences.” Instructors and students left the course motivated to work for menstrual justice, while acknowledging that historical and contemporary narratives are entrenched. One student wrote, “The fact [is] that, in all honesty, many will still consider periods as a taboo or as an unspoken subject.” As part of co-learning, students are encouraged to question biases and cultural taboos, to apply learning about menstruation in academia and in public discourse. Many students identified ways that they planned to apply their learning outside of the classroom from dinner table discussions with their families and composing poetry “so that stigmas find more space in public dialogue” to dissertation work, future research projects, and voting and policy action. One student wrote, “I will vote only [for] those people who will work towards the betterment of the life of people and promotion of human rights and values.”

Strategy 5. Critical Reflection

The transformative potential (TP), a theoretical framework informed by and developed in response to the theoretical limitations of Freire's critical consciousness pedagogy (Freire, 2018), is defined as levels of consciousness and action that produce potential for change at one or more socio-ecosystemic (e.g., individual, institutional) levels (Jemal, 2016). Students in the course reflect on learning at a personal level (e.g., deconstructing personal beliefs in socio-cultural taboos about menstruation) and at the institutional level (e.g., observing menstrual management in public institutions).

Critical reflection – examining everyday realities to analyze the relationship between personal context and structural oppression (e.g., social, economic and political environments) – is a precursor to critical action. Structural barriers restrict access to opportunity and resources, and thus, sustain inequity and perpetuate injustice that limit well-being and human agency (Giroux, 1983). The ability to see the issue of menstrual education in terms of a broad socio-political environment is crucial. A wider lens can help one to understand why and how young menstruators are denied menstrual and reproductive health education within a country's borders and across the globe in the name of culture, tradition, religion, and morality. One response from a Global Classroom student not only critically questioned the state and parents' control over what a child should learn but expressed deep anguish over the inability to bring any meaningful change in menstrual and reproductive health education. The student asked (rhetorically) how schools can let parents choose whether their children receive educational content about menstruation, questioning why so many schools “allow the parents to have a choice on learning period?” The student noted that intervention and advocacy is needed to change policy so that menstrual health and justice are prioritized.

In this course, students engage in meaningful discourse and reflective writing on their experiences

interacting with cross-cultural peers as well as on sensitive issues surrounding menstrual health. In response to a question about action steps to follow this course, one student wrote, "I would love to discuss more on this with my friends who were not in the course." Another wrote, "In the future, if I become a teacher, I would love to start one such course on menstruators for school students." Reflection is critical to personal growth, building agency to participate in dialogue, and moving to critical action outside the classroom and in the public domain about menstrual health policy, activism and education as exemplified in the statement: "I think I would like to do more research into period poverty in my own community and join organizations that address it."

Students' responses suggest that classroom discussions, readings and engagement with a "taboo" topic helped raise consciousness to the pervasive need for active engagement. We genuinely hope that they will take this learning into political organizing and advocacy in the future. Projects done by students, development of educational materials for different target audiences demonstrate their motivation and determination to work in communities to reduce stigma around discussing menstruation. While we cannot know where they will go, reflective writing and project deliverables give us hope that many will take their enthusiasm to political engagement, activism in their communities, and to their future workplaces.

Discussion

A Global Classroom with students and professors from low-middle income and high-income countries will establish what Martha Nussbaum calls a "rich network of human connections," necessary to establishing global citizenship (Dolby, 2008). Yet, inequities between the global north and global south cannot be treated like an elephant in the room. We must address biases and practice critical reflection to deconstruct ideologies and "us and them" labels that dominate colonial narratives (Roholt and Fisher, 2013; Kerkhoff and Cloud, 2020). A decolonized pedagogical approach aims to strengthen global citizenship by building momentum from self-awareness to working collaboratively and with cultural competence. Cultural competence education within a global citizenship model builds capability to value cultural differences (Roholt and Fisher, 2013).

This course, through its thematic and methodological approach, has potential to change the narrative on teachable content in higher education. In our experience, the words decolonization and menstruation push boundaries of comfort. University authorities in India express subtle hesitation and overt resistance to menstruation as a relevant course topic, while decolonizing a Global Classroom course pushes U.S. institutions to truly address historical power imbalances. Global Classrooms afford opportunities to build global citizenship and cultural competency, but the work can be uncomfortable and takes ongoing commitment.

This Global Classroom offers a new approach to dispelling misconceptions about menstrual health. Engaging students in co-learning and critical reflection challenges instructors and our institutions. Course material and discussions address colonial narratives that stigmatize menstruation and menstruators, whitewash, and undermine women's health. In the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, this course has potential to calibrate and re-calibrate to a shifting reproductive landscape. *Teaching Menstrual Health: Dispelling Myths and Misconceptions* is our effort to address power imbalances, build cultural competency, and de-center colonized perspectives by bringing a taboo topic to the classroom. Ultimately, our Global Classroom has the potential for expansion to improve gender equity and address human rights at a global level.

References

- Abimbola, S., Asthana, S., Montenegro, C., Guinto, RR, Jumbam, D.T., et al. (2021) Addressing power asymmetries in global health: Imperatives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLOS Medicine*, 18(4): e1003604. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003604>
- Al Shamsi, H., Almutairi, A. G., Al Mashrafi, S., & Al Kalbani, T. (2020). Implications of language barriers for healthcare: A systematic review. *Oman Medical Journal*, 35(2), e122. <https://doi.org/10.5001/omj.2020.40>
- Anand, E., Singh, J., & Unisa, S. (2015). Menstrual hygiene practices and its association with reproductive tract infections and abnormal vaginal discharge among women in India. *Sex Reprod Health*, 6(4):249-254.
- Babbar, K. et al. (2021). Menstrual health is a public health and human rights issue. *The Lancet Public Health*, 7; e10-e11.
- Diamant, A. (2021). *Period. End of sentence: A new chapter in the fight for menstrual justice*. Scribner: New York.
- Dolby N. (2008). Global citizenship and study abroad: A comparative study of American and Australian Undergraduates. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 2008; (17): 51-67. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v17i1.244>.
- Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury publishing USA; 2018.
- Garg S., & Anand, T. (2015). Menstruation related myths in India: Strategies for combating it. *J Family Med Prim Care*. Apr-Jun;4(2):184-6. doi: 10.4103/2249-4863.154627.
- Garg S., Bhatnagar, N., Singh, M.M., Basu, S., Borle, A., Marimuthu, Y., Azmi, F., Dabi, Y., & Bala, I. (2022). Menstrual hygiene management and its determinants among adolescent girls in low-income urban areas of Delhi, India: A community-based study. *Osong Public Health Res Perspect*. 13(4):273-281. doi: 10.24171/j.phrp.2022.0127.
- Giroux, H. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A critical analysis. *Harvard Educational Review*. 53 (3), 257-293.
- Groccia J.E. (2018). What is student engagement? *Teaching and Learning*. 154:11-20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20287>.
- Harris L.R. (2008). A phenomenographic investigation of teacher conceptions of student engagement in learning. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. 35.
- Jha, T. (2023, May 3). Adolescent leadership can address menstruation myths. *Down to Earth*, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/health/adolescent-leadership-can-address-menstruation-myths-89084>. Accessed March 11, 2024.
- Jemal, A. D. (2016). Transformative consciousness: Conceptualization, scale development and testing (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Rutgers University, NJ
- Johnson, Margaret E., (2019, May 1). Menstrual justice. 53 UC Davis Law Review 1, University of Baltimore School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper # 2019-04, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3389773> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3389773>
- Johnson, M. E. (2021). Asking the menstruation question to achieve menstrual justice. *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 41(1), 158-68. <https://doi.org/10.52214/cjgl.v41i1.8830>
- Kalia, S. (2023, April 30). Explained-Menstrual hygiene facilities in school. *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/explained-menstrual-hygiene-facilities-in-indian-schools/article66754551.ece>
- Kerkhoff, S.N. & Cloud M.E. (2020). Equipping teachers with globally competent practices: A mixed methods study on integrating global competence and teacher education. *International Journal of Educational Research*. 2020; 103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101629>.
- Kushwaha, M. & Maurya, A. (2022). *Menstrual health: Lets' know our body*. Manda Publishers, New Delhi. www.mandapublishers.com
- Kwete, X., Tang, K., Chen, L. et al. (2022). Decolonizing global health: What should be the target of this movement and where does it lead us? *Global Health Research and Policy* 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41256-022-00237-3>
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21 for India. https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/NFHS-5_Phase-II_0.pdf
- Pugach, M.C. & Glesne, C. (2018). Story as pedagogy: A reflective commentary. *LEARNING Landscapes*. (11):2.
- Rapp, A., & Kilpatrick, S. (2020, January 4). Changing the cycle: Period poverty as a public health crisis. University of Michigan School of Public Health. <https://sph.umich.edu/pursuit/2020posts/period-poverty.html> Accessed March 11, 2024
- Rhodes, R. (2019). Personal story sharing as an engagement strategy to promote student learning. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*. 16(1).
- Roholt, R.V. & Fisher, C.(2013). Expect the unexpected: International short-term study course pedagogies and practices. *Journal of Social Work Education*. 49(1), 48-65, DOI: [10.1080/10437797.2013.755416](https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2013.755416)
- Shrewsbury, C.M. (1987). What is feminist pedagogy? *Women's Studies Quarterly*. 15(3/4), 6-14.
- Singh, A., Chakrabarty, M., Singh, S. et al. (2022). Menstrual hygiene practices among adolescent

women in rural India: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*. 22, 2126
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14622-7>
Accessed March 11, 2024.

Spelman, E.V. (1982). Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views. *Feminist Studies*. 8(1), 109–131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177582>.

Tuli, A., Dalvi, S., Kumar, N., & Singh, P. (2019). "It's a girl thing": Examining challenges and opportunities around menstrual health education in India. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)*. 26(5), 1-24.

UNICEF (2018). Menstrual Hygiene Management of adolescent school girls and nuns: A knowledge, attitudes and practices study in Bhutan. <https://www.unicef.org/bhutan/media/211/file>. Accessed on March 10, 2024.

Waldman, E.G., & Crawford, B.J. (2022). Menstruation in a Post- Dobbs World. *New York University Law Review Online*, 191. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4270825>

World Bank (2022, May 12). Menstrual Health and Hygiene. Brief. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene>. Accessed on February 15, 2024.

Madhu Kushwaha, PhD, is a Professor of Education in the Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, India. Her areas of specialization are Sociology of Education and Gender Issues in Education with research focus on equity in learning and pedagogic practices.

Elisabeth Fost Maring, PhD is a Clinical Professor of Family Science in the School of Public Health at the University of Maryland, College Park. As Associate Director of the Global Health Initiative, she directs the Global Public Health Scholars program and advises the Public Health Beyond Borders student organization. Maring is a qualitative researcher whose teaching and research focus on global families.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



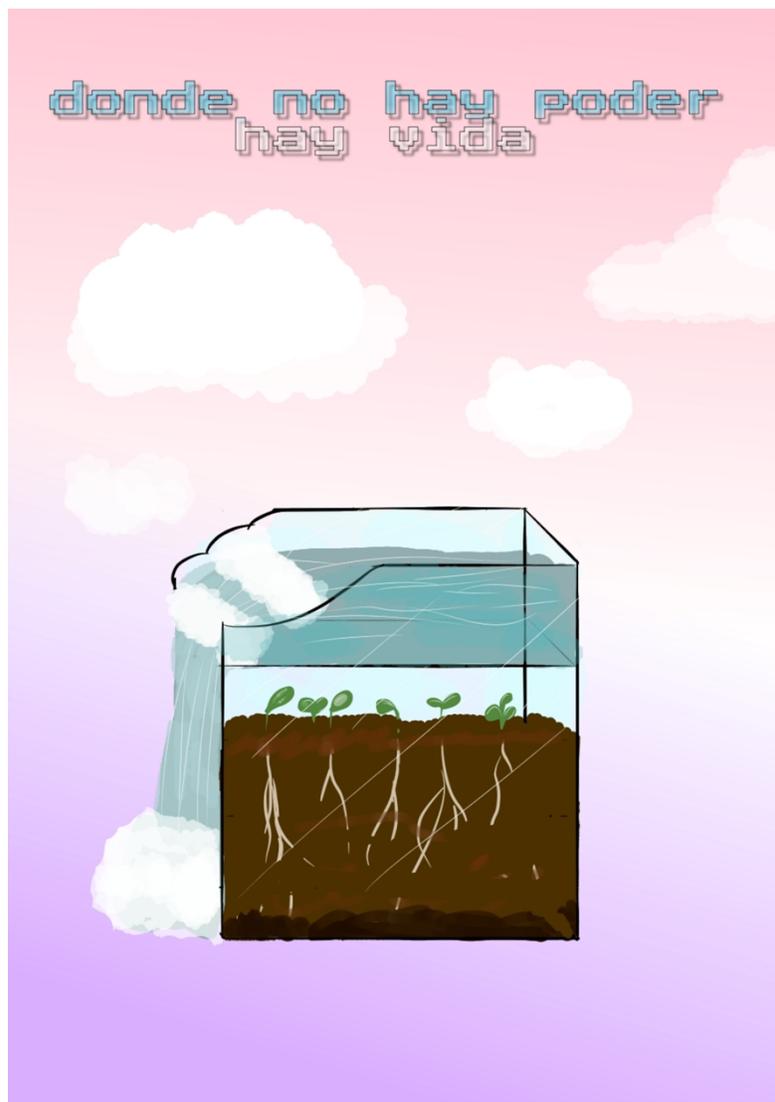
This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Recurring Rhetorics and Cultivating Connections: The Transversals of Rhetoric, Sex, Freedom

by Wendy Hayden



"DONDE NO HAY PODER HAY VIDA" BY SARA HEBE VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

In spring 2022, I was teaching a class on Rhetoric, Sex, Freedom when the Dobbs decision leaked, giving new urgency to our semester-long inquiry on the connections between the rhetoric of freedom and the curtailing of reproductive rights and imposing of censorship. I designed this elective English course in rhetoric, offered both undergraduate and graduate two different semesters, one semester online and one semester in person, to explore these connections and the recurring rhetorics in reproductive justice.

Course description: Are trigger warnings censorship? Is a cake speech? How much is the rhetoric of freedom in the US connected to sex, gender, sexuality? These are a few of the questions this course will explore. This class begins as the Supreme Court will rule on abortion laws, a ruling expected to restrict women's rights to control their own bodies. Many of those opposed to abortion are also opposed to birth control. The Supreme Court has already ruled that companies can prevent their employees' health insurance from covering some birth control devices and medications. We are also at a time when books are being pulled from library bookshelves and school curricula, especially on LGBT issues. At this kairotic moment—a rhetorical concept about the timeliness or urgency of speech—we will be analyzing several other points in history where rhetoric, sex, and freedom have been intertwined in similar ways.

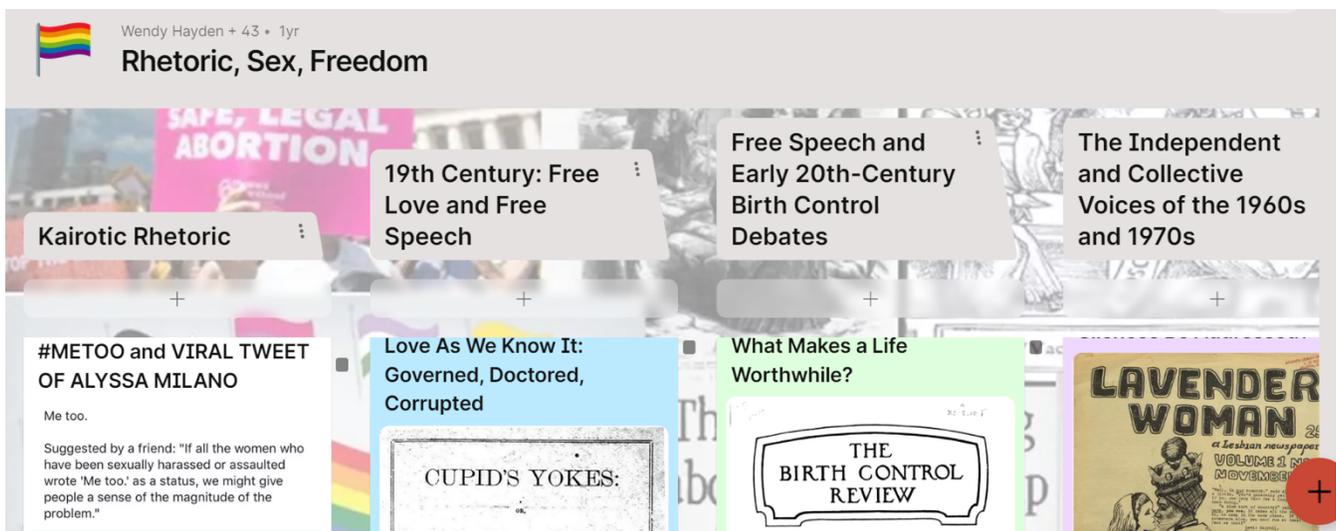
We began with the most salient contemporary debate—reproductive rights—and traced how this same rhetoric connects to specific moments in the past, including the late nineteenth century when the Comstock law—recently invoked in the Supreme Court questions about mifepristone—limited writing about sex by making it a crime to send “obscenity” in the mail; the early twentieth century when advocacy for sex education and birth control tested the limits of both obscenity laws and feminism; and the 1970s when editors of feminist and LGBT+ periodicals and of *Our Bodies, Ourselves (OBOS)* emphasized personal experience and the value of marginalized voices in the fight for reproductive justice. The main methodology of the

course—digital archival research and exploration of primary texts—enabled us to examine how we understand sex through rhetoric, freedom through sex, and rhetoric through sex and freedom.

Social Circulation and Archival Research

My design of the class mirrors my own research and applies current approaches and conversations in the field of rhetoric and composition, particularly two conversations: the circulation of rhetoric across time and space and archival research pedagogies. Since Royster and Kirsch examined *social circulation* as a method of feminist research in rhetoric, scholarship has moved beyond the recovery of marginalized individual rhetors to focus on the context and circles in which these individuals wrote or interacted. Using social circulation to understand rhetoric means analyzing how rhetoric travels, both within and across particular kairotic moments.

Circulation studies in rhetoric emphasizes writers and readers as part of networks and analyzes the spaces in which they interact, whether using a feminist-materialist approach (Hallenbeck) or an ecological framework that “recognizes publics as the result of the interactions between multiple texts and actors over time and that attends to the ways in which power relations alternately shape, constrain, and enable those texts and actors” (Gruwell). The editors of the recent volumes *Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism Across Time, Space, and Place* and *Feminist Circulations: Rhetorical Explorations Across Space and Time* complicate temporal barriers in their approach to rhetorical historiography. The contributors to *Feminist Connections* theorize and employ a Rhetorical Transversal Methodology (RTM), in which transversals, or points of intersection, cross the sub-fields of feminist rhetorical studies, the methods of digital and historical research in rhetoric, and the topics, methods, and exigencies of feminist rhetoric within and across time periods, genres, and technologies (4). Meanwhile the contributors to *Feminist Circulations* concentrate on “tracking rhetorics that circulate and recirculate due to



exigencies and situations.” These volumes use a rhetorical framework that reveals both how rhetoric is tied to situation and context *and* how it moves or circulates beyond that situation and context. The study of what Logan calls recurrences of rhetoric appear in reproductive justice arguments, where recurring rhetorics respond to other recurring rhetorics, or to similar circumstances and constraints. Carmen Kynard, examining conservative rhetorics that reemerge regarding DEI and censorship, calls it a “rebooting” of past arguments. We see such recurrences and reboots of the rhetoric Comstock employed beginning in the 1870s to ban obscene material in the 2022 “Don’t Say Gay” law in Florida banning LGBT+ issues in education, for example. Using a framework of RTM and social circulation facilitates looking beyond apparent barriers, whether those barriers relate to our research methods and academic disciplines or to the rhetorical practices we study (Fredlund et al. 4). My methodology in my research project on rhetoric, sex, and freedom, for example, has allowed me to cross barriers of different points in time, and different debates or exigencies within those time periods. Teaching this course also created points of contact between my feminist historiography research and my pedagogical research.

Using archives to identify transversals was a natural fit, because of RTM’s similarity to archival research methodologies and pedagogies, which enable students to take active roles in the research of the field by handling archival documents; recovering forgotten rhetors or rhetorical practices that challenge the gendered nature of rhetorical traditions; recovering the history of their geographic communities, whether within their universities or beyond; reading the archives themselves as rhetorical; and creating archives themselves, often in partnerships with community organizations. The pedagogical uses of archives follow the same trajectory as the sub-field of feminist archival studies in rhetoric, illustrated by its edited collections, whose titles tell its story, starting with the need for archives to document the history of the field in *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition* and *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools* (Donahue and Moon; Ostergaard and Wood), the establishment of field-specific archival research methods in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process* and *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* (Kirsh and Rohan; Ramsey et al.), the development of archival pedagogies in *Pedagogies of Public Memory: Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Archives, and Memorials*, and *The Archive as Classroom: Pedagogical Approaches to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives*, as well as *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, Activism* (Greer and Grobman; Comer et al.; Graban and Hayden), and finally an “unsettling” of these practices in *Provocations: Reconstructing the Archive* and *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives* (Berry et al.; Kirsch et al). Similarly, pedagogical uses of archives include assignments situated in both creating and questioning the history of our field (Beasley; Kirsch et al.), assignments that teach information literacy skills (Hayden; Gaillet and Eble) and the production of public memory (Enoch and Jack;

VanHaitsma), assignments that impart digital literacies (Rivard; Purdy; Comer et al.), and the development of what Enoch and VanHaitsma call archival literacy, which focuses less on using archives and more on analyzing their rhetorical characteristics. In all of these archival pedagogies, students confront the role of the archives in the dissemination and production of knowledge. Examining these issues, as well as the rhetorical characteristics of archives, leads to what Gesa Kirsch, Romeo Garcia, Caitlin Burns Allen, and Walker P. Smith propose as an ethos and praxis of bearing witness, recognizing that archives and the communities and institutions they belong to can uphold “epistemic racism, social injustices/inequalities/inequities, and settler colonialism” (1). Scholars in archival studies point out that archives “serve as tools for both oppression and liberation, ...in bringing about or impeding social justice, in understanding and coming to terms with past wrongs or permitting continued silences, or in empowering historically or contemporarily marginalized and displaced communities” (Caswell et al. 1). Though “the archive” is sometimes used as a metaphor in the humanities (Manoff 17-18), especially in scholarship on the archives and power structures, archival pedagogies in rhetoric and composition engage what Cvetkovich distinguishes as “actually existing archives” (268), both physical and digital. Archival pedagogies are thus another transversal crossing academic disciplines, as well as the theoretical or metaphorical archives and the “actually existing archives.” Archival pedagogies also transverse scholarship on feminist historiography and digital humanities (Enoch and Bessette), revealing that these two lines of inquiry in rhetorical study are no longer parallel.

Prompt: We often don't think about the databases where we search for secondary sources and their selectivity. They contain journals and books that the library has purchased access to. We could think of databases as rhetorical in terms of what work is included—what was important enough for the library to purchase?—as well as their organization: how are they searchable? These questions are even more important when we look at digital archives. How is the digital archive organized? How does that organization tell a story? These questions show that it is not only the texts themselves but where the texts are stored that is rhetorical.

Pick out one rhetorical characteristic—structure, audience, date ranges, search functions, for example—to analyze one of the digital archives listed. How would that characteristic affect your research methods in or on that archive?

My archival pedagogy

I have explored the benefits of archival pedagogies, such as students learning information literacy, stepping out of their comfort zone as researchers, understanding the history of their institution, constructing alternative rhetorical traditions, and creating opportunities for genuine undergraduate research (see Hayden, “Gifts,” “The Archival Turn’s” and Graban and Hayden). This essay



applies RTM and social circulation to archival pedagogies to reveal the transversals of rhetoric, sex, and freedom and the angles, or perspectives, they create. In Geometry, transversals are lines that intersect or cross two or more lines that are usually parallel, but not always. My archival pedagogy aims to cultivate connections, analyzing the recurring rhetorics across time as either transversals, where the line crosses two parallel lines, or intersections where those lines are not parallel but converge.

Hunter College is a four-year public institution, part of the City University of New York. Our English department offers an undergraduate major with a concentration in linguistics and rhetoric as well as in literature, an MA in Literature, Language and Theory, and an MA in English Adolescent Education. Almost all of the undergraduate and graduate students who took my course had no background in rhetoric so it was their first exposure to both rhetorical study and archival research. I included readings on theory and methods for archival studies in rhetoric to contextualize our approach and show how archival research can be both daunting and rewarding for researchers at any level. I have assigned students to work in physical archives in other courses, and students find that the inability to do keyword searches and lack of detailed description of documents in finding aids can make research in physical archives more time-consuming but ultimately rewarding. The abundance of digital archives can make this type of research overwhelming, but more convenient, especially for the mostly commuter population at Hunter. Assigning archival research changes their understanding of what research is and can do, since primary documents they find and interpret as well as the research methods they use can offer a contribution to an academic field (see Hayden, "Gifts of the Archive"). In addition, being participants in the kairotic moment we were archiving reoriented students' relationship to their research.

For my courses, I define archives as physical or digital spaces preserving primary sources and ephemera. I also like Enoch and VanHaitsma's definition of the digital archive as "any digital resource that collects and makes accessible materials for the purposes of research, knowledge building, or memory making" (219). The web itself has been called "the most important archive ever created" (Miller and Bowdon 594), resulting in "archival abundance" (Enoch and Bessette 639). Digital archives may also become active writing spaces (Purdy; VanHaitsma). The contributors to the special issue of *Radical Teacher* in 2016 on archival pedagogies also defined archives as participatory spaces, with both archivists and users taking active roles in the shaping and understanding of archives, both actual and metaphoric (Dittmar and Entin 3-4). I made one goal or method of the class to construct a digital archive which was also a writing space for students to present their primary research from digital archives or contemporary examples. Creating their own archive of materials emphasizes how archives not only store but also produce knowledge.

I made the course archive private, for several reasons. I wanted to share some of my research from physical archives with students, but do not have permissions to display those sources publicly. I am also conscious of the ways that assigning students public writing can be problematic, as internet spaces are not the democratic platform some scholars envisioned (Gruwell). Finally, as participants in the current events we were archiving, students often related the material to their own lives. However, this choice to keep it private leads to the question of whether what we produced could be called an archive. Most definitions of archive include its use by future audiences and researchers. However, the class itself could be that future audience, even if that future is only two months, between when we study the nineteenth century and the twentieth century for example.

Viewing archival pedagogies as a transversal eliminates distinctions between researching in archives and creating archives as well between current and historical rhetorics. Linking social circulation and archival research pedagogies fits the definition offered by Tarez Graban, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne, and Whitney Myers of “the archive as a critical rhetorical space that demands equally of its creators and users and a site for testing theories about how texts migrate among discourse communities and new practices come into being” (233). Students participated in the space of our archive as researchers, as archivists, and even as subjects.

Transversal Pedagogy

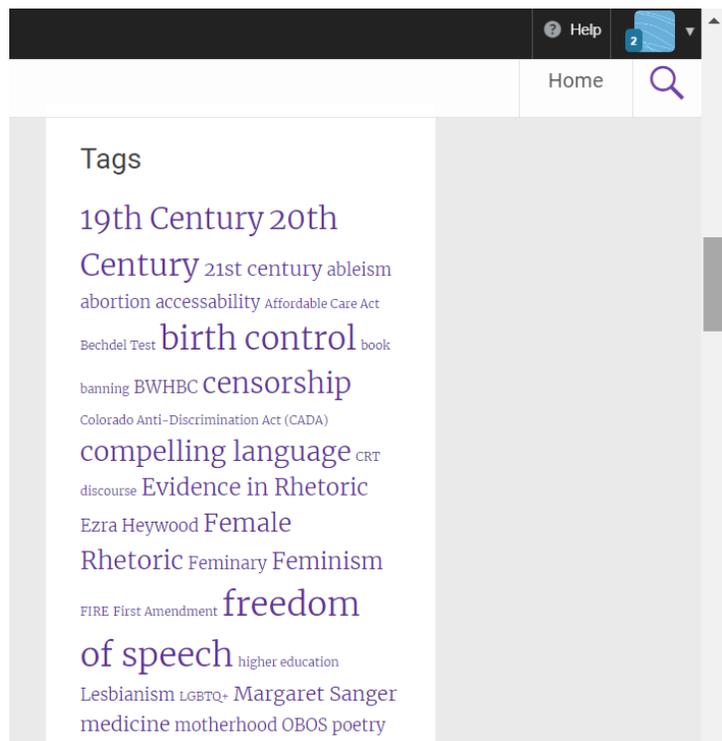
Prompt: Primary Source Exploration posts should include:

- *Full citation information for your artifact: Include links, the name of the text, and digital collection.*
- *Your methodology: Detail how and why you chose this artifact. What interests you about it? Did you start with a specific research question in mind? Browse until you found something you either liked or hated or responded to in some way?*
- *Description of text: Provide a short summary of the text, what arguments it makes, what you know about the author or context of the text.*
- *Ideas for further discussion: Write a set of discussion questions based on your reading of the text.*
- *Connection to previous post: Provide a sentence or two in your post that connects your artifact to the one in the post before it. The texts may be very different, so you can be creative in connecting them.*
- *Categorization: Include a category (which is the collection # or name), tags (as many as you like), and at least one image/video/media.*

I designed the course assignments to build on each other. Each week students completed a reading response on a secondary source or posted a primary source exploration (PSE) on our course website. The formal papers analyzed a single text or trend in the PSEs, framed by questions about rhetoric posed in reading responses on secondary sources. Near the end of the semester, students developed a digital presentation of trends in rhetoric and composition scholarship relevant to our inquiries and then wrote a short literature review based on those presentations. Their final paper incorporated that literature review as a starting point for their own analysis, which revised and expanded two papers or PSEs on texts from different historical moments.

The template prompt for PSEs incorporated ideas from feminist rhetorical study such as the attention to research methods and consideration of the researcher’s positionality in relation to the texts they study. The prompt cultivated connections by requiring that they relate their current post to the post before theirs.

We housed the PSEs on a course website. The design of the online platform used for an archive can encourage students to consider their documents from different angles and place them within different contexts by determining its organization and metadata, what archivists use to describe and categorize artifacts. In the first semester, I used Padlet, but found the scrolling to read posts excessive. I have used Wordpress for other courses and find it more dynamic, so the second semester, I used the CUNY Academic Commons, a Wordpress site licensed for CUNY. I designed the sites to be researchable. For the Padlet, I created columns for each time period. The Wordpress site proved more researchable, with categories for each primary source collection and tags which acted as metadata for the artifacts. For example, “birth control” or “obscenity” could be applied to posts from different points in time, fitting the methodology of the course. One semester, I had students practice doing a kind of literature review or synthesis based on a single tag, such as “obscenity.” The use of tags forecasted the final project to analyze texts from two different kairotic moments we had studied.



Each historical moment under consideration included two PSEs: one on a primary source from a collection curated by me and one from a digital archive, such as the [National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection](#) from the Library of Congress. Students could choose a single text or group of texts, an article, an issue of a periodical, or a periodical itself. For example, they could

post a specific article in [Lesbian Voices](#), a specific issue of *Lesbian Voices*, or the periodical *Lesbian Voices* as a whole. Or they could write about a single tweet under a hashtag like #MeToo, a group of tweets under the same hashtag, or the hashtag itself.

Some of the archives were born digital; others featured digitized facsimiles of physical archives. Students stated how they typically use a research method of entering keywords in a library database or Google to find precise secondary sources. They often encounter sources divorced from their context or even their publications, since a keyword search in a database brings us directly to an article. The archival literacy lessons illustrated the need to learn more about how a database or archive is organized and searchable. Both undergraduate and graduate students had to step outside their research comfort zone to work with archives.

Discussion Prompt: In analyzing our work in digital archives, think about what was considered important enough to preserve. What was then important enough to digitize (from the physical library collection)? Who is included and who is excluded? What does that silence say about the archive?

Some students remarked that reading theory of the archives, such as on queering the archives (Morris; Bessette), before their first exposure to digital archival research lessened their enthusiasm for the task. These readings taught them to think about archival absences and the choices behind those absences.

Prompt: Morris and Bessette consider a queer approach to the archives, while Mattingly shows what happens when we broaden our definition of rhetorical activities. She also notes our tendency to research women and men whose ideas of feminism are similar to our own, which can lead to ignoring other feminist activists, such as temperance activists. In the documents you found, what definition of feminism or freedom might be applied? Does it match what we envision as "freedom." Whose voices are included? Are there queer voices for example? What is the connection or disconnection between the story the archive tells you about these documents and the story you want to tell about them?

Our Kairotic Archive

The artifacts we collected for the digital archive bearing the name of the course—Rhetoric, Sex, Freedom—were significant on their own but also gained significance when placed among other artifacts and their recurring exigencies. We began with two PSEs on twenty-first century primary sources, then traveled back in history, and ended by returning to contemporary sources.

From the nineteenth century I first provided primary sources such as speeches by free-love feminist Victoria Woodhull during the 1870s, columns written by Angela Heywood from *The Word: A Monthly Journal of Reform* in the 1870s to 1890s and treatises by her husband Ezra Heywood during the same time period about sexual

freedom for women and how the new obscenity laws restricted women from learning about their own bodies, and thus from controlling their own bodies. Students used digital archives such as the Gale Primary Resource Collections, nineteenth-century periodical collections, and the LOC collection to add works by suffragists, texts on women's virtue, advice to married women from both doctors and reformers, and arguments on motherhood, marriage, and birth control. Students were especially interested in my collection of Angela Heywood columns because of her insistence on plain and what some called "obscene" or "vulgar" language, some still considered obscene today. We contemplated how her language choices contributed to her exclusion from most women's histories. Certainly most suffragists were not writing the word "cock" or using the word "penis" to describe sexism, such as in her articles on "penis literature." Students were also interested in men's rhetoric on these topics, and included in our archive men writing both for and against suffrage or women's sexual freedom.

Next, we worked with the archives on Margaret Sanger available in [HathiTrust](#), which included speeches by Sanger such as "The Morality of Birth Control" and books and pamphlets such as *Woman and the New Race*, *What Every Girl Should Know*, and *What Every Mother Should Know*. The periodicals *The Birth Control Review* and *The Woman Rebel* also contained articles by doctors and letters from women discussing their pregnancies or need for birth control. We examined arguments about birth control framed in economics, women's health, and morality. We confronted the eugenic rhetoric of Sanger, and connected it to arguments by nineteenth-century feminists such as Woodhull. I shared a story about my own archival research and why I linked to Sanger's works through *HathiTrust*: A search for the *Birth Control Review* through our library once brought me to the full text of the journal on an anti-choice site (it no longer does). This story highlighted archival literacy, leading to analysis of how Sanger's rhetoric has been put to other uses in current discourse.

We then looked to the 1970s, using the open-access [Independent Voices Archive](#), which includes alternative periodicals from feminists, underground campus groups, and LGBT groups. I also provided links to the [Queer Zine Archive Project](#) and my own collection of articles from *Feminary*, a periodical published from 1969 to 1972 by a southern feminist lesbian collective. Students chose texts from periodicals such as *Come Out!*, *The Lavender Woman*, and *Gay Flames*. Since I shared my research on *Feminary*, some students used a geographic lens for their research, recovering queer and feminist voices in places they did not expect to find such a proliferation of texts, or zines from their own neighborhoods. They were particularly interested in the coming out stories shared in these texts.

For the second week of primary research from the 1970s, students chose either letters to the editors of *OBOS* from my research at the [Schlesinger Library](#) or editions of *OBOS* from the archives on [Our Bodies, Ourselves Today](#), which includes the first edition of *Women and Their Bodies* in 1970 and other editions until 2011, their [Archived Global](#)

Projects, such as a 2011 Arabic edition for an audience of Palestinian women, and editions from Germany, the Netherlands, Taiwan, and Thailand, among others. The website included full-text of some editions, excerpts from others, or even only the Table of Contents of an edition. Students wrote about the different translations or compared the inclusion or exclusion of a topic from different editions, such as on orgasm or pregnancy. These primary sources demonstrated the circulation of information and texts for different audiences.

We began and ended our archive with texts from our current kairotic moment. For the first PSE, I started by offering texts such as videos of Wendy Davis's filibuster, Sandra Fluke's testimony, or Paxton Smith's valedictory address, statements by Nancy Pelosi and Kamala Harris after the Dobbs ruling, as well as the Dobbs ruling itself, which we read as a class. I also included Supreme Court decisions on reproductive rights including Hobby Lobby and Dobbs; LGBT+ discrimination cases such as the Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission and the 303 Creative LLC et al. v Elenis et al.; and a stalking versus freedom of speech case of Counterman v Colorado, which decided what constitutes a "true threat" when a man sent a woman hundreds of threatening social media messages. Finally, I included the so-called "Stop Woke" and "Don't Say Gay" acts from Florida and the American Library Association's report on banned and challenged books. These primary sources revealed similar rhetoric that determined which "freedoms" are protected and which are not. In their second and final PSE posts, students added the judge's statement in the Brock Turner sexual assault case, speeches by Congresswomen Elizabeth Warren, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, and Cori Bush on abortion bans and the defunding of Planned Parenthood, tweets from celebrities such as Alyssa Milano, Evan Rachel Wood, and Taylor Swift on sexual assault, videos of Viola Davis's women's march speech, and social media posts sharing abortion stories. The first two PSEs on contemporary primary sources in the beginning of the semester were used as a lens to understand the rhetorics we encountered in the past, whereas the final PSEs, also on contemporary sources, made connections across texts and time periods with the purpose of understanding the rhetoric of our current kairotic moment through the lens of past texts.

Cultivated Connections

Final paper prompt: This paper will integrate your work this semester in rhetorical analysis, primary research, research methodologies, secondary source research, review of a conversation in the field, connections between different time periods, and rhetorical theory in order to examine the rhetoric of sex, reproductive rights, and freedoms. You will choose primary texts from two different time periods and expand your work on those texts. You could look at paper topic 1 and 2 for example, or PSE 2 and 5, or paper 1 and PSE 6...you get the idea. You should be extending and revising your work rather than developing a whole new topic, though of course you can use a new approach to your topic

and should have new insight, especially as you look at two time periods.

You should focus your topic around a question about rhetorical practices and situate it within a current conversation in the field of rhetoric and composition, identified in your literature review. For example, you might explore the role of storytelling in chapters on abortion in Our Bodies, Ourselves or hashtag #YouKnowMe, or how rhetors fought censorship of speech about sex in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century through analysis of Heywood and Sanger, or how censorship of LGBT texts was justified in the 1970s and today.

Our Rhetoric, Sex, Freedom archive gave insight into how rhetoric responded to constraints on sexuality for separate kairotic moments, how rhetoric and rhetorical tactics cross textual and temporal boundaries, and how we could understand our current rhetorical situation through texts from the past. Our inquiries highlighted intersectional analysis of race, class, religion, and geography. Topics we kept returning to included the role of values and religion, silence and censorship, and logic versus emotion in sexual rhetoric. The final paper asked students to perform analysis of primary texts from two different historical eras, drawing on topics or questions that emerged in the primary or secondary source posts. The tags as metadata on the Wordpress site facilitated connections between texts, spaces, and time periods, and I found the papers much more successful because of this functionality.

Jonathan Alexander's explanation of "What's Sexual about Rhetoric, What's Rhetorical about Sex?" promotes "understanding of the ways in which sexuality is constructed in language and the ways in which our language and meaning-making systems are always already sexualized" (Alexander 18; Alexander and Rhodes 6). The same is true about the third transversal of freedom. It is also "always already sexualized." For example, we analyzed appeals to "freedom" and personal choice when banning books. We traced how a rhetoric of responsibility travels: nineteenth-century feminists and Sanger used a rhetoric of responsibility to urge people to use birth control but so do birth control opponents in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We saw how the rhetoric of virtue and innocence was once used to support arguments for more sex education whereas now it is used to limit such education. We observed the root of current rhetoric limiting reproductive rights in feminist arguments from the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, whether because these women were more conservative in upholding gender roles or systemic racism in their rhetoric or because conservative rhetors have always found ways to flip liberal arguments to serve their own agendas. For example, we noted rhetoric to oppose reproductive rights was framed as helping women, a trend that continues in anti-trans rhetoric and fearmongering. We bore witness to rhetoric upholding racist structures as in the problematic and often horrifying eugenic rhetoric of Margaret Sanger and its outcomes of birth control and sex education.

Prompt: In this week's discussion, we will more closely examine the rhetoric of freedom. How is the rhetoric of freedom employed for anti-choice and anti-trans arguments? In arguments about reproductive justice, which freedoms are more important? Is there a hierarchy of freedoms?

The rhetorics circulating in our archive allowed us to apply our findings to current issues. We connected how nineteenth-century rhetors challenged or circumvented obscenity laws in their rhetoric, tracing the choice of ambiguous language or "plain speech," and how rhetors who made that choice risked imprisonment, either to make a point about the laws or out of a genuine desire to spread knowledge. One letter to the editors of *OBOS* on the abortion of a pregnancy the author wanted echoes the horror stories we've seen in the news often since Dobbs. We were also conscious of RTM's overuse, risking erasure of differences or diminishing the impact of specific events texts responded to. In this way, the application of transversals follows the application of intersectionality.

Students related their findings to their personal lives. They shared what sex education they had experienced and situated it in the history of the battles to provide sex education. They shared their own stories of experiences with doctors which they compared to the stories told to and by *OBOS* editors. One semester it seemed that every woman in the class had a story where she was misdiagnosed, condescended to, ignored, or even physically harmed by medical professionals, and every man had an example from the women in their lives. They related their own coming out stories or experiences in childbirth. I did not require them to make such personal identifications with their own lives. Rather I encouraged them to evaluate the relevance of their historical artifacts to rhetoric they encounter every day. However, the material, such as the personal stories in the texts of the 1970s, prompted students to share their own experiences and recognize in them methods of transversality.

Archival Abundance

Success of the project came with students' enthusiasm and understanding of primary source research and the connections they made to contemporary discourses or with their own lives. Challenges came from archival abundance and from the definitions of primary sources in rhetorical study, particularly when applied to our own kairotic moment. For the archives of our current moment, anything could be a primary source if used to document firsthand accounts of reactions to Dobbs, for example. While I gave students the freedom to define what counts as a contemporary primary source, I also provided models such as speeches, Supreme Court decisions, or the laws passed in Florida and the reactions to them. If, as Miller and Bowdon explain, the Internet is an archive, then archival abundance takes on a new meaning. We thus defined primary sources as firsthand sources for us to analyze rather than firsthand sources that provide analysis, though a rhetorical focus also complicates that distinction.

In earlier posts, students attempted very specific research questions or keyword searches when researching in archives. They had to broaden their approaches, but then narrowed them again to look at similar texts across time periods. Since they quickly learned how archival research was more about browsing than searching, they were more comfortable with smaller collections, such as the *OBOS* texts, but empowered by recovering sources from a larger archive, such as the Library of Congress or Gale selections. They learned and enacted the power and responsibility of the archivist to determine what is remembered through their choices of texts and examination of archival absences. In response to the methodology prompts, students focused more on why the source interested them than on their process finding the source, a methodology that emphasizes reactions to texts, which fits what Kirsch and Rohan call "research as a lived process." Having a shared goal and shared challenges as archivists also contributed to a sense of community in the class, regardless of gender or political viewpoint. Sharing their research online helped provide community for an online class.

Digital archives as texts promoted critical research and digital and archival literacies. However, there was confusion for some students caused starting by beginning with students collecting primary texts from contemporary sources. This structure led them to employ the same methodology for historical sources, even when I provided links to specific collections of primary sources, such as Google searches that produced secondary rather than primary historical sources. I learned to focus more on defining primary versus secondary sources for different purposes and will include more archival literacy lessons that contextualize locations of online sources.

Few students were taking the class for the rhetoric and linguistics focus, and those who were introduced to this area of study found both the historical and rhetorical approaches valuable lenses. They pointed to the value of considering whose voices are included and whose are excluded in an area of study. Starting with the contemporary, then going back to points in history, then ending with a reorienting of their original focus is an approach they can take with them beyond courses that require archival research. I take a similar approach to teaching research in composition and literature courses, showing how rhetorical study can be a useful lens for analyzing literature whether students consider the impact of kairotic moments or reorient their positions in research and analysis. The transtemporal approach is especially important to show the recurring rhetorics in reproductive justice.

I applied similar methods in my first-year writing course, (FYC), where none of the students were English majors, by assigning some of the same primary and secondary research to fit my FYC theme of freedom of speech. When not using a curated archive, I assign students to collect primary sources to analyze, such as free speech policies at universities or on social media platforms. Students at all levels are both empowered and challenged by exploring primary sources to draw their own conclusions and connections rather than relying only on

secondary source support. I think bringing more of the work of RTM and digital archival research into first-year writing will encourage the multiple literacies of academic writing. I plan to use the same CUNY Commons site in future classes, where students can compare and connect their research on reproductive justice with previous students' efforts, hopefully responding to a different kairotic moment with more positive recurrences, reboots, and transversals to address.

Conclusion

Our archive prompted transtemporal connections but also provided insight into archiving itself. These insights match Judith Halberstam's definition:

The notion of an archive has to extend beyond the image of a place to collect material or hold documents, and it has to become a floating signifier for the kind of lives implied by the paper remnants of shows, clubs, events, and meetings. The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity. (169-170)

Cvetkovich shows the emotional significance of such archives which "represent far more than the literal value of the objects themselves" and "challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science" (268). Cvetkovich's and Halberstam's archival theories fit the emphasis in the fields of rhetoric and composition and critical archival studies on archival research both recovering a past and preserving a future. These insights on archives mirror our course content, eliminating temporal boundaries and defining archival research as a purpose, an idea, a metaphor, and a process. Our transversal and transtemporal approach explained texts "not as isolated rhetorical moments but as representative rhetorical resistance to networks of power that enable and constrain feminist action" (Blair 247), which fits the practice of bearing witness theorized by Kirsch, Garcia, Allen, and Smith. The result was a participatory archive, rather than a collection of texts.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Jonathan. *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies*. Utah State UP, 2008.
- Alexander, Jonathan, and Jacqueline Rhodes. Introduction: What's Sexual about Rhetoric, What's Rhetorical about Sex? *Sexual Rhetorics: Methods, Identities, Publics*. Routledge, 2016, pp. 1-16.
- Beasley, James P. "Assembled Trajectories, Perishable Performances, and Teaching from the Harvard Archives." Graban and Hayden, pp. 91-106.
- Berry, Patrick W., et al., editors. *Provocations: Reconstructing the Archive*. Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State UP, 2016.
- Bessette, Jean. "An Archive of Anecdotes: Raising Lesbian Consciousness after the Daughters of Bilitis." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2013, pp. 22-45.
- Blair, Kristine L. "Afterword: (Techno)Feminist Rhetorical Action: Coming Full Circle." Fredlund et al., pp. 246-252.
- Caswell, Michelle, et al. "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-8.
- Comer, Kathryn, et al., editors. *The Archive as Classroom: Pedagogical Approaches to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives*. Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2019, ccdigitalpress.org/book/archive-as-classroom/index.html.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Dittmar, Linda and Joseph Entin. "Introduction: Archives and Radical Education." *Radical Teacher*, vol. 105, 2016, pp. 1-6.
- Donahue, Patricia and Gretchen Flesher Moon, editors. *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*, U of Pittsburgh P, 2007.
- Enoch, Jessica and Jean Bessette. "Meaningful Engagements: Feminist Historiography and the Digital Humanities." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 64, no. 4, June 2013, pp. 634-660.
- Enoch, Jessica and Jordynn Jack. "Remembering Sappho: New Perspectives on Teaching (and Writing) Women's Rhetorical History." *College English*, vol. 73, no. 5, May 2011, pp. 518-537.
- Enoch, Jessica, Danielle Griffin, and Karen Nelson, editors. *Feminist Circulations: Rhetorical Explorations Across Space and Time*. Parlor Press, 2021.
- Enoch, Jessica and Pamela VanHaitsma. "Archival Literacy: Reading the Rhetoric of Digital Archives in the Undergraduate Classroom." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 67, no. 2, Dec. 2015, pp. 216-242.
- Fredlund, Katherine, et al., editors. *Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism across Time, Space, and Place*. U of Alabama P, 2020.
- Gaillet, Lynee Lewis, and Michelle F. Eble. *Primary Research and Writing: People, Places, and Spaces*. Routledge, 2016.
- Graban, Tarez Samra and Wendy Hayden, editors. *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, Activism*. Southern Illinois UP, 2022.
- Graban, Tarez Samra, et al. "In, Through, and About the Archive: What Digitization (Dis)Allows." *Rhetoric and the Digital Humanities*, edited by Jim Ridolfo and William Hart-Davidson, U of Chicago P, 2015, pp. 233-244.

- Greer, Jane and Laurie Grobman, editors. *Pedagogies of Public Memory: Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Archives, and Memorials*. Routledge, 2016.
- Gruwell, Leigh. "Writing against Harassment: Public Writing Pedagogy and Online Hate." *Composition Forum*, vol. 36, 2017, compositionforum.com/issue/36/against-harassment.php.
- Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. NYU P, 2005.
- Hallenbeck, Sarah. "Toward a Posthuman Perspective: Feminist Rhetorical Methodologies and Everyday Practices." *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2012, pp. 9-27.
- Hayden, Wendy. "And Gladly Teach: The Archival Turn's Pedagogical Turn." *College English*, vol. 80, no. 2, November 2017, pp. 133-158.
- . "'Gifts' of the Archive: A Pedagogy for Undergraduate Research." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2015, pp. 402-26.
- Heywood, Angela. "Penis Literature-Onanism or Health?" *The Word: A Monthly Journal of Reform*, April 1884, p. 2.
- Kirsch, Gesa and Liz Rohan, editors. *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*. Southern Illinois UP, 2008.
- Kirsch, Gesa et al., editors. *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives*. Southern Illinois UP, 2023.
- Kynard, Carmen.
 "Black/Queer/Intersectional/Abolitionist/Feminist: Essay-ish on the 'Deep Sightings' of Black Feminisms During Shock-and-Awe Campaigns of White Supremacy (In Memory of Linda Brodkey)." *Peitho: Journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition*, vol. 26, no. 1, Fall 2023, cfshrc.org/article/black-queer-intersectional-abolitionist-feminist-essay-ish-on-the-deep-sightings-of-black-feminisms-during-shock-and-awe-campaigns-of-white-supremacy-in-memory-of-linda-brodkey/.
- Logan, Shirley Wilson. *"We are Coming:" The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*. Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- Manoff, Marlene. "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines." *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2004, pp. 9-25.
- Mattingly, Carol. "Telling Evidence: Rethinking What Counts in Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, Winter 2002, pp. 99-108.
- Miller, Thomas P., and Melody Bowdon. "Archivists with an Attitude: A Rhetorical Stance on the Archives of Civic Action." *College English*, vol. 61, no. 5, May 1999, pp. 591-598.
- Morris, Charles E. "Archival Queer." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 145-151.
- Ostergaard, Lori, and Henrietta Rix Wood, editors. *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools*. Pittsburgh UP, 2015.
- Purdy, James P. "Three Gifts of Digital Archives." *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, vol. 12, no. 3, Nov. 2011, pp. 24-49.
- Ramsey, Alexis E., et al., editors. *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*. Southern Illinois UP, 2010.
- Rivard, Courtney. "Turning Archives into Data: Archival Rhetorics and Digital Literacy in the Composition Classroom." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2019, pp. 527-559.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones and Gesa E. Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- VanHaitsma, Pamela. "New Pedagogical Engagements with Archives: Student Inquiry and Composing in Digital Spaces." *College English*, vol. 78, no. 1, Sept. 2015, 34-55.

Wendy Hayden is Associate Professor of English and co-director of first-year writing at Hunter College, CUNY. She is the author of *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism*, and co-editor, with Tarez Samra Graban, of *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, Activism*, both published by Southern Illinois University Press. Her research on archival and information literacy pedagogy, women's rhetoric, and feminist historiography includes articles in *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, *Rhetoric Review*, and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, and several edited collections.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

“I Took My Babies and Put Them Where They’d Be Safe”: African American Women and the Continuum of Reproductive Justice Activism

by Shelby Pumphrey

LOVE
AND
SOLIDARITY
NOW!

GRAPHIC BY @GRUPLINGZINHO VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

The title of this article comes from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, which is based on the life of Margaret Garner, an enslaved African woman who committed infanticide in 1856 after escaping enslavement in Boone County, Kentucky. Morrison's passage suggests the horrific truth that Garner's children would be safer dead than living under enslavement. Garner's story, like many of the stories of African birth givers, holds instructive lessons for those living under white supremacy. 1 It highlights the varied ways the state has intruded in the lives of African birth givers, but it also highlights distinctive methods of resistance, which is a prominent theme in each of the courses I teach. When *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in June 2022, I was preparing a syllabus for a course I have dreamt of teaching since I was in graduate school: "African American Women and the History of Reproductive Justice." I intentionally designed the course around the concept of *sankofa* or the belief that to move forward, we must look back at our past (Karanga 2010, 65). Through *sankofa*, my students and I embarked on two projects, both of which were designed to deepen their understanding of reproductive justice and envision our collective reproductive futures. Over the course of the semester, we met weekly for regular class meetings where we discussed historical topics related to reproductive justice. As students became more familiar with the concepts and language related to the course, they began to share contemporary connections to the historical examples we encountered in the assigned materials.

As I continue to build new courses, I am constantly looking back to my training in African Studies and Women's Studies, both of which center lived experience and practically useful knowledge that serves community needs. It is with this understanding that I have worked to build community with students, faculty, and staff across campus as well as the vibrant communities in which the university is situated. As the community components of the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 sections of the course, I designed the Reproductive Justice Community Altar (RJCA) and the Community Herbal Gathering (CHG). The community component of my courses typically involves community building activities focused on the questions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability. Students served as organizers and participants on both projects. The RJCA was an altar space, housed at the Women's Center at the University of Louisville, where students, staff, faculty members and folks from the surrounding community could gather to celebrate, grieve, and meditate on how reproductive autonomy has impacted their lives. Similarly, the Community Herbal Gathering offered a space for African community members to learn about African methods of healing through hands-on medicine making sessions with a trained herbalist. I intentionally included the RJCA and CHG to help students understand how the information they learn in the classroom impacts their lives and the lives of those in their communities. As an African Women's historian, whose training is at the intersections of African Studies and Women's Studies, this connection is central to my disciplinary backgrounds, but also helps bring the engaged pedagogical space I've envisioned for my classrooms into fruition.

This article opens with a brief description of how and why reproductive justice was established as an organizing framework. It moves on to explore how I designed my "African American Women and the History of Reproductive Justice" course in the immediate aftermath of the removal of protections surrounding abortion in the United States. This section includes a description of key readings, concepts, and assignments. It closes with how altar work and community engagement functioned as transformational pedagogical tools for teaching reproductive justice. As reproductive justice organizers have pointed out for decades, while access to abortion is an important medical issue, there are multiple compounding issues facing African birth givers, including access to adequate healthcare before, during, and after pregnancy, affordable housing, and safe communities free from police violence.² Without acknowledging these inequities, scholars and activists ignore both the historical and contemporary examples of state violence against African communities. This article calls attention to this violence and highlights ways that altar work and community engagement can play important roles in Women's Studies and African Studies classrooms.

Reproductive Justice as Concept and Practice

In 1994, twelve African activist women coined the term reproductive justice at a pro-choice conference on health care reform in Chicago (Ross 2017, 290). While working in the reproductive health and rights movement, they found that it did not meet the needs of their communities (Ross 2017, 290). They felt that a myopic focus on access to abortion obscured many of the issues facing non-white birthing people, especially those who were multiply marginalized. Co-founder and scholar activist, Loretta Ross shared, "While abortion is one primary health issue, we knew that abortion advocacy alone inadequately addressed the intersectional oppressions of white supremacy, misogyny, and neoliberalism" (Ross 2017, 290). In its earliest iteration, reproductive justice was centered around three tenets: (1) the right to have children; (2) the right not to have children; (3) the right to parent those children in safe and healthy environments. Over time, the concept of reproductive justice has evolved to include the protection of gender identity and pursuit of sexual autonomy and pleasure (Ross and Solinger 2017, 9).

Using an intersectional lens, reproductive justice addresses the variety of obstacles that impact reproductive decision making and demands that legislation and support services at the local and federal levels do as well. By recognizing that each of our reproductive capacities are influenced by intersecting factors, like race, gender, ability, class, sexuality, and nationality, early reproductive justice activists demanded a more inclusive and holistic framework (Ross and Solinger, 2017, 65 – 66).⁵ Reproductive justice brings together the reproductive rights and human rights frameworks to demonstrate how reproductive violence is a direct infringement on human rights. Reproductive justice

activists Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger noted, "Reproductive justice connects the dots between many social issues that seem unrelated to reproductive rights and to traditional view of reproductive politics" (Ross and Solinger 2017, 169). Even though reproductive justice was developed by African American women, the concept is not limited to use exclusively by African American women. As a concept, reproductive justice centers the lives and experiences of communities that have been marginalized historically and endorses the idea that when the most vulnerable people and communities are cared for, our society is a better place for all. It is a theoretical and organizing framework meant to empower all people to pursue and protect reproductive autonomy, defined as the right to make informed decisions free from coercion, manipulation, and material obstacles.

Designing the Course: Looking Back to Move Forward

My position as a Black feminist educator heavily influences my pedagogical practices. My interdisciplinary background in Africana Studies and Women's Studies has nurtured my belief in knowledge in service of and in collaboration with community. As both Africana Studies and Women's Studies emerged out of political struggle, I encourage my students to investigate these histories and understand education as a political act (Bernard-Carreño 2009; hooks 1994; Hull and Smith 1981; Karenga 1993). Further, my training as an Africana women's historian has provided me with a deep understanding of the importance of Africana women's historical narratives both to Africana women and our communities, but also for the important lessons they hold for those outside of African-descendant communities. These experiences and truths are at the center of this course, which I designed to illuminate the tangible and sometimes imperceptible harms that white supremacy has enacted on Africana birthing people and their communities historically. In alignment with Black feminist pedagogy, this course is firmly rooted in Africana women's unique experiences and functions as a "pedagogy of liberation, a pedagogy of protest" (Henry 2005, 91).

I taught "African American Women and the History of Reproductive Justice" in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 as a graduate and upper-level undergraduate course, cross-listed in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department (WGSS), the Pan-African Studies Department (PAS), the Healthcare Ethics Master's Program (Applied Philosophy – Philosophy Department), and the Law School at the University of Louisville. ³ I designed the course around four primary objectives:

1. To expose students to reproductive justice as a concept that is historically grounded in intersectional feminist activism;
2. To discuss foundational differences between the reproductive justice movement and the reproductive rights movement;

3. To explore how African American women's reproductive experiences fit within a larger national narrative;
4. To help students make connections between the African American women's experiences in the historical past to the contemporary moment.

As I am a historian by training, I organized the course chronologically apart from the opening module, where I introduced the concept of reproductive justice, including the historical development of the term and foundational definitions of how reproductive justice functions as an intersectional feminist activist framework. Over the course of the semester, we moved through four interconnected modules, each building on the previous to provide a multi-dimensional view of African American women's complex relationship to reproductive justice across time and space. Module two explored African American women's experiences during enslavement, including sexual assault, forced breeding, and medical mistreatment. It also emphasized the individual and collective ways African American women resisted these violations and intrusions on their personhood through physical violence, herbalism, and spiritual practices. I made this decision so that students would have a model for the myriad ways that Africana people could resist even under the extremely harsh and inhuman circumstances of enslavement. Module three described scientific definitions of Black womanhood during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as well as the various discourses surrounding birth control for African American women at that time. The fourth module focused on the experiences of African American women political prisoners, like Assata Shakur. Like examples discussed earlier in the semester, Shakur's story demonstrates the intrusive reach of state power and how African American women ingeniously responded by creating detailed counternarratives, advocating for themselves, and building community wherever and whenever possible. Strong undercurrents of resistance are embedded in each of these modules as they forcefully assert Africana women's consistent and multi-layered response to their subjugation.

Highlighting the important work of scholar activists, like Loretta Ross, we discussed how reproductive justice was designed to move beyond the pro-choice/pro-life binary to address the diversity of human experiences. Ross' work is an apt place to begin the course not only because of her role in the development of the framework, but also due to her deep and unyielding commitment to using her experiential knowledge as a pedagogical tool. Her individual experiences with sexual assault, sterilization and other forms of violence frame her call to action around collective violence. In contrast to Ross' early publications, like "A Personal Journey from Women's Rights to Civil Rights," her more recent work, "Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism," focuses on the evolution of reproductive justice as an organizing framework. It both describes the multiple ways that various forces impact reproductive decision-making, while also holding space for conversations of the individual right to determine one's gender identity and to experience sexual pleasure.

For the first assignment, I asked students to describe a personal experience related to reproductive justice. In their responses, many students admitted that before engaging with the assigned materials, they saw access to abortion, birth control and other methods of contraception as the entirety of reproductive justice. I intentionally coupled Ross' readings with this opening assignment. In doing so, I created space for students to reconcile the difference between their previous knowledge of reproductive justice and a historically grounded conceptualization of reproductive justice as an organizing framework and theoretical lens. Through the diversity of the examples they shared, there was an acknowledgement of how the reproductive justice framework could be more broadly applied to include a variety of individuals and life experiences. For example, one student described growing up in a predominately African American neighborhood, where there were extremely limited options for fresh fruits, vegetables, and non-genetically modified foods. They complained that residents had to travel far outside of the neighborhood, making it more difficult to provide healthy meals for themselves and their families. In their reflection, the student unpacked how they now understood food justice as a reproductive justice issue as it could directly impact a community's quality of life, including their ability to make informed decisions about their reproductive capacity.

To best understand Africana women's reproductive experiences in the United States, I intentionally moved to readings related to Africana women's lives during enslavement. This invasive relationship perpetrated by white enslavers, and upheld by state authorities, provided a rich and complex historical context. While terror and oppression occupied many enslaved Africana women's lives, resistance, joy, and community were also present. Ensuring this dialectical relationship remained a prominent theme in the course was a deep ethical concern for me as, in some cases, students learn about the horrors of enslavement without a full understanding of how Africana people resisted in various ways to assert their humanity and autonomy. Leaning into this one-sided narrative both reifies the lack of power they experienced in life and is also fundamentally ahistorical (Bauer and Bauer 1947; Camp 2004; Davis 1971; White 1985). By discussing the importance of resistance methods, like pan-toting, and "stealing time," students gained a better understanding of the unique ways enslaved Africana women challenged authority.⁴ Focusing on the work of scholars, like Dorothy Roberts, highlighted this dialectical relationship. Roberts' *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* is an incisive and thorough history of how Africana women have experienced reproduction in the United States from enslavement through the twenty-first century. Her attention to how African American women have responded to intersecting forms of violence historically is key to how I hope students will understand African American women's agency as a continuum. Further, literary works, like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* provide invaluable insight into enslaved Africana women's complex resistive actions during this time.

Coverage of enslaved Africana women's experiences would be incomplete without including their significant roles in the development of gynecology and obstetrics in the United States. Deirdre Cooper Owens' *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* made an important contribution to this dialogue as it considers the injustices enslaved women, like Lucy, Betsy, and Anarcha, faced as well as the labor they performed. Cooper Owens dubbed Lucy, Betsy, and Anarcha the mothers of gynecology in contrast to J. Marion Sims, a prominent nineteenth century physician whose legacy has come under great scrutiny in the past decade for his unethical practices and treatment of enslaved Africana women (Cooper Owens 2017, 25). Cooper Owens argued that white medical men, like Sims, viewed Black women as medical *superbodies*, no more than experimental material devoid of feeling, impervious to pain and undeserving of respect (Cooper Owens 2017, 109). Her counternarrative serves as an important touchstone for scholar activists organizing around the contemporary Black maternal mortality crisis.⁶ Similarly, Sharla Fett's *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* explored the power dynamic between white male doctors and enslaved Africana women during this time, arguing that Africana people were distrustful of white doctors. Further, she provided a detailed history of Africana doctoring women, midwives, and nurses, who performed daily sick care for enslaved Africana people within the plantation system (Fett 2002, 112, 118). She argues that white medical men wrested power from enslaved medical workers to control Africana people's reproduction and maintain authority despite the deft skills and extensive knowledge of these enslaved medical workers.

Using Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body*, we discussed the origins of the American Birth Control Movement in the early twentieth century and its connection to eugenics. When the study of eugenics emerged in the United States, it was immediately imbued with notions of white supremacy and was used as a tool to maintain the status quo. Similarly, Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League worked with eugenicists to reach "groups whose high fertility rates were thought to threaten the nation's racial stock and culture" (Roberts 1997, 75). Roberts described the diversity of perspectives held by influential Africana men, like W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey, exemplifying the opposing perspectives that grew from this debate. Roberts argued that DuBois' endorsement of birth control was a symbol of his support of "the dual themes of Black people's economic emancipation and women's independence from their traditional childbearing role" (Roberts 1997, 84). In contrast, Garvey was a staunch critic, who viewed birth control as a threat to Africana communities. These competing perspectives illuminate how Africana birth givers' choices were understood within the context of patriarchal nation building. We also discussed the devastating impacts of Norplant and other contraceptive methods that were pushed on Africana communities to better understand how scientific progress has often come at the expense of the health and wellbeing of Africana people. Both of Roberts' examples demonstrate the

concerted interest in Africana births during the twentieth century and how Africana women organized to make informed decisions about their reproductive lives.

We closed with Assata Shakur's autobiography, a harrowing example of state violence against Africana birth givers. Shakur is an activist, who is best known for her activism during the 1970s and membership in the Black Liberation Army. After facing numerous charges, including first degree murder, Shakur was sentenced to life in prison, and later escaped to Cuba, where she remains. It is worth noting that despite all that is now known about the federal government's efforts to disrupt, quash, and kill Black activists during this time, Shakur remains on the FBI's Most Wanted list with a \$1,000,000.00 bounty. While those reading Shakur's story often focus in on the brutality she faced from various law enforcement officers and the deplorable living conditions she faced in numerous facilities, our primary focus was on her decision to birth a child while incarcerated and her decision to protect that pregnancy despite the consequences. In *Assata: An Autobiography*, Shakur remembers being excited about the birth once it was confirmed. She wrote:

I spent the next few days in a virtual daze. A joyous daze. A person was inside of me. Someone who was going to grow up to walk and talk, to love and laugh. To me it was the miracle of all miracles. And deeply spiritual. The odds against this baby being conceived were so great it boggled my mind. And yet it was happening. It seemed so right, so beautiful, in surroundings that were so ugly...Already, i was deeply in love with this child (Shakur 1987, 123).

Shakur admits that during this time, she "talked to it and worried about it and wondered about how it was feeling" (Shakur 1987, 123). Given the shoddy medical care the prison provided to incarcerated people, at Shakur's behest, her lawyers fought to secure an Africana gynecologist, who would guide her through a successful pregnancy. Towards the end of *Assata*, Shakur reflects on the difficulty of parenting her daughter, Kakuya, while incarcerated. Despite familial support, Kakuya struggled to understand why her mother could not go home with them and blamed Assata Shakur at times, even accusing her of not wanting to go home with them. Shakur's story is at once a narrative of triumph and hardship as she navigates the obstacles of the carceral state. In including her story, I hope to illuminate the extremely personal nature of state violence against Africana birth givers and emphasize the varied ways to strike back, challenge and resist. Further, Shakur's story highlights how carceral violence negatively impacts Africana families and communities.

This collection of readings offered a slice of how African American women have fought for reproductive autonomy in the United States. Collectively, the readings call attention to a historical relationship framed by force, coercion, and violence, but they have also brought resistance, healing, and survival into focus. By highlighting these experiences, I hope students can better understand the complex dimensions of reproductive autonomy, how these dimensions have functioned in the past and morphed into contemporary issues. The following section describes

two of the major projects my students and I completed together. Both projects encouraged students to participate in collectively envisioning a just reproductive future and invited them to engage in collaborative work with community partners.

The Reproductive Justice Community Altar

The RJCA was designed as a sacred space for our community, including students, faculty, staff, and residents from the surrounding area, to communally celebrate, grieve, and meditate on how reproductive autonomy has impacted their lives. It was housed at the University's Women's Center, which offered an easily accessible location. The altar space started with a table covered with clean white fabric, a bowl of water and flameless candles.⁷ To the left of the altar were large pillows for participants to use in their meditation, prayer, chant, or other spiritual practice. A free book exchange was on the opposite side of the room, and participants were invited to share books related to reproductive justice.

Various spiritual traditions include the use of altars; the use and maintenance of altars is a common spiritual practice.⁸ The instructor developed this project in connection with multiple African and African diasporic practices, including the Dagara tradition from Burkina Faso, West Africa, and the Ifa spiritual tradition of the Yoruba people from Nigeria, West Africa, but especially the African-based Hoodoo tradition practiced by African Americans.⁹ Altar work can include meditation, prayer, manifestation, and communication with various spiritual energies, and for ancestor veneration, or to honor one's ancestors. ¹⁰ Altar work is therefore a starting point for connection with self through another plane and is a direct through point to communication with individual and collective ancestors. I asked participants to consider the following questions when making offerings:

- How has reproductive autonomy impacted your life and the lives of those around you? What feelings does that bring up for you?
- How/do the historical figures discussed in the course speak to you? Do you see connections between their experiences and the contemporary moment?
- What lessons have you learned about bodily autonomy from our readings and discussions? Who in your community could benefit from these lessons?
- Who shaped your earliest ideas/feelings/emotions around bodily autonomy and reproductive justice? Are there ancestors, elders or others who have influenced how you understand reproductive justice and body sovereignty?
- How do you envision your individual reproductive future? What about our collective reproductive future? What does body sovereignty look/feel/smell/taste like to you?

- What types of objects/ideas/practices have you used to safeguard your reproductive autonomy?
- How have you helped others secure reproductive autonomy already? How can you help others secure reproductive autonomy moving forward?

In this context, the RJCA as a meeting place, where altar co-workers could commune with the reproductive justice foremothers we discussed in the course, while introducing individual ancestors and figures as well. Altar work as a pedagogical practice invites each person, student, and instructor, to bring their full self into the classroom. This self includes their experiences, struggles, and perspectives about the world.

Community Herbal Gathering

The Community Herbal Gathering (CHG) was a community-engaged project designed to bring Africana community members from West Louisville together for a two-day medicine-making workshop focused on the Africana tradition. The CHG was not a required part of the course, but numerous students eagerly volunteered their time to support this initiative. As a continuation of the course and the RJCA, the CHG encouraged participants to take ownership of their wellness practice by engaging with traditional Africana healing modalities. Overall, the students who participated in the CHG found it fulfilling and instructive. Multiple students revealed that they learned more about herbalism, community engagement, and the historical context around these important topics, which they plan to share with family and friends.

The CHG connects to the reproductive justice framework by empowering individuals, especially Africana people, to divest from the medical industrial complex, a system that historically has failed them and their communities. Students from the “African American Women and the History of Reproductive Justice” course served as organizers and volunteers in collaboration with our community partner, Play Cousins Collective (PCC). PCC is a local organization striving to “build a village around socially and economically vulnerable children and families in West Louisville, Kentucky, through juvenile justice, mental health, and community development projects in historically and predominately African American neighborhoods.”¹¹ Targeted towards Africana people living in West Louisville, this workshop series encouraged participants to tap into ancestral ways of healing and empowered them to be more active in their wellness practices. Our primary objectives were to:

- Empower participants to tap into existing resources related to herbalism, home remedies and other wellness practices;
- Share individual stories and experiences surrounding wellness and healing;
- Foster understanding around body autonomy and the historical context surrounding healing modalities within the Africana tradition.

During the first session, registrants, many of whom identified as Africana, women, and caregivers, participated in a “healing circle.” During this initial activity, they shared their varying levels of experience with herbal remedies and other healing modalities. This exchange honored the knowledge each participant brought to the experience and served as a resource-sharing activity. Emphasizing the importance of each person’s experiential knowledge and connections to generational wisdom was at the center of this event. After the first workshop on the first day, a trained Africana woman herbalist led the medicine-making sessions, where participants made two herbal infusions (tisanes) and an herbal chest rub. On the second day, we opened the session with lunch and discussed herbs from the first session, including how participants used the herbal remedies over the past week. We then moved to the medicine-making session, where the herbalist led participants in making two tinctures and an herbal steam. During this session, participants also made fire cider, an immunity-boosting drink that can be made with an apple cider vinegar base, various fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

The CHG provided a unique space for Africana folks to gather, learn and share together. It provided some tools for participants to begin taking control of their bodily autonomy. As a pedagogical tool, it reminded students of the importance of these healing traditions as practiced by Africana people before them. Collaboration with community through engaged projects, such as the CHG, is an effective teaching tool that demonstrates the stakes of practical knowledge and moves students toward understanding the political nature of education.

Conclusion

In the wake of the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, activists, organizers, and community members began looking for ways to comfort and care for birthing people and caregivers in need. This care looked different for everyone as it forced us to look outside of the systems and protections that were no longer in place. Similarly, it required that educators think more broadly about how we could engage our students, our institutions, and our communities in more thoughtful and communal practices. Through anonymous course evaluations and direct conversations with students, I found that many of the students enjoyed both the RJCA and CHG, because for many of them, this type of learning was unfamiliar to them. One student described taking the course as an “eye-opening” experience that helped them better understand the connections between Africana women’s history and our contemporary moment. Further, they explained how they now understand reproductive justice as a broad umbrella that is relevant to multiple parts of our lives, not just those typically associated with reproductive rights or abortion. Together, through the Reproductive Justice Community Altar and the Community Herbal Gathering, my students and I engaged in the important work of *sankofa*; we began the process of looking back to the past to collectively envision a new future.

Bibliography

- Bauer, Raymond A. and Alice H. Bauer. 1947. "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery." *The Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 4: 388 – 419.
- Bernard-Carreño, Regina A. 2009. "The Critical Pedagogy of Black Studies." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 10: 12 – 29.
- Camp, Stephanie M.H. 2004. *Close to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Davis, Angela. 1971. "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 4: 2 – 15.
- Fett, Sharla M. 2002. *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Henry, Annette. 2005. "Chapter Four: Black Feminist Pedagogy: Critiques and Contributions." *Counterpoints* 237: 89 – 105.
- Hull, Gloria T. and Barbara Smith. 1982. "The Politics of Black Women's Studies," in *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, xvii – xxxii. Old Westbury: The Feminist Press.
- Hoyert, Donna L. 2023. "Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021." National Center for Health Statistics Health E-Stats. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:124678>.
- Karenga, Maulana. 2010. *Introduction to Black Studies*. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press.
- Morrison, Toni. 1987. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Owens, Deirdre Cooper. 2017. *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Play Cousins Collective. n.d. "About Us." Accessed September 15, 2023. <https://playcousinscollective.wildapricot.org/About-us>
- Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Ross, Loretta. 2017. "Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism," *Souls* 19, no. 3: 286 – 314.
- Ross, Loretta and Rickie Solinger. 2017. *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Shakur, Assata. 1987. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Press.
- White, Deborah Gray. 1985. *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaved in the Plantation South*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Notes

1. Author uses Africana and Black interchangeably. Africana refers to people of African descent. Author uses African American to describe the unique experiences of Africana people living in the United States.
2. In Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), she addresses how Africana people continue to experience an ongoing continuum of violence, which she terms the afterlives of slavery (6). The connection between the violence of the historical past and our contemporary future is especially salient when considering how various Africana people experience the compounding forms of violence in our lives. Hartman's concept of the afterlife of slavery offers Africana people's experiences as a model to understand how the state acts on marginalized individuals and communities through impoverishment, lack of access to quality education and healthcare, and harassment by police, immigration enforcement, and other state forces.
3. For additional information about how Kimberlé Crenshaw operationalized the term intersectionality, see "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul., 1991). In her article, Crenshaw employs an intersectional approach, or an approach that seriously considers the impact multiple intersecting identities have on individual lived experiences, to understand how violence impacts the lives of women of color.
4. Both the Healthcare Ethics Program and Law School reached out to WGSS, one of my home departments, to request space in the course for their respective students. While unplanned prior to registration, adding these students provided an exciting opportunity for a more interdisciplinary discussion around the legal and ethical aspects of African American women's historical connections to reproductive justice.
5. Pan-toting is how enslaved people reclaimed resources from enslavers without permission. They commonly took food, clothing, raw materials, and other items to help sustain themselves, their families and other community members. Stealing time refers to the reclamation of enslaved people's time and included work stoppages, feigning illness, and escape for long and short periods of time (Davis 1971).
6. The Black maternal mortality crisis refers to the increased rates at which Black birthing people die both during and after pregnancy. A 2021 CDC study found the maternal mortality rate for Black women was 2.6 times higher than the maternal mortality rate for white women (Hoyert 2023).
7. Due to restrictions related to where the RJCA was housed, we were unable to use live candles.
8. In various traditions, like the Dagara, an altar may be referred to as a shrine.

9. Author recognizes Hoodoo as a continuation of African diasporic spiritual traditions, carried to North America through the Maafa (Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade), continued by Africana people during enslavement and recognized through contemporary practice. For more information about the distinct characteristics of Old Traditional Black Belt Hoodoo, see Katrina Hazzard-Donald's *Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System* (2013).
10. Spiritual energies refer to nature as well as any deified entities of a specific tradition.

11. <https://playcousinscollective.wildapricot.org/About-us>

Shelby Pumphrey is an assistant professor in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) Department and Pan-African Studies (PAS) Department at the University of Louisville. She teaches courses in African American women's history with a focus on reproductive justice and the carceral state.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://open.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Confronting Reproductive Injustices: A Discussion on Decolonial, Queer, Anti-racist Organizing

by TL Jordan, BriShaun Kearns, Regan Kluver, and Mary Jo Klinker



"ONCE..." BY BEC YOUNG VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

In April 2023, Governor Tim Walz tweeted the following message, celebrating the protective measures available to Minnesotan citizens:



Governor Tim Walz ✓
@GovTimWalz

I just signed three bills into law that:

- ✓ Protect people seeking or providing abortions in Minnesota
- ✓ Ban the harmful practice of conversion “therapy”
- ✓ Protect access to gender-affirming health care

In Minnesota, we’re protecting rights – not taking them away.

10:24 AM · Apr 27, 2023 · 742.1K Views

1,691 Reposts 332 Quotes 11.7K Likes 63 Bookmarks



As we explore throughout this essay, Minnesota’s reputation as a progressive island, surrounded by more conservative states that have restricted access to reproductive rights, misses the opportunity to fully contextualize intersecting social movements beyond electoral politics. In this way, we ask — what connections do we share across coalitions for Indigenous sovereignty, environmental justice, racial justice, the movement for police abolition, and protecting trans youth? These are core conversations that we have shared in our analysis of reproductive justice and creating safe communities for children and families. In March 2023, we converged for a plenary panel as fellow travelers in the movement for reproductive justice at the Red River Women’s Studies Conference, “Bodies and Bans: Reflecting Post-Roe,” at Minnesota State University-Moorhead. During that same year, the Red River Women’s Clinic was forced to relocate from Fargo, N.D., to Moorhead, Minn., due to the consequences of the Dobbs decision and subsequent trigger ban in North Dakota. This is an important pedagogical context, as the move from North Dakota to Minnesota is framed as one of greater safety afforded through legal protection; however, that notion is troubled by examining abortion through the reproductive justice lens.

By sharing our diverse perspectives in relation to the following theoretical frameworks – decolonial, anti-racist, and queer reproductive justice, we offer an example of coalitional solidarity by including perspectives at the margin often relegated to invisibility in mainstream reproductive rights conversations. Of course, the post-Dobbs era has ushered in further misogynist and white nationalist violence that normalizes the conditions that undermine our collective reproductive, sexual, and gender autonomy. Our conversation charts this terrain in the Minnesota context. As we know, the meager rights under Roe have never been enough, because a legal framework

individualizes a collective experience of harm; hence, the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which continues to prohibit use of Medicaid funds for abortion, exposed the intersecting impact of classism and racism on low-income folks who became pregnant and had no access to abortion. According to the Guttmacher Institute, Black women make up 29% of women 14-49 enrolled in Medicaid, meaning this impact disproportionately affects Black women (Guttmacher Institute, May 2021).

Reproductive Justice Beyond Rights

This dialogic essay builds from the critical teachings of women of color organizers in Sister Song and Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice who assert that reproductive justice is an intersectional framework tying together multiple social movements. This framework is elucidated in Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger’s *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*:

Reproductive justice is a contemporary framework for activism and for thinking about the experience of reproduction. It is also a political movement that splices reproductive rights with social justice to achieve reproductive justice. The definition of reproductive justice goes beyond the pro-choice/pro-life debate and has three primary principles: (1) the right not to have a child; (2) the right to have a child; and (3) the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments. In addition, reproductive justice demands sexual autonomy and gender freedom for every human being (p. 9).

Linking reproductive health access to broader social movements ensures that the most marginalized are centered. As we document here, while abortion access is legally available in Minnesota, the state also has the largest racial health disparities in the nation. This is confounded by high rates of family separation experienced by Indigenous and Black parents, police violence, and continued attacks on Indigenous sovereignty via pipelines — all factors that necessitate that reproductive justice extends beyond discussion of abortion. As Loretta Ross pointed out, “this is in contrast to the singular focus on abortion by the pro-choice movement that excludes other social justice movements.”

Ross’ analysis of liberal individualism inherent in the singular focus of “choice” offers an important lesson to students and organizers, especially as we consider the roots of reproductive injustices and deploy strategies to create collective safety beyond a legal framework. As Wendy Brown argued in *States of Injury*, “Rights discourse in liberal capitalist culture casts as private potentially political contests about distribution of resources and about relevant parties to decision making. It converts social

problems into matters of individualized, dehistoricized injury and entitlement, into matters in which there is no harm if there is no agent and no tangibly violated subject" (p. 124). Essentially, the progressive fight to preserve and now protect (or restore) abortion rights inherently shifted focus away from broad systems of economic, racialized, and colonial marginalization that perpetuate a litany of harms far beyond reproductive access. This provides a potent teaching opportunity to expose how limited reform demands like "restore Roe" fail to acknowledge existing inequities. Therefore, in "pro-choice" states like Minnesota, once abortion rights protections were passed, coalitional solidarity around systemic injustice can quickly falter without this broader theoretical framework.

Minnesota's state electoral politics are "progressive." On June 25, 2022, Governor Tim Walz signed an emergency executive order to protect "reproductive health care services" in Minnesota (Exec. Order No. 22-16, 2022). This was followed by the passing of the Protect Reproductive Options Act (PRO Act) which protects the right to "reproductive freedom" within the state (Protect Reproductive Options Act, 2023). Our analysis of organizing at the margins of reproductive injustice in the state of Minnesota highlights how we must trouble this notion of "progressive," as laws can be essential for some protections, but remain attached to the colonial state apparatuses that uphold unequal access to safety. Despite codifying "reproductive freedom," these policies are more concerned with keeping reproductive freedom legally available, not materially accessible. This is especially true considering that the PRO Act codified what was already legal in Minnesota at the time but did not address the barriers keeping people from accessing that health care in the first place. This legislation was always meant to "establish a fundamental right to reproductive health" and not to improve access to reproductive care (Minnesota Legislature, 2023).

Minnesota is also a site of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racist violence. For instance, in the uprisings of 2020 responding to the extrajudicial murder of George Floyd, protesters were met with state violence and tear gas. Planned Parenthood North Central States' recent research has found a significant impact on the reproductive health of those who were exposed to tear gas in 2020, documenting that 83% of those surveyed experience reproductive health issues like early menstrual bleeding, breast tenderness, and delayed menstrual bleeding (Hassan, et al 2023). Another context of state violence is the 2021 replacement and completion of Line 3—Enbridge, the Canadian-owned oil pipeline; almost 900 people were arrested protesting the oil pipeline. As many water protectors argued, the pipeline violates the treaty rights of the Anishinaabe people and endangers water.

As argued below, the anti-Black racism of policing in Minnesota is co-constitutive of the settler colonial project. Dorothy Roberts' *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families—And How Abolition Can Build a Safer World* further exposes the racism in Minnesota, stating:

The United States extinguishes the legal rights of more parents than any other nation on Earth. As with every aspect of the child welfare system, Black and Native children suffer the most—they are twice as likely as white children to experience the termination of both parents' rights. In some states, the legal demolition of family ties has risen dramatically in the last two decades, spurred by federal law's acceleration of termination proceedings. Terminations in Minnesota, which removes Black and Native children at exceptionally high rates, increased by 80 percent from 2010 to 2019 (p. 23).

Minnesota's representation as a progressive electoral state is dismantled in relation to the evidence of a larger colonial context. For this reason, we agree that the reliance on the legal framework erases many compounding oppressions.

When examined through the prism of intersectional reproductive justice, that legal reproductive rights framework reveals more inequality and more coalitional opportunities. This paper is a product of feminist pedagogy that refuses a hierarchy between theory and experience; as such, we are students, educators, and activists who have studied and practiced reproductive justice politics collaboratively. Our methodology follows the vision of Carolyn M. Shrewsbury's 1987 "What is Feminist Pedagogy?" whereby the division between "teacher-student and student-teacher" is subverted through collaborative social action (p. 6). Throughout this paper we utilize policy analysis, storytelling, and personal testimony as anti-racist feminist educators to show how these interlocking frameworks reveal the demands of social movements and differences between rights and liberation. The Red River Women's Conference plenary was our primary site of teaching; however, our teacher-student subversion is the act of reflection, or as Shrewsbury stated: "engaged with self in a continuing reflective process" (p. 6). The sections that follow are collectively theorized and written, as an act of coalition-building, and embed the individual, lived experiences of Regan Kluver, TL Jordan, and BriShaun Kearns.

ICWA and Building Family Autonomy

As noted above, reproductive rights discourses are often simplistic. Reducing reproductive health care access to abortion falls into a harmful binary of access versus no access; this binary is a fundamentally Western perspective that reproductive rights only mean equal access to abortion. However, if we look at reproductive justice, including "the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments," within an Indigenous framework, we can start to see the intersectional and cyclical nature of what reproductive justice offers. By looking at the health and needs of a whole person and whole community, we can understand the ripple effects reproductive justice, or a lack thereof, has on issues beyond abortion. My discussion is centered around understanding reproductive justice as bodily and community autonomy by examining the relationship between reproductive justice and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and water protection.

Reproductive justice as a framework is critical in my passion for ICWA awareness because of the history surrounding the systematic removal of Native children and forced assimilation practices before ICWA passed in 1978. The removal of Native children from their homes had been ongoing throughout the 19th century. However, between the 1950s and late 1960s, this removal was formalized into the Indian Adoption Project organized by two government agencies known as the United States Children's Bureau

I can remember sitting with an elder whose relatives were stolen prior to 1978. I remember looking through old photographs of their homes; she told me once when she was young and playing with her siblings and cousins in her yard, a black vehicle rolled onto her dad's property. She told me her cousins did not know that when that car approached, that meant they were supposed to recede to the woods and wait until it was gone. That day, two of her cousins were taken, and she never saw them again.



"IT'S NOT JUST WOMEN" WSU REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE CLUB CHALKING AT WINONA STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL 2021

and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Although forced separations of Native children from their homes was present in urban areas, the Indian Adoption Project targeted tribal communities and justified their acts of violence under the argument that life on the rez was hard, and Native children would be given a better life if placed with non-Native white families. The forced assimilation of Native children via boarding schools and family separation was intentional and became one of the leading causes of cultural disruption. At one point, before the passing of ICWA in 1978, over 75% of Native families had at least one child taken from them (*Blood Memory*).

My mother was born prior to the protection of ICWA and was placed in a white household, and although she grew up in a home full of love, she still was a statistic and a removed Native child. Unfortunately, my mom's story is not an outlier. According to the House of Representatives Report "Establishing the Standards for the Placement of Indian Children in Foster Homes, To Prevent the Breakup of Indian Families and Other Purposes," one in four Native peoples from her generation were adopted out. Sandy White Hawk had a similar story. As she has examined in her book, *A Child of the Indian Race*, there is no reproductive justice for Indigenous families under the terrorism of family separation (Whitehawk, 2022).

Further, reproductive justice gives families the ability to care for their children in a safe manner. It is not just about the right to choose to carry a child; it includes the rights of rearing and supporting that child into adulthood without federal policy taking away agency from families.

While ICWA is currently protected, the anti-abortion and racist climate of the Supreme Court is an attack on both bodily and community autonomy. The same week that the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of ICWA, there was a split vote decision in *Arizona vs. Navajo Nation*, denying the United States' responsibility to uphold promises from the Treaty of 1886 and consequently removing the Navajo Nation's primary access to clean water. Access to and protection of clean water is also a reproductive justice issue. Water and access to clean water is the foundation of all life. We are nurtured and carried in our parents' waters before birth, and so there is an understanding amongst Indigenous communities, including my own, that water is sacred, and we cannot survive without it. Moreover, water is not just a means for basic human life but is also a lifeway for cultural knowledge. It is part of our creation stories, our pathways, and so much more. Colonial pipelines, like Enbridge's Line 3 that crosses 95 bodies of water, know no bounds when it comes to injustice. They harm traditional foodways and the water, and they increase sexual violence and the attacks of Indigenous women, children, and two spirit people. Pipeline leakage creates barriers for a community's access to water, is a direct act of violence, and demonstrates the federal government's implicit attack on tribal sovereignty by upholding imperialist natural resource management policies, similar to the treatment of Indigenous families. This history and the continued reality of environmental racism is one that provides evidence of the importance of teaching that our personal stories are tied to politics in order to understand the harm of colonial policy.

Gender Autonomy and Protecting Trans Families

Minnesota had a monumental legislative season in 2023 that provided protections for both reproductive rights and trans rights with the passage of the PRO Act and Trans Refuge Act. While these pieces of legislation have been crucial to protect people's autonomy in raising their families, we cannot rely on legislation to protect the most vulnerable among us, especially while dominant narratives are imbued with white nationalism and transphobia.

In the post-Dobbs era, public conversations have still been centered around abortion and *Roe*, but those conversations tend to be centered within the status quo that *Roe* provided, which did not provide equitable access (e.g. Hyde Amendment) to all outside of the most privileged groups. As activists and advocates in reproductive justice, we must not limit our imagination to what *Roe* was; rather we must imagine a future that is as inclusive and diverse as the groups of people seeking access to reproductive care. A part of that reimagining is the intentional inclusion of family structures beyond the

hegemonic nuclear family model and the incorporation of transgender people and the reproductive care that is specific to them. This reimagining of family structures is critical to incorporating gender-diverse families and to resisting the colonial family ideals which destroyed and



"WATER IS LIFE" BY CHRISTI BELCOURT VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS

separated many Indigenous families, as well as incorporating the ways that full communities can raise their children. It also requires that we clearly define reproductive care as part of gender-affirming care; if politicians are drawing those lines, we should be explicitly drawing those lines as activists and advocates for reproductive freedom. For instance, during the Minnesota Senate floor debate of the PRO Act, amendments were introduced to ban gender-affirming care for young people, despite the bill language never mentioning trans people or gender-affirming care at all (Minnesota Senate, 2023). If hostile lawmakers are making these connections on the Senate floor, it is critical for us to draw these connections between movements as educators. Cross-movement analysis is not only critical for students to practice intersectional frameworks, but it also enables us to dream of ways movements can work together to make change. For these reasons, we need to imagine reproductive care

that is just as diverse as the people and the families who deserve access to that care.

A huge part of caring for families of transgender individuals as they seek safety is ensuring that those trans people have access to the reproductive care that they need. Transgender reproductive care looks a lot like reproductive care for anyone else, but there are unique considerations that often get lost or are inaccessible to trans people from the start. The discussion of fertility is a notable example of trans specific health care that is often pushed to the side. Quite often, trans people are not seen as reproductive beings, which automatically limits the conversation about trans-inclusive reproductive care (Strangio, 2016). There is a pervasive assumption which ties deeply with the misunderstanding of trans experience in the general population, that *all* trans people hate their body (especially their genitals), and so trans people must not want to get pregnant, be a part of pregnancy, or want to discuss pregnancy in any terms (Nixon, 2013). This is not only a harmful generalization of the trans experience that is rooted in eugenics, but it means that providers of reproductive care will immediately assume only a portion of reproductive care is desired and will never actually be offered. There are plenty of trans people who want to parent, and the experience of pregnancy is quite gender-affirming to them. There are trans people who believe so strongly in birthing their own child that they will adjust their own transition to accommodate pregnancy. Reproductive justice looks like transgender people having access to starting families on their own terms and in ways that affirm their gender.

The option to start a family through pregnancy may be a desire for some trans people, but maintaining viable fertility while transitioning can be incredibly difficult and inaccessible for most trans people, regardless of knowing if they want to start a family (Chen, 2018). When I first started HRT, my provider began to discuss how HRT would impact my fertility and what fertility preservation options were available to me. I remember immediately stopping my provider from going in depth into fertility preservation options and said, "You may as well not even talk to me about this, because I will never be able to afford it." Although I do not have a desire to have kids of my own, I never got the option to truly consider fertility preservation without pausing my transition and hoping I could afford fertility preservation in the future. My experience is extremely common among transgender people; we do not even get the chance to truly consider fertility because of the barriers imposed by the health care system that makes fertility preservation extremely expensive. For many trans people, giving up their fertility is just the price you pay to receive gender-affirming care (De Sutter, 2021). This injustice is compounded by the fact that alternative family options, such as adoption, have similar discrimination-based barriers (Stotzer, 2014). Trans people will never have full access to reproductive justice while being unable to make the decision to start a family on their own terms and not on the terms set by medical gatekeeping and transphobic ideas about trans parenting in the first place.

The question of fertility is already a complicated one for trans adults, but it can be even more complex and

difficult to manage as a young trans person. This is especially true as gender-affirming care for minors is increasingly banned across the country, limiting the options for trans youth and limiting the ability of supportive parents or guardians to help them navigate these decisions. Unfortunately, living in a state that hasn't banned gender-affirming care isn't enough to make fertility preservation accessible to the families of young trans people. For all the good that Minnesota's Trans Refuge Act has done, it doesn't do anything to address the access of gender-affirming care or the costs of moving to a new state. In fact, since that legislation was passed gender-affirming care providers have been struggling to keep up with the influx of new patients, new residents and current residents alike (Bierschbach, 2024).

As mentioned earlier, reproductive justice is keeping families together and ensuring that your family is safe from harm, and families with trans parents or trans children are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain safety for their family. Even in legally protected states, like Minnesota, there is an ever-present fear of harm done to trans people in the wake of increased violence against trans communities. Conversations post-*Dobbs* must go further than the question of abortion and start addressing the systems and political harm that continue to make it difficult for families to maintain safety and live full, healthy lives. It is incredibly difficult to live a full, healthy life while living in a state that continually legislates against your existence. It is difficult for families to navigate moving out of state to avoid the danger perpetuated by the state, and for the families who cannot afford to move, life becomes a constant struggle to do everything you can to mitigate the harm to those nearest to you. Minnesota did well to pass the Trans Refuge Act in the 2023 legislative session, which increased protections for people seeking gender-affirming care in Minnesota and gave the state increased authority in child custody cases regarding gender-affirming care. Regardless of this legislative win, we cannot rely solely on the state to create solutions for trans people, especially since the law only supports families in Minnesota, families who are receiving gender-affirming care in Minnesota, or families who are able to move to Minnesota. One state cannot undo the harms of every state's legislature, and we need to prioritize supporting the families who will be fighting to survive in states hell-bent on erasing trans existence.

Addressing these issues will take more than single-issue organizing, and by emphasizing intersectionality and cross-movement work in our pedagogy on reproductive justice, we can come up with solutions that are more creative and responsive to lived realities. We can use our communities to welcome trans families who move to states with more legal protections and ensure that they get connected with the resources that they need. We can create systems of care and mutual aid that protect trans families who must remain in states that are hostile. This is especially true as more hostile states are looking to remove trans children from the custody of their parents, the same tactics used to separate Indigenous children from their communities. We can look to Indigenous communities who have been fighting to keep their families

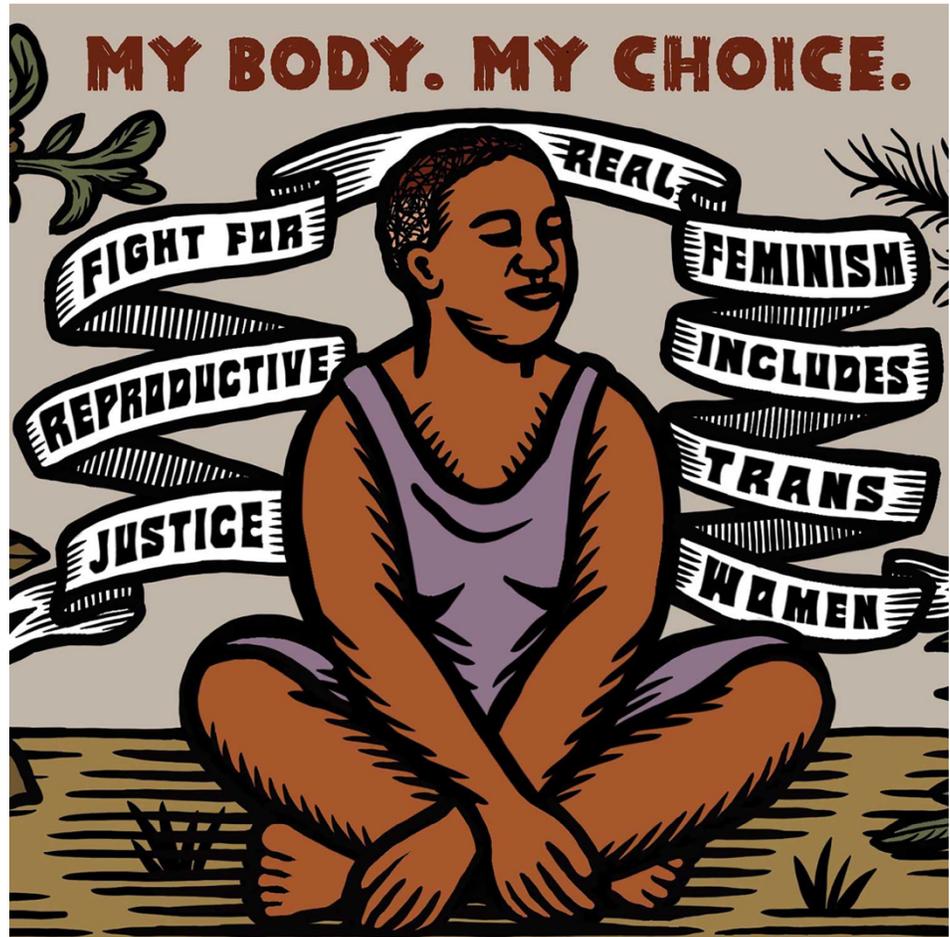
together and raise those families on their own terms in their own cultures. Being able to raise a family on your own terms and in safe environments is not just the responsibility of those starting the family; it is the responsibility of a community to continue to create conditions where all types of families can survive and thrive. In our new imagining of a life after *Roe*, we need just as much effort in community care to create communities based in solidarity as we need effort in passing legislation to combat attacks on reproductive and gender autonomy.

COVID, Policing, and Reproductive Justice

Another critical component of the “right to have children” is the ability to access life-affirming resources such as housing, health care, and education. Currently, governmental funding is rarely spent on the needs of the most marginalized communities, and as a result, they are forced to provide community relief through building care networks of mutual aid. For this reason, my earliest memories of reproductive justice show up as my mom and my aunts coming together to pay for rent or offering childcare. This unspoken organizing was done in my community to make sure people could go to the county office for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, go to job interviews, and attend school. While this is a fact of life for many people in our communities, it’s a rarely discussed part of reproductive rights discourses. As someone that doesn’t have children of their own, I often am asked why the issues of mothers are so important to me. A large part of my answer to this is that despite not being a mother myself, I still love and cherish the young people in my community. In this way, I still act as a mother figure for them. As Alexis Pauline Gumbs describes in *Revolutionary Mothering*, this act of community “mothering” is “the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming and supporting life” (p. 9). Many of us know this personally, whether coming from neighbors watching out for us while we play or having friends of our moms act as “aunts” and participate in our care despite not having blood relation. This is all reproductive justice.

As a Black-Native person, there are many ways that reproductive choice is very limited. “Choice” and reproductive rights are often reduced to individual access to abortion and birth control. Although health care access is an incredibly important part of achieving reproductive and sexual autonomy, the reproductive justice framework demands that we move past this simple measure of

success. In the article, “Racism and the Need for Reproductive Justice,” author Erica West points out that both the decision to have children as well as not to have



MY BODY. MY CHOICE BY KILL JOY, VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS

children are “more challenging for people of color and low-income people. This means that the fight for reproductive justice encompasses not just pregnancy and birth (and, of course, the choice to plan and continue, or terminate, that pregnancy), but housing, schooling, community and police violence, and more.” Histories of the use of Black bodies during slavery and forced sterilization for Indigenous, Black and Puerto Rican, and Chicana women, as well as women in poverty and folks with disabilities makes it especially difficult to view either as an easily made choice. These realities will always color whichever direction I choose to go. Unfortunately, traditional reproductive choice frameworks do little to address this when framing childbirth as a “choice.” From a young age, I experienced racism in libraries and at stores, being followed around to this very day, impressing on me that I don’t belong there. These types of ostracization are material forms of violence that we need to fight against as they deny people the right to grow up in an environment that is safe and allows the space for children to thrive — a central tenet of reproductive justice. Thriving also means access to safe environments amidst large-scale crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and affordable housing.

During the early part of 2020, when I was working at the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center and COVID had first hit, we made masks collectively to protect our communities. At the start of the pandemic, there wasn't much support to prevent the spread of COVID, especially for service providers and those that interacted with us daily. It really came down to enlisting "personal protection strategies" like masking, social distancing, and, when possible, staying home throughout the lockdown. This reliance on personal measures posed a problem in many ways. For those who were jobless, unhoused, or employed but severely underpaid, being able to afford masks was nearly impossible. Similarly, those receiving services, especially anyone who utilized the shelter, were at high risk due to the contact they maintained with providers and other community members as they were largely unable to socially distance. Most importantly, due to the high rates of homelessness in the Native population, many members of the community were unable to observe lockdown procedures and self-isolate "at home." This is important as COVID infections and deaths hit the Native population hardest. Native Americans come together to protect families and elders, as "Natives [were]...nearly three times more likely to be hospitalized [from COVID] and more than twice as likely to die from the disease than whites" (Chatterjee).

During that same time, George Floyd was murdered, in the community I lived in. We were locked down by the police and National Guard. Families lived under the duality of COVID threats and the policing of their communities; state violence disrupted our ability to have reproductive justice. As Erika West argues in "Racism and the Need for Reproductive Justice," "every person that is killed by police is someone's son, daughter, and child." We demand the right to raise our children in a safe environment. The fight against police brutality and militarized state violence is a feminist struggle as state violence is reproductive injustice.

Another way of engaging in community support was the work that my wife and I did to bring diapers, food, and baby wipes to community centers and to disseminate donated money to unhoused mothers of color. Due to citywide lockdowns, the lack of supplies in the stores, and the financial insecurity that families faced, it was increasingly difficult for mothers to get the needed supplies for their families. That is a literal way that reproductive justice happens in the struggle for anti-racism and against police violence. In addition, at that time, traveling to stores was risky due to COVID, tear gas, and militarized police clashes. Because of the lack of governmental support to our communities, we have to provide mutual aid, as reproductive justice, to make it possible to raise kids in a safe and healthy environment amidst these odds. Political organizing must secure safety and ensure respect for children so that they can live in a world without policing that can lead to death.

My own sense of mothering comes most strongly with my sister's children. She had her first child when I was 10 years old, and we grew up together. My nephew remains an important part of my life despite us being separated for years when I went to college. I think about him a lot when

I'm doing activist organizing, especially regarding the deaths of Black men from police brutality. As a young Black boy, there are a lot of hard conversations that we've had to have about his safety and how life is different for him than it is for his white peers and even for his sister. These dangers have intensified as he's gotten older, and now that he's going to start driving next year, I'm constantly thinking about what that means for him and his safety, what it means "to parent children in safe and healthy environments" (Ross and Solinger, p. 9). Examining communal parenting as a site of pedagogy is one way that anti-racist feminist educators can bring the most marginalized student voices to the classroom. Mutual aid networks are themselves a form of education that teach us about horizontal leadership and collaboration.

Conclusion

As we have documented and as Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice first formulated, reproductive justice is interconnected to all social movements, providing lessons on coalition work among groups that are usually disconnected. Reproductive justice is the safety and preservation of all people, families, and communities. Much like our conversation at "Bodies and Bans: Reflecting Post-Roe" in March 2023, we end here with abolitionist author and organizer Mariame Kaba who says that "hope is a discipline" that we must practice amidst interlocking oppressions of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, settler colonialism, environmental injustice, perpetual militarism, and attacks on bodily autonomy. To confront the myriad of reproductive injustices, we need decolonial, queer, anti-racist co-conspirators. As we have documented, sharing our stories of struggle and mutual aid leaves no one behind. Kaba says that hope looks like "collective care, collectivizing our care, and thinking more about how we can help each other." She asks, "How can we collectivize the care of children so that more people can feel like they can actually have their kids but also live in the world and contribute and participate in various different kinds of ways?" (p. 28). This conversation has examined how collective care is reproductive justice. This care looks like water protection, Indigenous and trans families' bodily and family sovereignty, care networks throughout the continuing COVID pandemic, and aunties.

Reducing our scope of conversation to legal access to abortion in Minnesota does not afford us the ability to examine interlocking structures of oppression, as seen in documented attacks on trans youth, clean water access, ICWA, and police violence. Laws and liberal rights discourses will not provide us the solutions of decolonial, queer, anti-racist justice. This collective reflection as teacher-students and student-teachers has afforded us an opportunity to practice the critical lessons outlined by women of color in the reproductive justice movement. We encourage other educators and organizers to center storytelling about the diversity of strategies communities are using to protect each other and build collective care to move beyond a single focus on abortion.

Additional Comments

This conversation began in March 2023 for the conference “Bodies and Bans: Reflecting Post-Roe” at Minnesota State University-Moorhead. The plenary panel “Another World is Possible: A Conversation About Reproductive Justice with Emerging Activists” was organized and facilitated by Mary Jo Klinker. They were all fellow travelers in reproductive justice movements, Bri Kearns and Regan Kluver were previously student activists at Winona State University and TL Jordan had collaborated as a graduate student with WSU Students for Reproductive Justice.

Throughout the paper we seek to denaturalize the gender binary in our language. We understand that for reproductive justice to be realized, gender autonomy is critical. This work necessitates that we dismantle the problematic gender binary, which arises out of colonial violence; while many citations and works use “women’s health” and “women’s rights,” we have used non-gendered language to ensure that trans, non-binary, and gender nonconforming folks are not erased by using a colonial binary.

We would like to thank the Minnesota State University Moorhead community for hosting our plenary panel, Winona State University Students for Reproductive Justice for their continued activism, the editors of *Radical Teacher*, and Drs. Colette Hyman and Scott Makstenieks for their comments on drafts of the essay.

Works Cited

- Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice. (2005). “A New Vision for Advancing Our Movement for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Justice.” <https://forwardtogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ACRJ-A-New-Vision.pdf>
- Bierschbach, B.. (2024, Feb 15). ‘Trans refuge’ law draws some to Minnesota, and providers are struggling to meet the demand. *Star Tribune*. <https://www.startribune.com/people-are-flocking-to-minnesota-as-a-trans-refuge-providers-are-struggling-to-meet-the-demand/600343715/>
- Chatterjee, R. (2021, November 24). *Hit hard by Covid, Native Americans come together to protect families and elders*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/11/24/1058675230/hit-hard-by-covid-native-americans-come-together-to-protect-families-and-elders>
- Chen, D., Matson, M., Macapagal, K., Johnson, E. K., Rosoklija, I., Finlayson, C., Fisher, C. B., & Mustanski, B. (2018). Attitudes toward fertility and reproductive health among transgender and gender-nonconforming adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 63*(1), 62-68.
- De Sutter, P. (2001). Gender reassignment and assisted reproduction: Present and future reproductive options for transsexual people. *Human Reproduction, 16*(4), 612-614. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/16.4.612>
- Exec. Order No. 22-16. Protecting Access to Reproductive Health Care Services in Minnesota. (2022). https://mn.gov/governor/assets/EO%2022-16_tcm1055-532111.pdf
- Gumbs, A. P., Martens, C., & Williams, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Revolutionary mothering: Love on the front lines*. PM Press.
- Guttmacher Institute. The Hyde Amendment: A Discriminatory Ban on Insurance Coverage of Abortion. (2021). <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/hyde-amendment>
- Hassan, A., Ojanen-Goldsmith, A., Hing, A. K., Mahoney, M., Traxler, S., & Boraas, C. M. (2023). More than tears: Associations between exposure to chemical agents used by law enforcement and adverse reproductive health outcomes. *Frontiers in Epidemiology, 3*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fepid.2023.1177874>
- H.R. Rep. No. 1386. (1978). Establishing the Standards for the Placement of Indian Children in Foster Homes, To Prevent the Breakup of Indian Families and Other Purposes. Hr1386.pdf
- Kaba, M. (2021). “Hope is a Discipline.” *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*. Haymarket Books. 26-29.
- Minnesota Senate. (2023). *Journal of the Senate, Ninety-Third Legislature: Fourteenth Day*. Retrieved from <https://www.senate.mn/journals/2023-2024/20230127014.pdf#>
- Nichols, D. (2019). *Blood Memory Documentary*. Film North.
- Nixon, L. (2013). The right to (trans) parent: a reproductive justice approach to reproductive rights, fertility, and family-building issues facing transgender people. *Wm. & Mary J. Women & L., 20*, 73.
- Protect Reproductive Options Act, Minn. Stat. § 145.409 (2023) <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/Session+Law/Chapter/4/>
- Sister Song . (n.d.). “About Us” . <https://www.sistersong.net/about-x2>
- Shrewsbury, C. M. (1987). What Is Feminist Pedagogy? *Women’s Studies Quarterly, 15*(3/4), 6-14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003432>
- Spade, D. (2015). *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Duke University Press.
- Stotzer, R. L., Herman, J. L., & Hasenbush, A. (2014). Transgender parenting: A review of existing research. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3rp0v7qv>
- Strangio, C. (2016). Can reproductive trans bodies exist? *CUNY L. Rev., 19*, 223.

Trans Refuge Act 2023, Minn. Stat § 518D.201-629.14 (2023).

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/bill.php?b=house&f=HF146&ssn=0&y=2023>

West, E. (2020, September 18). *Racism and the Need for Reproductive Justice Can't Be Unlinked*. Teen Vogue. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/racism-and-the-need-for-reproductive-justice>

White Hawk, S. (2022). *A Child of the Indian Race*. Minnesota Historical Society.

TL Jordan, MS, MA (they/them) is an instructor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality studies at Winona State University. They previously have spent many years as reproductive rights organizer and continue to do queer organizing in their communities. Their teaching and research focus on trans studies and the intersections of trans rights and reproductive rights.

BriShaun Kearns (they/them) is a Black and Indigenous person doing community work and is a student of the Feminist Studies PhD program at the University of California Santa Barbara. They have experience working in domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy through the Women's Resource Center in Winona MN and the MN Indian Women's Resource Center in Minneapolis MN.

Regan Kluver (she/her, Aandakamiginamookwe)

grew up in the Twin Cities, but her tribal communities are the White Earth band of Ojibwe and Red Lake Nation. She is also of mixed Polish descent. Professionally, Regan has worked as a program specialist for the Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship program at the Minnesota Historical Society and is currently Assistant Director of American Indian Education in St. Paul Public Schools. Regan is an Ojibwe Language learner, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) advocate, and Indigenous curriculum consultant in the state of Minnesota. Her research focuses on curriculum and teacher leadership with a focus on preparing educators to teach Indigenous content across disciplines.

Mary Jo Klinker (she/they) is a professor of Women's,

Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Winona State University. Their research focuses on the relation of queer activism and theory to feminist antimilitarist organizing and anti-imperialist critique. She serves as the mentor to WSU Students for Reproductive Justice.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Post-Roe Abortifacients in a Gender and Health Classroom: Teaching Reproductive Justice in 2022 and Beyond

by Rachel O'Donnell



"ABORTION ACCESS SAVES LIVES" BY LANE LLOYD VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

Teaching new college students, especially privileged students in majority-white classrooms, about the importance of understanding structural patriarchy is not only challenging but occasionally ugly. Some students have even suggested, either in person or in their course evaluations, that perhaps reproductive justice is not a topic for the classroom, even in a class I teach titled “The Global Politics of Gender and Health.”¹ I consistently argue for a careful consideration of what is meant by Reproductive Justice, taking from our course reading by Loretta Ross, and her famous response to “What is reproductive justice?”² In a teaching setting, the topic of reproductive justice covers a range of issues, including access to comprehensive sexual education, contraception, prenatal care, safe and legal abortion services, and support for parenting, such as in Ross’ “Right to Parent,” which outlines how important reproductive justice is to trans lives, as both a worthwhile academic topic and its place in the classroom, especially at predominantly male institutions. I mean by this that the majority of academics in high positions are men; I am a non-tenure track full-time faculty member with an appointment in a writing program, who is asked to ‘adjunct’ in what I consider my primary field of study: Gender and Women’s Studies. Many of my colleagues in this program are also “adjuncts,” and mainly teaching one course at our institution, without full-time appointments. As a white female instructor at a private institution in upstate New York, I find myself often reflecting on the structural components of knowledge production, and making use of radical ideas to explore what is meant by the education we get at particular institutions.

Certainly, exploring the traumatizing legacies of eugenics, sterilization campaigns, and misogyny remains a privilege as a white instructor who can contain these discussions to the classroom. Those most impacted by reproductive justice, women and gender minorities, often form powerful counters against systemic oppression in a world that attempts to erase the humanity of many people. Reproductive justice has been theorized by Ross and others (Solinger, Roberts) as a radical and political act, that often moves from the individual family to the larger community, as it has in the post-Roe world. If I can make use of narratives to teach the value of reproductive justice, I thought, the importance of the movement to protect reproductive justice will certainly become clear to students. I wanted to make it clear that being subject to reproductive law is not just challenging, but dangerous, and connected in many ways to legacies of colonial and imperial violence. I always want to ensure that we are talking about reproductive rights meaningfully and authentically in the classroom and resist the pushback and dismissal of it by students who often say is ‘too difficult to tackle.’ I take this call to action seriously and speak the understanding of to those who are ‘gender illiterate,’ though my courses are primarily meant to expose students to Gender Studies as a field, and in the case of Gender and Health, the way health and health care are gendered globally.

I say this in part because my research has been for many years on plant-based abortifacients; and now,

before the more recent ‘alternative methods’ of contraception and abortion were being talked about and shared, I found it a really interesting place to start the course. Students were interested in plants that women used in other places as contraceptives and abortifacients, and wondered about the differences, but also held onto it as an important reproductive justice issue as well as a knowledge production one. “Where is this knowledge?” they wondered out loud in class, and many asked, “Why don’t I have access to it?”

So, this past spring, teaching it for the first time since Roe was overturned, I decided to change the course a bit, to begin the Gender and Health course with reproductive justice itself, which I would define and then use as a pedagogical tool. I talked in that first class session about the ideas surrounding reproductive justice, including abortifacients and contraceptive knowledge and access to pharmaceutical abortion.

We began the class session by reading a work from Jamaica Kincaid. In Jamaica Kincaid’s short prose piece “Girl” (1978)—sometimes referred to as a poem, sometimes a short story—a mother in Antigua gives advice to her daughter in a string of straightforward lessons. One of the key lessons in the story links Kincaid’s characters to the Caribbean practice of resisting gender norms and colonialism through the use of plant-based abortifacients. In the story, these instructions are given sharply and hastily, and the mother allows the child, the unnamed girl, only two brief responses throughout her long monologue. These responses are noted in italics to denote the girl’s interjections, but it is the mother who steadfastly proceeds. Much of the advice given reflects the mother’s particular knowledge of women’s daily labors and clear conception of gender roles: she explains to her daughter how to wash clothes and menstrual rags, how to hem a dress, and how to behave with men and manipulate them. Kincaid begins her story as if in the middle of the speech in the mother’s voice:

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off. (Kincaid 37)

Much of the literature about this very popular story and often-anthologized short piece considers the character of the mother and her distinctive voice. Still, the title itself allows the reader to understand that the mother is not the main character, but the maternal voice is only filtered through the listener, her daughter. The mother in the story clearly communicates gender roles and sexuality, and maintains her agency within the oppressive society that she manages daily. Still, the most important lines of this short work are evoked in the recipes for food and medicine that the mother provides towards the end of the work. In a New Yorker essay, Kincaid reflects on the distinction between enjoyment and knowledge of the natural world and its practical application, and “Girl” is not the only place where Kincaid notes the complicated relationship between Antiguans and plants: “When they (we) were brought to

this island from Africa a few hundred years ago, it was not for their pottery-making skills or for their way with a loom; it was for the free labor they could provide in the fields” (qtd. in Stitt 150). In “Girl,” her work takes a more complicated route: she shows how plants are both part of a legacy of slavery and of resistance to colonialism and highlights the feelings of Antiguan women towards the natural world.

In “Girl,” each line later in the story begins with “This is how,” and the reader sees represented in spare prose the wealth of knowledge that Caribbean women possess about their bodies and the natural world. The list of instructions that the mother gives come near the end of the piece and contains recipes for preparing food and medicines: “this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; *this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child*” (Kincaid 37, italics mine).

Contraceptive plant knowledge has remained central for Caribbean women as a political practice and is often part of their everyday lives, and I use this story to highlight the work that my own work has taken on—recognizing that abortifacients are everyday practice, much like a recipe for cooking, and not anything out of the ordinary for much of the world. They only become more complicated to discuss in the contemporary political landscape. In my own research, which centers on an abortifacient plant used in rural Guatemala, I found plants often used for menstrual regulation in rural communities where I did fieldwork, alongside a legacy of the disappearance of the contraceptive and abortifacient properties of plants in botanical writing and classifications. As more women ask one another for medical supplies for abortion outside of health care settings, I asked my students, in what ways is history repeating itself? How have contraceptives and abortifacients been hidden? How much of this knowledge has disappeared? Students often recall the sharing of information on social media—is it safe to use these things? In class, we come to a place where we wish for a better medicine and science centered on health, one that studied and highlighted the possibilities for reproductive practice for everyone.

I also ask students to give examples of what their grandmothers have given them for home remedies. I have heard all kinds of things in response to this, from garlic for stomach aches, peppermint tea for nausea, other herbs and plants with curative properties. And then I ask, why should plant-based abortifacients be any different? Why has this information not been passed down to us?

We also begin that first class with a Bettina Judd poem, from her collection *Patient*, where she takes on the colonial legacies of black women and Western medicine, including J. Marion Sims, the controversial 19th century gynecologist, and honors women like Saartje Baartman and Henrietta Lacks.

I then have students watch a 2020 documentary film called *Belly of the Beast*, in which activists discover a pattern of illegal sterilizations in California’s women’s

prisons and uncover a series of coercive sterilizations that primarily targeted women of color. Students responded well to this film, arguing that they now understand more clearly the shameful and ongoing legacy of eugenics and reproductive injustice in the United States. In addition to talking about their anger, they were able to consider how the legacy of forced and coerced sterilization can rework assumptions about what reproductive justice means, from the right to control fertility, but also the right to protect it.

At the center of the film is a Black mother, and I used this to connect many of our readings about the legacy of racism in health and health care. Angela Davis, for example, connects Black mothering to the fight for reproductive freedom, noting that it was early American Black women who were able to control their reproductive capacities, even from slavery onward (Bush), and ongoing reproductive justice movements (Roth). Davis points to this, and the legacy of coerced sterilization as Black mothering (216-17) and the reproductive justice movement, which highlights how women’s right to not have a child and to have a child are continually intertwined.

The first year I taught this class on Gender and Health, in 2020, our last in-person class happened at midterm, right before we were suddenly at home because of COVID-19. For that class, before we knew we would not be meeting in our classroom again, I decided to run a panel discussion for the class with local health care practitioners. I had invited a naturopathic doctor, some sexuality educators, and the head of the state chapter of Planned Parenthood, who all agreed to join us for class. Right at the end of the panel discussion, responding to a student question about what would happen next for Planned Parenthood, the head of the state chapter told us that that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned in the next few years. She said deliberately, “I am telling you it will be overturned, not that I’m afraid it will happen.” Students looked a little bit sad, but mostly shocked. I admit I was hesitant how to respond. Doesn’t this seem extreme, I thought? We have had this law in place since 1974.

Nearly 50 years after its initial ruling, *Roe v Wade* was overturned on 24 June 2022, by the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case, which also overruled *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The *Dobbs v. Jackson* case ruled that a Mississippi law banning abortions after 15 weeks was constitutional. The law was designed to provide a legal basis by which to overturn the *Roe v Wade* ruling, which states that abortion cannot be banned before the fetus reaches viability (24–28 weeks into pregnancy). The ruling did not ban abortion, but it removed the constitutional restriction on legislation banning abortion.

Reproductive justice conversations can come up in a variety of ways, from plant-based contraceptives to mothering narratives. Reproductive Justice discussions,

especially in what we now call the post-Roe world, shouldn't back away from ideas of access ("Where do I get an abortifacient? Will it work?" as one student asked) and its connections to motherhood. We may have to pull these narratives from creative places. I have often assumed that true ideas about coerced sterilization would drive out white supremacy or cultural illiteracy (Simms) around structural racism in conversations about reproductive rights, and that only a lack of exposure to these ideas have impacted students, but that is not necessarily true. Beginning from the Reproductive Justice framework radically changed my class last semester. This 'demystification' process happens differently for everyone in the classroom (Olson). Sometimes we have to work with the narratives that are more relatable for students, perhaps around mothering or where to access contraception, to develop what I hope is an altered consciousness and behavior, and increasing compassion for other humans, as we advocate for reproductive justice for all of us.

Notes

1. "The Global Politics of Gender and Health" course description reads: This interdisciplinary course is an introduction to critical concepts and approaches used to investigate the intersections of gender, health, and illness, particularly in the context of individual lives both locally and transnationally. Special attention will be paid to the historical and contemporary development of medical knowledge and practice, including debates on the roles of health-care consumers and practitioners, as well as global linkages among the health industry, international trade, and health sector reform in the developing world. Emerging issues around the politics of global health include clinical research studies, bodily modification practices, and reproductive justice movements.
2. Ross said: "The right to have a child, the right to not have a child and the right to raise your children. Everyone should have that. It's not that hard to explain — it's just hard as hell to achieve."

Works Cited

- Bush, Barbara. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*. Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Cohn, Erika. *Belly of the Beast*. Idle Wild Films. Documentary. 2020.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

Kincaid, Jamaica. "Girl." *At the Bottom of the River*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.

Olson, Gary. "The Execution Class." *Z Magazine*. March 1, 2007. Online. [Zcomm.org](http://zcomm.org).

Mirkinson, Jack. @jack Mirkinson, "american exceptionalism: you can't have an abortion or get a juul, but we'll give you all the ak-47s you want." June 24, 2022.

@PPFA. "BREAKING: The Supreme Court just overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending our constitutional right to abortion. We know you may be feeling a lot of things right now — hurt, anger, confusion. Whatever you feel is OK. We're here with you — and we'll never stop fighting for you." *Twitter*. June 24, 2022.

Ross, Laretta. "Trust Black Women: Reproductive Justice and Eugenics." From *Radical Reproductive Justice*, eds. Edited by Loretta J. Ross, Lynn Roberts, Erika Derkas, Whitney Peoples, and Pamela Bridgewater Toure. New York: The Feminist Press, 2017.

Sarkar, Ash. @AyoCaesar. "Absolutely gutted for my sisters in the states. Abortion bans are an attack on all women, but that disproportionately impact women who are poor, women of colour, and women trapped in abusive relationships. Abortion bans are barbarism." *Twitter*. June 24, 2022.

Rachel O'Donnell teaches in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program at the University of Rochester. With a background in radical politics, International Development, and Latin American Studies, Rachel's writing and teaching are interdisciplinary and have been focused on global feminist politics and Central America. Her research has explored social movements and political violence in Guatemala during the period of regional democratic and neoliberal reform, and her work has been published in the *Women and Social Movements International* database with Alexander Street Press. Her more recent work on the history and political economy of bioprospecting in the region is part of an international project on abortifacients and reproductive justice.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Sharing Information as Political Praxis Among Activists for Self-managed Abortion

by Naomi Braine



"REBIRTH" BY JOSH MACPHEE VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

We enter 2024 following 18 months of escalating losses of rights and bodily autonomy for people with the capacity for pregnancy and those who live outside the gender binary, along with a corresponding rise in creative, determined resistance. Abortion bans have a horrifying impact on the lives and health of anyone facing an unwanted pregnancy, and can have serious consequences for those who develop severe health problems during a wanted pregnancy (Perritt and Scencirro, 2024). Yet the power of everyday resistance has been so strong that the abortion rate has not declined nationally (We Count, 2023), even though almost half of states have imposed some level of restriction on access to abortion that would not have been possible under *Roe* (Center for Reproductive Rights). Forms of teaching and learning or, in the language of activists, of sharing information have been core elements of maintaining access to safe abortion regardless of the legal context. Contemporary feminist activism for self-managed medication abortion (SMA) engages with processes of circulating information and developing knowledge, including medical knowledge, as a central form of political action. The work that takes place within feminist activism around SMA challenges even progressive frameworks for teaching, learning, and the creation of knowledge.

This essay draws on a combination of research on SMA as a transnational feminist movement and my own experience as an SMA activist as well as someone long involved in harm reduction around drug use and HIV, another domain where social movements have been central to knowledge development. The SMA research involved semi-structured interviews with 70 activists across 17 countries from 2017 to 2019 with a few follow up interviews done in 2022 in the wake of the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision that overturned federal protection for abortion rights. Participants were recruited through chain referral (snowball sampling) and the majority of persons interviewed had been SMA activists for 5 to 10 years at the time of the interview. The material from this study has been published in two journal articles and a book, and a full description of the research methodology can be found in Braine and Velarde (2022).

Social movements are deeply involved in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, although they often describe this work using language that does not carry the hierarchical implications of "teaching". Feminist consciousness raising and self-help groups in the 1960s and 70s were explicitly horizontal spaces within which women shared experiences to develop an analysis of sexism and a deeper understanding of their own lives and bodies (Murphy, 2012). Workshops or trainings may create temporary spaces within which an experienced activist teaches others how to engage in a particular form of action, such as clinic defense (Hume, 2023), but unlike most institutional teaching contexts, the vertical elements of a movement training are usually bounded by the workshop space itself and do not involve ongoing power differentials. Movements engage with the production of knowledge through praxis that integrates feeling, action, and intellectual analysis (Lozano, 2018), as can be seen

powerfully illustrated in the work of activists for self-managed abortion.

Community based health action outside the medical system builds through the development and sharing of information, including adaptations of scientific knowledge. For example, the most effective responses to HIV prevention have long emerged from within affected communities as activists integrate different forms of knowledge to share strategies, practices, and above all information about how to think about safety, risk, and pleasure in creative and adaptive ways. Similarly, women's health activists, across generations and social contexts, have adapted medical information and developed autonomous knowledge about female bodies in ways that center women's lived experience. While this article will focus on the work of 21st century activists for SMA, it is useful to first step back to place this work within larger historical and social movement contexts.

HIV offers diverse examples of the development of community-based practices and health related knowledge at the margins of or outside of the medical system. While HIV/AIDS activists engaged with, challenged, and operated outside of the medical system in a wide range of ways, the community-based health practices of safer sex and harm reduction offer the closest analogies to SMA. In the 1980s, activists within gay communities developed what we now call "safer sex" by drawing on early scientific research on HIV to think through strategies for interrupting transmission that would work within the contexts of urban gay male sexual cultures (Escoffier, 1998). These processes continue as both sexual contexts and knowledge about sexual transmission evolve, often in dialog with each other and in ways that continue to reduce risk through the integration of knowledge and practice (Braine et al, 2011). These community-driven strategies de-medicalize scientific knowledge through adapting it to community settings and creating approaches to risk reduction that center marginalized cultures and lived experience over the dominant models of mainstream public health.

People who use drugs began to adapt injection practices to reduce transmission even before the advent of syringe exchange programs and have been central to the evolution of drug-related harm reduction from the beginning (Grund et al, 1992; Friedman et al, 2004). Syringe exchange and overdose prevention emerged within networks of activists, including both active and former drug users, as community driven practices that reduced the harms of substance use -- or more accurately, reduced the harms caused by laws prohibiting the use of certain drugs which, in turn, create health (and other) risks for drug users. Activists distributed materials and information through drop-in sites, workshops, and grassroots networks to reduce the spread of HIV, often working at the margins of the law during the early years of harm reduction. SMA, safer-sex, and drug-related harm reduction all center the bodily autonomy of people in stigmatized situations, building health practices and spaces of safety outside medical control.

SMA and drug-related harm reduction in particular have many similarities but emerged from within social movements and contexts that were largely separate, and have only relatively recently come into active dialog. Both SMA and drug-related harm reduction adapt medical/pharmaceutical products (medications, syringes) for autonomous use by ordinary people within community settings, with activists in both movements adapting and sharing formal medico-scientific knowledge to inform their practices (see Braine, 2020 for a more in-depth discussion). Despite these similarities, however, the places where feminist health activists and (other) HIV/AIDS activists engaged in shared work largely did not involve abortion; women who use drugs and/or have HIV face more challenges to their right to parent than to their access to abortion. In addition, organized feminist action for SMA emerged in parts of Latin America and Europe where drug injection was not a major risk for HIV, and the drug-related harm reduction that existed had little overlap with reproductive health. The use of the phrase “harm reduction” in relation to abortion largely refers to practices by medical providers who cannot directly perform abortions but can provide pre-abortion counseling and post-abortion care if needed/desired. The silo-ing of drug use/abuse and abortion as separate domains has begun to break down, particularly in the US post-Dobbs, but the depth of stigma and criminalization surrounding drug use during pregnancy has deeply complicated the connections between these areas of grassroots health work.

In contrast, there are deep and sustained connections between contemporary SMA and the long history of feminist health activism across historical periods and geographic regions. The medicalization of abortion starting in the late 19th century could be understood as a rupture in the historically dominant location of abortion as an area of autonomous action among women, and SMA reclaims abortion as a de-medicalized experience. Before the Roe decision legalized abortion throughout the US, feminists had developed a range of self-help practices that reclaimed and de-medicalized women’s experiences of their bodies and reproductive health (Murphy, 2012; Hume, 2023) but this brief window of de-medicalization faded with the legalization of abortion and creation of feminist health clinics. The Jane collective in Chicago in the years before Roe (Kaplan, 1997) were probably the most direct predecessors of today’s SMA activists, performing abortions outside the medical system for women who called their phone line. Today, cellphones and the Internet have radically altered communication and access to information, while medication makes it possible for someone to have a safe abortion alone in their home (or anywhere else) with pills and 1 page of instructions. These 21st century technologies increase the possibilities for communication, and in doing so provide a basis for feminist solidarity through strategies that enhance access, autonomy, and accompaniment.

Digital technologies can enhance atomization and separation but also connection and community; in the hands of feminist SMA activists, they create the possibility for sharing information in contexts that also enable support and solidarity. Since the early 2000s, a few shared

strategies have emerged globally despite an extraordinary diversity of languages and locations. The most essential, and adaptable, may be the Safe Abortion Hotline, which can be operated by a collective with a cellphone that is answered for set hours each week, an NGO with an internet-based call center that can accept calls 24/7, or anything in between. The first collectively run hotline was created in Ecuador in 2008, and the idea spread rapidly across the world until in 2023 there were at least 58 hotlines across 5 continents (listing from womenhelp.org). A hotline collective shares information with callers, provides mutual support to collective members around the stresses and rewards of hotline work, and shares knowledge and experience with other hotline collectives regionally and/or transnationally. Some collectives and NGOs provide accompaniment, which usually also begins with a phone call but then involves ongoing support between an activist and a person with an unwanted pregnancy, often by phone or text but sometimes in person, throughout the abortion process. There are also websites with information for download and telehealth services that mail medication as well as providing information and support by email. While the work may be done alone in any given moment, feminist support for SMA is fundamentally a collective process in which activists engage in mutual aid, sharing information and experiences with people confronting an unwanted pregnancy and with each other in ongoing processes of knowledge development (see Braine and Velarde, 2022, or Braine, 2023, for more comprehensive exploration).

At its core, feminist activism for SMA involves sharing information about how to use medication to have an abortion based on the protocols published by the World Health Organization and other medical or public health bodies. There is a certain radical impulse behind the action of taking control of formal medical protocols and claiming them for autonomous community use. When activists began doing this in the 2000s, they were working with protocols designed for use by medical practitioners (Braine and Velarde, 2022), although since then the WHO has published protocols that are explicitly for self-managed abortion, largely based on studies collaboratively produced by community activists and feminist epidemiologists (Braine, 2023). In practice, activists learn to literally share information when they accompany abortions, as they recite the protocol as instructions in the third person: “first someone would take the mifepristone, swallowed with a glass of water, and then 24 hours later take the misoprostol by placing 2 pills on each side of the mouth between the cheek and the gums, allow to dissolve for 30 minutes.” I can say from personal experience that this form of communication feels unnatural in a conversation with another human being and requires some practice and self-monitoring.

The phrase “share information” is both a simple surface description of what activists do when they speak with people who want to learn about SMA and a legal framework that creates a space for limited but vital communication even within contexts of severe restriction and criminalization. In brief, it is legal to share information from a widely available medical protocol; it is not legal to

counsel someone or do anything that could be interpreted as giving medical advice. The step-by-step instructions may be expanded to include other relatively technical information, for example that the standard medications used for an abortion do not interact with testosterone and therefore can safely be used by persons in the transmasculine spectrum without pausing hormonal treatment. Even with relevant extensions, however, the structure of the communication remains bounded by the legal framework of sharing widely available information, not offering medical advice or counseling. This framework has enabled hotlines and other forms of support for SMA to proliferate throughout the world, even in contexts of complete prohibition on abortion (even to save the life of the mother) as in El Salvador and Honduras, and in Chile prior to 2017 (Braine, 2023).

Sharing information is a spacious and creative activity that can range from simply sharing the basic step by step protocol to more complex spaces of ongoing communication. In the context of ongoing support through an abortion, activists continue to share information rather than give advice or tell someone what to do, but the communication becomes more focused on the concerns of the moment, such as how many soaked maxi pads in what period of time might indicate a hemorrhage. Discussion of the social and emotional conditions surrounding or during an abortion are not constrained by the “info share” framework since they lie outside the medical domain. Activists in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa described spending more time talking about the context for the pregnancy, and sometimes the logistics of the abortion, than about the protocol itself (Braine and Velarde, 2022). These larger conversations ranged across stigma, familial judgment, anger and shame at oneself, and domestic violence, as well as practical considerations like how to manage the abortion in a way that limits the visibility of the process. A Mexican syringe exchange activist who accompanies women who use drugs through the SMA process explained that renting a cheap hotel room was perhaps the most important form of support her program provides (personal communication, 2022).

Activist networks share experiences, insights, and observations gained through the collective accompaniment of thousands of abortions (Braine, 2023), enabling individual activists to benefit from this accumulated body of knowledge. Expansive understandings of the process of having an abortion, from the implementation of the protocol to the diverse social locations and emotional contexts within which abortions take place, give shape to the unfolding communication in any single encounter in ways that integrate the technical (and therefore limited) with the less constrained realms of the interpersonal and interpretive. As a result, the actual communications at the heart of activist support for SMA were never described as static or rigid, but instead as highly interactive, multi-dimensional, and sometimes exhausting (Braine, 2023). The dynamic process of bringing together information from diverse sources and contexts to inform a particular moment, issue, or encounter may be a common thread across social movement and more formal educational contexts, although the hierarchical elements of

institutional settings tend to impose more directionality on the flow of information.

Learning within activist networks takes place in many ways and can occur without the legal boundaries necessary in conversations with someone facing an undesired pregnancy. In addition to the ongoing, horizontal pooling of experience just described, there are a variety of workshops that often have a more traditional, somewhat vertical, structure. Organizations will run general educational events, online or in-person, with information about abortion, SMA, legal issues, and how to get involved in feminist organizing. These are advertised through social media, flyers, and word of mouth in activist networks. Latin American SMA collectives have periodically run “abortion schools” to recruit and train new activists, and in these contexts the focus is on teaching the protocol and associated legal constraints; participants practice how to remain within the boundaries of “sharing information” without facing any potential legal hazards when they exceed the limits. In the US, there are analogous training events that vary somewhat in format depending on the immediate context and political goals. These kinds of trainings may take place in formally horizontal settings but would be recognizable to anyone who has sat in a classroom, non-profit training session, or a zoom workshop -- the US trainings often come complete with powerpoint and handouts. These instances of more traditional teaching-learning formats stand out within the movement, in part because of the contrast with the other structures of learning and communication.

Under some circumstances, movement activists share their knowledge and experience with medical providers and public health scientists in a subversive reversal of traditional roles and authority. I attended a full day meeting in Argentina in which activists and medical professionals interacted in a completely horizontal fashion anchored in movement principles of facilitated conversation and shared knowledge development. There are long-term, transnational collaborations among epidemiologists and activists to evaluate the care practices of accompaniment collectives, and the outcomes of second trimester abortions accompanied in the community (see Braine, 2023, for a general discussion; Moseson et al, 2020 for efficacy, and Bercu et al, 2021 for discussion of collaboration and research methodology). In countries with long histories of abortion bans or restrictions, activists may have more experience with second trimester medication abortion than medical providers (e.g., Zurbriggen et al, 2018), and doctors describe learning from activists. From an institutional perspective, community health activists teaching doctors or epidemiologists is a subversive reversal of structural roles, but it is entirely in keeping with movement practices of radical knowledge development and sharing among all relevant parties. The new element may be the acceptance by some medical providers and epidemiologists of a collaborative peer relationship with people who work outside institutional settings. While it is important to acknowledge this aspect of information sharing within the movement, a full exploration of these dynamics -- and the question of social movement engagement with scientific

knowledge in multiple fields -- goes beyond the scope of this paper.

What can we learn from these radical movement practices and bring into more institutional settings? The framework of "sharing information" offers an interesting model for at least some aspects of education. It decenters authority by locating the person who shares the information as a conduit for knowledge more than an arbiter of knowledge, and any potential use of the knowledge explicitly lies in the hands of the person receiving information, not the provider of information. The interactions that take place among SMA activists and persons facing an unwanted pregnancy center on a collaborative sharing of different kinds of knowledge in order to move forward. Someone who wants to end their pregnancy may need information about the use of pills and perhaps some emotional support, both of which can be provided by an accompaniment activist, but the process of the abortion itself lies entirely in the hands of the pregnant person. Teachers working within institutional contexts may understand that the adaptation, relevance, and use of the material we share, or teach, lies in the hands of students/learners, but the power structures within which these encounters take place still tend to dominate interactions. The institutional imperative to assign grades often draws the most attention in analyses of power, for obvious reasons, but the design of a curriculum intrinsically creates an educational framework within which "information sharing" in one educational moment/classroom exists in relation to other moments/classrooms/courses. The longitudinal, interactive, and mutually referential nature of teaching within a department or other shared curricular environment simultaneously creates valuable contexts for the information shared in any one course or classroom but can also limit the autonomy of students or the directions of dynamic collaboration in the moment.

The knowledge development practices of SMA and other community health activists offer an invitation, and perhaps a provocation, to the health sciences in particular. The horizontal, de-institutionalized processes through which activists generate knowledge about the safe and effective use of mainstream pharmaceuticals outside the medical system challenges traditional models of the teaching and learning of medical practice. This is not unique to SMA, and can be seen across the domain of women's health activism as well as in Black Liberation movements (e.g., Nelson, 2011). The history of HIV globally offers extensive examples of communities claiming, adapting, and re-imagining medical knowledge. Education in the natural and health sciences has often been rigidly structured and hierarchical on the grounds that this is necessary given the technical content of the information and the formalized, at times ritualistic, approaches to both educational and clinical practice. The information sharing and knowledge development work of community-based health activists may not translate directly into educational settings, but it models expansive practices within domains that are often seen as less adaptable and somehow less safe for nonhierarchical approaches to learning. Yet the power of these radically

horizontal forms of knowledge development and sharing continues to be demonstrated daily throughout the world in places where access to abortion has been restricted or banned.

Last but not least, what can feminists in the US learn from this transnational movement that has changed the experience of having an abortion under restrictive conditions? It is important to begin by saying that a growing number of US activists have been learning from and participating in transnational feminist activism for SMA. A few have been involved since the early 2000s -- including some of the people doing train-the-trainer workshops in the US -- but connections expanded significantly when Texas banned abortions after 6 weeks (SB8) in Sept 2021, followed less than a year later by the Supreme Court decision in Dobbs. There are at least two abortion hotlines in the US, multiple websites with information and links, and an unknown (unknowable) number of collectives working close to the ground in their respective communities to accompany abortions as well as share information. There are active alliances with Mexican feminists who provide support to individuals in the US who are seeking abortions, and who work collaboratively with US counterparts around sharing experience, facilitating access to medication, and building cross-border solidarity. The US has traveled in the opposite direction from most Latin American countries, and the process of de-legalizing abortion brings very different political, cultural, and practical challenges than moving from illegal to increasing legality. This paper has focused on processes of communication among activists and with people seeking abortion, which are very different from the forms of communication that focus on legislative and policy change. The same activists engage in both forms of communication, in the US and transnationally, but in different contexts and through different processes (although ReproAction has shouted instructions for SMA through a bullhorn on the steps of the Supreme Court as a form of public protest). In the US, we need to follow the lead of women of color inside the US as well as those in the Global South by centering reproductive justice and human rights as the basis for law and legislation, while continuing to demonstrate the day to day power of de-medicalized SMA as autonomous, solidarity-based, action.

References

- Bercu, C., H. Moseson, J. McReynolds-Perez, E. Wilkinson Salamea, B. Grosso, M. Trpin, R. Zurbruggen, C. Cisternas, M. Meza, V. Diaz, and K. Kimport (2021) "In-person later abortion accompaniment: A feminist collective-facilitated self-care practice in Latin America." *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* vol 29(3)
- Braine, N (2023) *Abortion Beyond the Law: Building a Global Feminist Movement for Self-Managed Abortion*. Verso Press

- Braine, N. and M. Velarde (2022) "Self-managed Abortion: Strategies for Support by a Global Feminist Movement." *Women's Reproductive Health* vol 9(3)
- Braine, N., L van Sluytman, C Acker, S Friedman, and DC Des Jarlais (2011) "Sexual contexts and the process of risk reduction." *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, vol 13(7)
- Center for Reproductive Rights, map of state policies on 12/17/23. Map updated regularly <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>
- Escoffier, J (1998) "The invention of safer sex: Vernacular knowledge, gay politics, and HIV prevention." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol 43
- Friedman, SR, C. Maslow, M. Bolyard, M. Sandoval, P Mateu-Gelabert, and A Neaigus (2004) "Urging others to be health: "Intravention" by injection drug users as a community prevention goal." *AIDS Education and Prevention*, vol 16(3)
- Grund, JP, P Blanken, NFP Adriaans, CD Kaplan, C Barendregt, and M Meeuwssen (1992) "Reaching the unreached: Targeting hidden IDU populations with clean needles via known user groups." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol 24(1)
- Hume, Angela (2023) *Deep Care: The Radical Activists Who Provided Abortions, Defied the Law, and Fought to Keep Clinics Open*. AK Press
- Kaplan, L (1997) *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*. University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition
- Lozano, Alberto A (2018) "Knowledge co-production with social movement networks: Redefining grassroots politics, rethinking research." *Social Movement Studies* vol 17(4) 451-63
- Moseson H, Bullard KA, Cisternas C, Grosso B, Vera V, and Gerds C (2020b) "Effectiveness of self-managed medication abortion between 13 and 24 weeks gestation: A retrospective review of case records from accompaniment groups in Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador." *Contraception* vol 102(2): 91-98
- Murphy, M. (2012) *Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*. Duke University Press
- Nelson, A. (2013) *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. Univ of Minnesota Press
- Perritt, J and A Scencirro (2024) "Advocacy and Activism for Health Care Providers in post-Roe World." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol 123(3) forthcoming, July 2024.
- We Count Report April 2022 to June 2023*. Society of Family Planning, 10/24/23. Doi <https://doi.org/10.46621/218569qkgmb1>
- Zurbriggen, R., N Vacarezza, G. Alonso, B. Grosso, and M. Trpin (2018) *El Aborto con Medicamentos en el Segundo Trimestre de Embarazo: Una investigacion socorrista feminista*. Ediciones La Parte Maldita, Buenos Aires

Naomi Braine is a Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College, City University of NY. Prior to joining the faculty at CUNY, she worked in the non-profit research sector on issues of drug use and HIV, and consulted for community based organizations. Her political and intellectual work addresses gender, sexuality, reproductive justice, wars on drugs and terror, and health and collective action. Her current work focuses on self-managed abortion as a transnational feminist movement.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://open.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Dobbs to Disrupt U.S. Hegemony and Build Feminist Solidarities

by Derek P. Siegel



IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR

When the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department asked if I could teach *The Politics of Reproduction* in Fall 2022, an elective course for 35 undergraduate students, I was excited. As a scholar-activist, I study how inequalities shape people's ability to parent and become parents, integrating reproductive justice into my intellectual and political work. For example, I serve as a board member with the Abortion Rights Fund of Western Massachusetts, where for three years I coordinated volunteers to help pay for people's abortions, redistributing over \$100k per year. Preparing the syllabus, I knew I wanted the course to be an entry point into student activism and that we would approach this topic through a global lens. The Dobbs decision, however, created both opportunities and challenges in the classroom. On one hand, Dobbs animated student interest, increasing awareness of reproduction. In an activity where students mapped their own reproductive life course, over half identified Dobbs as a pivotal event or "turning point" (Elder 1998). On the other hand, media coverage of Dobbs primed students—particularly those who had not been exposed to reproductive justice—to think about abortion access in isolation from other topics and from an exclusively U.S. perspective.

Struggles to teach abortion politics post-Dobbs are symptomatic of larger problems in the U.S. classroom, including lack of diversity in the curriculum (Myers 2006; Utt 2018) and students' difficulties theorizing nation/nationalism as categories of analysis. In my experience teaching at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and public Research 1 university, many students who have the vocabulary to analyze race, class, and gender have not thought as much about how nation (i.e., citizenship, borders, and other global processes) also structures their everyday lives. The polarization of U.S. politics reinforces this pattern, compelling students to focus on real and perceived differences between Democrats and Republicans without reflecting on the structure of U.S. hegemony. For context, most of these students are from Massachusetts; most engage in paid work outside their studies, and about a third identify as people of color.

I responded to these challenges in several ways. First, I organized the course around three key concepts: *reproductive justice* (Ross & Solinger 2017), *stratified reproduction* (Colen 1995), and *reproductive governance* (Morgan & Roberts 2012). Introducing these concepts early in the semester provided students with concrete case studies that address the interrelationship between domestic and global politics. For example, Colen (1995) examines differences between West Indian childcare workers and their (white) employers, theorizing how "inequalities of race, class, and gender are reinforced through stratified systems of reproduction" (98). In another assigned text, Morgan & Roberts (2012) explain how different "configurations of actors," including state institutions, nonprofits, and social movements, have worked together to criminalize abortion in Latin American countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic (241).

I also wanted to expose students to *La Marea Verde*, or the "Green Wave," of countries expanding abortion access in Latin America. Between 2020 and 2023, Argentina legalized abortion through the first fourteen weeks of pregnancy, Colombia's highest court legalized abortion through twenty-four weeks, and the Mexican Supreme Court decriminalized abortion. In each of these cases, mass mobilization and feminist solidarities were vital to expanding abortion access. By teaching Latin American abortion politics in relation to the Dobbs decision, I aim to disrupt U.S. hegemony. Specifically, teaching about the Green Wave highlights the possibility of organizing for reproductive justice outside the parameters of the state and challenges the logic of American Exceptionalism, which works to justify and normalize intersectional inequalities.

How Abortion Discourse Can Reinforce U.S. Hegemony

During our dedicated week on U.S. and Latin American abortion politics, I invited students to examine the social movement frames favored by activists and other actors. Social movement frames produce and maintain meaning by priming people to think about issues in a particular way (Benford & Snow 2000); like picture frames, they tell a partial story, emphasizing certain details and excluding others. So, what is at stake when some frames (often from the U.S.) become synonymous with the fight for abortion access, and how do social movement frames open and/or foreclose different organizing possibilities?

In class, I shared excerpts from *Shaping Abortion Discourses* by Ferree et al. (2002) to illustrate the multiple ways that U.S. activists talk about abortion. The authors conduct a discourse analysis of U.S. and German newspapers. They find that pro-choice activists in the U.S. most commonly discuss abortion as a matter of privacy from the state and/or a private medical decision, a framing that was codified (at least in principle) by *Roe vs. Wade* before *Roe* was struck down by the Dobbs decision. Other frames include women's right to self-determination and social justice (i.e., identifying inequalities in access). After reading these excerpts (p.106-111), students reviewed sample newspaper articles and social media posts published post-Dobbs. In this admittedly unsystematic search, we found that while U.S. feminists are not a monolith, and that reproductive justice has shaped public discourse tremendously in the last twenty years, the frames identified by Ferree et al. still resonate.

Latin American activists, however, use different social movement frames. To analyze these differences, I assigned an article by political scientists Daby & Moseley (2022) that profiles the *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less) campaign in Argentina, which many credit as a catalyst for legalizing abortion across the country. The *Ni Una Menos* campaign frames abortion within the larger context of gender-based violence, linking femicide with the criminalization of abortion in the public imagination. Activists wear *pañuelos verdes* (green bandanas)

inscribed with the phrase *Ni Una Menos* to symbolize this message, a slogan that has traveled to other Latin American countries and is used in conjunction with other social movement frames. In Uruguay, feminists discuss abortion as a public health crisis (Anderson 2017), while Chilean feminists have linked abortion access to democracy in a cross-movement coalition that sought to change the country's constitution (Matteson 2022). Depending on the time they have allotted, educators can use multiple case studies in this cross-country comparison.

After reviewing these case studies, students wondered aloud how they had never heard about the Green Wave in Latin America. We used this as an opportunity to discuss media bias and what is considered "newsworthy" or not. I asked students to reflect on their own news consumption and digital media practices; "why do you think so few people know about the Green Wave?" Students brought up the concept of American Exceptionalism, which we had studied earlier in the semester, arguing that many Americans disengage from world politics because they don't think it affects them. We had watched a speech by President Obama, claiming he believes in American Exceptionalism with "every fiber of his being" and that the U.S. represents an "example" to the rest of the world (Kuhnenn 2014). American Exceptionalism not only maintains the uniqueness of the U.S. but also its perceived superiority, reinforced by U.S. economic might and its disproportionate influence on global affairs. Like other ideologies, American Exceptionalism is "flexible" in its ability to withstand possible contradictions. For example, someone can believe the U.S. is the "most liberated" in terms of gender politics and reproductive rights (Abu-Lughod 2002; Smith 2006) while also lamenting the injustice of Dobbs. Perhaps, I suggested to my students, U.S. feminists ignore Latin America because we doubt the ability of Latin American activists to teach us how to organize for social change. By learning about the Green Wave, we can disrupt hierarchies between the so-called "First" and "Third Worlds."

While students may express an affinity for one frame or another, I remind them that social movement frames are political strategies, not inherent truths (Benford & Snow 2000). To address the political implications of frame mobilization, I adapted a teaching activity I published in the journal *Feminist Pedagogy*, which examines the debate over whether abortion advocates should use the term "women" or "pregnant people" (Siegel 2023). In this original activity, I ask students to consider how activists deploy frames to fulfill different social movement goals, including consciousness raising, coalition-building, and legal advocacy. In *The Politics of Reproduction*, I prompted students to conduct a similar exercise. First, in small groups, students compared social movement frames used by U.S. feminists post-Dobbs with those used by Argentine feminists in the *Ni Una Menos* campaign ("how are they similar or different?"). We then discussed the usefulness and potential limitations of each frame ("What are some political goals expressed by this movement for

abortion access? Do you think that certain frames are better suited than others to achieve this goal?").

This activity encouraged students to both think about the politics of language and question the naturalness of U.S. frames. Specifically, some students were surprised that abortion could "mean" something apart from a medical procedure or a "woman's right to choose." I completely sympathize. If someone has internalized one set of social movement frames, then it might feel strange to consider abortion access as a proxy for ending femicide or spreading democracy. When certain frames become the dominant lens through which people understand a topic, this renders other frames (and by extension, other country contexts) "un-thinkable." Some scholars refer to this as the "coloniality of language" (Deumert 2021). Language, including social movement frames, can reinforce the status quo; it is a structure that compels us to think about and engage with the world in particular ways. Language can also create new worlds and ways of being (Lorde 1984; Kelley 2002). When students challenge the naturalness of U.S. abortion frames, they participate in this practice of world-building.

As I prepared to teach *The Politics of Reproduction*, I was keenly aware of the emotions being presented on social media and by Democratic leadership, invoking a profound sense of fear and despair about the state of abortion access. One headline from the *Washington Post* reads, "1 in 3 American women have already lost abortion access. More restrictive laws are coming" (Shepherd, Roubein, & Kitchener 2022). Another headline, from *Mother Jones*, claims, "Forced Parenthood and Failing Safety Nets: This is Life in Post-Roe America," (Veroullis 2022). This fear cultivates what feminist historian Clare Hemmings (2011) calls a "loss narrative." In *Why Stories Matter*, Hemmings (2011) examines how Western feminists make sense of different historical and political eras. The "loss narrative" involves a perceived backslide in gender equality, which Hemmings warns can eclipse marginalized feminist histories. Similarly, I worry that characterizing Dobbs as an existential threat tells only a "single story" (Adichie 2009) that erases activism happening in the U.S. as well as Latin America.

Hoping to create space for students to process and potentially rearticulate their feelings, I decided to invite abortion access activists to our classroom. One guest speaker, a black woman working in the Midwest, described how her local abortion fund has responded to Dobbs. She also shared her dreams for reproductive justice in the future, which include expanded practical support programs (i.e., travel, lodging, and doula services) and more resources for front-line workers. As a long-time volunteer with the Abortion Rights Fund of Western Massachusetts, I know the challenge of sustaining movement work from a place of hopelessness. Thus, I delighted in sharing with students how the Dobbs decision has strengthened the National Network of Abortion Funds and increased collaboration across state lines. For example, in the summer after Dobbs, we began donating \$18,000 a month to the Collective Power Fund, redistributing that money to under resourced abortion funds in the South and Midwest.

More than conjuring hope, these reframes provide a counter-narrative to the “single story” of absolute crisis portrayed by the mainstream media. Dobbs has had a substantive impact on the landscape of abortion access, including mass clinic closures and increased burden of travel, not to mention potential legal implications for other topics, such as same-sex marriage (Guttmacher 2023; Kirstein, Jones, & Philbin 2022; Mohapatra 2023). However, while “crisis” suggests a fundamental shift in the political landscape, many activists argue that abortion access has never been a reality for minoritized communities in the U.S., even under *Roe v. Wade*. If we are teaching Dobbs through the lens of reproductive justice, then we must highlight the barriers to access that existed pre-Dobbs (Cohen & Joffe 2021), as well as the histories of resistance by woman of color activists in the U.S. (Silliman et al. 2004).

We must also highlight reproductive oppression and resistance from outside the U.S. context. When I decided to teach about the Green Wave, I suspected it would be difficult for students to feel hopeful about expanded abortion access in Latin America while navigating such discouraging discourses about Dobbs. The overwhelming message of fear and despair creates an expectation, or “feeling rule” (Hochschild 1979), that students should feel this way, too. Just as dominant social movement frames govern what is “thinkable,” feeling rules dictate the range of appropriate emotions, or what emotions are even “possible” to feel. While people have many legitimate concerns about Dobbs, the perceived inevitability of fear and despair disregard abortion activism in the U.S. and abroad. Feeling rules reinforce U.S. hegemony by presuming that some people’s post-Dobbs gloom represents a shared, universal experience. Educators have a responsibility to challenge this assumption in their classrooms.

Expanding Access Through Medication Abortion

Studying abortion access in Latin America can challenge students in the U.S. to rethink the possibilities of abortion access in our own country. For example, I taught students how Latin American activists have adapted to shifting political climates by promoting different methods of abortion. For context, people in their first trimester typically select between an in-clinic vacuum aspiration (manual extraction of the pregnancy) or a medication abortion (a combination of mifepristone to end the pregnancy and misoprostol to expel it from the uterus). “Medication abortions account for 53% of all abortion” in the U.S. (Jones et al. 2022). Still, abortion clinics remain a crucial part of the U.S. abortion rights movement, due to the significance of independent abortion clinics in feminist health movements (Frankfort 1972) and the overall medicalization of reproductive care in the U.S. (Halfmann 2011). In Latin America, however, activists have expanded access by focusing primarily on medication abortions obtained *outside the clinic* (both within and outside the bounds of the law).

Here are some examples that I provided my students. In Uruguay, prior to the legalization of abortion, the Ministry of Public Health adopted a harm reduction approach “consisting of pre- and postabortion counseling with a focus on safer abortion methods” (Stifani, Couto, & Gomez 2018:45). Experts credit this approach for reducing the maternal mortality rate in Uruguay by almost 30 percent (Briozzo et al. 2016). After legalization, the Ministry of Health worked to expand access via medication abortion (not in-clinic procedures), citing both the availability of resources and the success of the harm reduction model, which had already trained providers to support people using misoprostol at home (Stifani, Couto, & Gomez 2018). Peruvian activists have also worked to expand access via medication abortion. Operating in a country that actively criminalizes abortion, Peruvian activists form *acompañante* (“helper”) groups that distribute misoprostol along with information and in-person support (Duffy, Freeman, & Costañeda 2023). These community infrastructures of care subvert restrictive laws and build collective feminist consciousness, not unlike the Jane Collective operating in Chicago before *Roe vs. Wade* legalized abortion in the U.S. (Kaplan 2019).

Some U.S. providers and activists are already looking to Latin America for how to navigate restrictive laws. In a review article about self-managed abortions, Nisha Verman and Daniel Grossman (2023) urge fellow clinicians to follow the Uruguayan model of harm reduction. Others, while not explicitly citing their Latin American counterparts, do use similar strategies. For example, after Dobbs, activists have increasingly relied on telemedicine and self-managed abortion to meet the needs of their communities (Baker 2023). Organizations such as “Plan C” and “Aid Access” connect people living in restrictive states with providers who can ship them mifepristone and/or misoprostol (shield laws protect in-state providers from being targeted by out-of-state prosecutors). As an activist, I have seen a transformation in messaging on this topic. While taboo ten years ago, movement leaders like the National Network of Abortion Funds now self-describe as “committed to normalizing and decriminalizing self-managed abortion...grounded in racial, economic, and reproductive justice” (NNAF). These examples will remind students that, while the impact of Dobbs is devastating, feminist communities take care of each other even without the support of the state.

At this point you might be wondering, “*why teach about Latin America if U.S. activists are also organizing around medication abortion access?*” To answer this question, I want to discuss the logic and pedagogical value of cross-country comparisons. In the activity I shared in the previous section, I had students compare social movement frames to identify patterns of difference. When cases are similar (i.e., both U.S. and Latin American activists work to expand access to medication abortion), comparisons can also be useful. For example, they can help identify different pathways, explanations, and processes that lead to these similar outcomes; sociologist Michael Buroway calls this the “extended case method” (1998).

One difference between the U.S. and a country like Uruguay is that, for Uruguayan feminists, medication abortion is central to their vision for reproductive freedom. Meanwhile, in my experience as an activist in the U.S., medication abortion is presented—post-Dobbs—as a necessary alternative to in-person vacuum aspiration. Among other possible explanations, I attribute this to the medicalization of abortion in the United States (Mohr 1978; Halfmann 2011). In the context of abortion, medicalization refers both to how healthcare is administered (i.e., by licensed professionals, regulated by insurance companies and the American Medical Association) and to the language used by activists, providers, and pregnant people to make sense of abortion as a “routine medical procedure” (Siegel 2020:8). These processes collectively conflate abortion access with brick-and-mortar clinics. They also shape some people’s preference for in-clinic abortions, presenting vacuum aspiration as “more legitimate” or less emotionally fraught by virtue of occurring at the clinic and being administered by “professionals” (Siegel 2020). For me, including cases from Latin America facilitated a more nuanced examination of U.S. abortion politics than I would have otherwise planned, making visible these histories and processes that may otherwise seem “natural” or irrelevant to the topic.

Enacting Feminist Solidarities Across Difference

In class, I profiled how Latin American activists build feminist solidarities within and across social movements, starting with the concept of solidarity. Educators can introduce this concept in myriad ways. I usually begin with a mini lecture on Marx, defining solidarity in relation to class struggle. Then I share several applied examples of solidarity, including mutual aid (Spade & Carrillo 2021), transnational feminisms (Abu-Lughod 2002), and critiques of the “Ally Industrial Complex” (IndigenousAction 2014). We discuss how solidarity challenges clear boundaries between social movements; as poet and activist Audre Lorde (1984) explains, “there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (Lorde 1984). We also discuss how various U.S. movements have struggled to move beyond this single-issue approach. Examples range from white suffragettes distancing themselves from abolitionists to appeal to white women in the South (McDanel 2013) to the unequal distribution of organizing resources within the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (Gould 2012). While the movement for reproductive justice has a long history of practicing solidarity, in my experience, this history has been sidelined by the co-optation of reproductive justice by the mainstream abortion rights movement. In other words, many individuals and organizations use the label “reproductive justice” without necessarily engaging with its key tenants, including solidarity. Comparing examples of feminist solidarities in the U.S. and Latin America is one strategy educators can use to highlight this aspect of reproductive justice organizing.

Every three years, hundreds to thousands of Latin American feminists gather to participate in the *Encuentros Feministas* (Feminist Meetings) conference to discuss their activisms and share “strategies of resistance” (Weidner 2023). This tradition began in the 1980s and has established various transnational networks used to expand abortion access during the Green Wave. In 1986, Argentine feminists started holding their own yearly conference, entitled the *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* (National Women’s Meeting), drawing tens of thousands of women “from all walks of life” to discuss topics from labor, reproductive rights, and violence to sex work and international politics (Sutton & Borland 2013:195). Heterogeneous social movements require relationship-building across difference to manage the tensions and miscommunications that will inevitably emerge, and in Argentina the *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* provide a space to build such relationships. Sociologists Friedman & Gustá (2023) describe how these yearly conferences foster intergenerational connections through mentorship, mediation, informal social interactions, and hosting small- and large-scale mobilizations.

In the U.S., Dobbs revealed the lack of relationship-building among different arms of the feminist movement. When the Supreme Court decision leaked in May 2022, abortion funds such as my own were inundated with donations and requests to volunteer, including older white women offering their homes to anyone traveling for abortion care. Such requests were amplified on social media using hashtags like #AuntieNetwork and #UndergroundRailroad2022. While well-intentioned, these Auntie Networks either replicate or “directly undermine the work abortion funds do,” displacing woman of color leadership who have expertise in their communities (Pinckney 2021). Rachael Lorenzo, co-founder of Indigenous Women Rising, wants people to know that organizing for abortion access is a “long-haul venture” that requires building trust with people seeking abortion care (Sultan 2022). In class, we discussed how the impulse to offer assistance without taking the time to ask people what they need perpetuates white saviorism (Abu-Lughod 2002). Whereas feminist solidarities require people to negotiate their relationships, white saviorism reinforces a binary between “helper” and “victim.”

Activists also build solidarity networks across social movements through coalitional politics. In class, I provided examples from both Latin America and the U.S. In Uruguay, feminists and medical providers—two stakeholders most closely associated with abortion access organizing—joined forces with unions, churches, and the LGBTQ community in their fight for legalization. Each constituency “had its own logics and internal decision-making processes,” making it harder to reach consensus but also strengthening their influence in civil society (Anderson 2017:12). In the U.S., reproductive justice activists partner each year with abolitionist groups in the “National Mama’s Bail Out” campaign to reunite black mothers, unable to afford bail, with their families (Amuchie 2017). In the 1980s, an activist named Katsi Cook from the Mohawk nation partnered with the Tribes

Environmental Office to form the Mother's Milk Project. Together, they researched the effect of industrial pollution on breast milk, educating their communities and lobbying for policy change (Silliman et al. 2004).

In previous semesters, I taught about reproductive justice largely from the U.S. perspective, comparing it with the pro-choice movement (Fried 2008) or the movements for reproductive health and reproductive rights (Forward Together 2005). These distinctions are useful for pointing out the failure of some abortion activists to consider inequalities in access and other issues that affect women and pregnant people. This approach, however, has caused us to spend more time focusing on these typographies (i.e., "*which category does this fit into?*") and less time analyzing specific attributes of reproductive justice. In contrast, by presenting examples of reproductive justice from both the U.S. and Latin America, we focused on how activists actually enact feminist solidarities in different organizing contexts. These cross-country comparisons helped broaden students' vision of what reproductive justice can look like.

Putting Dobbs into the Context of U.S. Empire

In class, I used the concept of reproductive governance to illustrate how global and domestic inequalities mutually reinforce one another. In one session, for example, I introduced students to the Hyde Amendment of 1976, which limited the impact of *Roe v. Wade* by preventing federal funds (including Medicaid) from going towards abortion. After discussing the Hyde Amendment, we reviewed the Mexico City Policy of 1984, otherwise known as the Global Gag Rule, which revoked U.S. foreign aid from any family planning organization that independently offers or refers to abortion services (Global Health Policy 2021). These domestic and foreign policies have not only codified their authors' religious and moral beliefs into public policy but also benefit political leaders: "in 2003, President Bush [expanded the Mexico City Policy] in an attempt to garner more support from the religious right for his upcoming reelection" (Lalisan 2020:989). I invited a colleague who studies the impact of the Mexico City Policy on abortion rates in India to share her research with our class. She explained that in 2017, President Trump further expanded the policy to include a wider range of funding programs (over \$7 billion per year in aid compared to \$600 million). She also explained that while the revised Mexico City Policy has had a devastating impact on programming around the globe (McGovern et al. 2020), abortion rates in India were unaffected due to its pre-existing histories and infrastructures of population control (Balasubramanian 2018; Sreenivas 2021).

After this presentation, we identified multiple connections between the Hyde Amendment and the Mexico City Policy. Both programs make it more challenging for different populations, deemed "undesirable" and "undeserving," to make decisions about their own reproductive lives. In some ways, these policies represent "abortion exceptionalism," singling out

abortion-related services to galvanize the Religious Right (Millar 2022). At the same time, they rely on a binary between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, a racialized discourse that provokes selective outrage about which programs merit funding and which do not (Bridges 2017). The Hyde Amendment and the Mexico City Policy belong to a wider constellation of discourses and policies that construct low-income women of color's reproduction as a "problem" requiring state intervention. When politicians and everyday people deploy such framings against racialized communities in the U.S., they legitimize and amplify the regulation of racialized communities outside the U.S., and vice-versa (Smith 2006; Morgan & Roberts 2012).

We discussed the Mexico City Policy as a form of neocolonialism, in which U.S. legislators "impose their own moral values onto recipient countries" (Lalisan 2020:993).

It is not, however, an isolated example. To further illustrate the role of reproduction in maintaining U.S. empire, I assigned several excerpts from Laura Briggs's *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (2002). In this text, Briggs examines various cases in which the U.S. government intervened in Puerto Rican women's reproduction, including sterilization, developing new birth control methods, and criminalizing sex work. She argues that the regulation of Puerto Rican women's reproduction solidified colonial relations between the island and the mainland, and that Puerto Rico served as a "social laboratory for anti-poverty development programs around the globe" (Briggs 2002:140).

In previous semesters I have screened the documentary *La Operación* (the Operation), which details the mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women. Briggs does caution against conflating Puerto Rican sterilization with U.S. eugenic programs that have sterilized black, indigenous, and Latina women, noting that many Puerto Rican women actively sought sterilization in the absence of other birth control options. Still, the discourse of "overpopulation" used to justify Puerto Rican sterilization continues to drive U.S. policy. The concept of reproductive governance explains how seemingly separate discourses—such as "overpopulation" abroad and the domestic "crisis" of teenage pregnancy—and policies—from sterilization to coercive funding policies—mutually reinforce one another in the struggle to assert which groups deserve reproductive autonomy and which do not.

When teaching about U.S. imperialism, as with any structure of inequality, it is vital to highlight local activism. For example, I paired our close reading of *Reproducing Empire* with a profile of the organization Taller Salud, a community-based feminist group in Loíza, Puerto Rico. Since the 1980s, Taller Salud has organized a variety of programs, including breast and vaginal self-examinations, conflict mediation, housing resources, and disaster relief (Olive 2022). After they read about Taller Salud, I invited students to use the lens of feminist solidarities to consider how they could support the fight for gender justice in their communities and around the globe. Most students

struggled with how to engage across colonial (as well as racial, class, and gender) difference without replicating these hierarchies, or how to build relationships with people who live thousands of miles away and/or who speak a different language. While we understandably did not reach any decisive conclusions by the end of class, the questions they raised speak directly to the fight for reproductive justice post-Dobbs. By modeling what it looks like to reflect on our positionality and how we participate in systems of inequality, we can help students prepare for the many challenges and pleasures of feminist organizing. We can use our classrooms and curriculum to envision the possibilities of another, more just world.

Works Cited

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 783-90.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2009. The danger of a single story. *YouTube*, 12 Feb. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zge>
- Amuchie, Nnennaya. 2017. Why I'm helping to bail out black mamas. *Rewire News Group*. 12 Feb. <https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2017/05/12/im-helping-bail-black-mamas/>
- Anderson, Cora Fernandez. 2017. Decriminalizing abortion in Uruguay: Women's movements, secularism, and political allies. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 38(2): 221-46.
- Baker, Carrie N. 2023. History and politics of medication abortion in the United States and the rise of telemedicine and self-managed abortion. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 48(4): 485-510.
- Balasubramanian, Savina. 2018. Motivating men: Social science and the regulation of men's reproduction in postwar India. *Gender & Society* 32 (1): 34-58.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611-39.
- Bridges, Khiara M. 2017. The deserving poor, the undeserving poor, and class-based affirmative action. *Emory Law Journal* 66(5): 1049-1114.
- Briggs, Laura. 2002. *Reproducing empire: Race, sex, science, and U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Briozzo, Leonel, Rodolfo Gómez Ponce de León, Giselle Tomasso, & Anibal Faúndes. 2016. Overall and abortion-related maternal mortality rates in Uruguay over the past 25 years. *Gynecology & Obstetrics* 134(1): 520-3.
- Buroway, Michael. 1998. The extended case method. *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4-33.
- Cohen, Davis S. and Carole Joffee. 2022. *Obstacle course: The everyday struggle to get an abortion in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Colen, Shellee. 1995. "Like a Mother to Them" Stratified Reproduction and West Indian Childcare workers and their employers in New York." In *Conceiving the New World*
- Order: The global politics of reproduction*, edited by F. D. Ginsburg and R. Rapp. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Daby, Mariela and Mason W. Moseley. 2022. Feminist mobilization and the abortion debate in Latin America: Lessons from Argentina. *Politics & Gender* 18(2): 359-93.
- Deumert, Ana. 2021. Insurgent words: Challenging the coloniality of language. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 272(1): 101-26.
- Duffy, Deirdre Niamh, Cordelia Freeman, & Sandra Rodríguez Castañeda. 2023. Beyond the state: Abortion care activism in Peru. *Signs* 48(3): 609-34.
- Elder, Glen H. 1998. The life course as development theory. *Child Development* 69(1): 1-12.
- Ferree, Myra Marx, William A. Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht. 2002. *Shaping abortion discourses: Democracy and the public sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Forward Together. 2005. A new vision for advancing our movement for reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice, 12 Feb. <https://forwardtogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ACRJ-A-New-Vision.pdf>
- Frankfort, Ellen. 1972. *Vaginal politics*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Fried, Marlene Gerber. 2008. 10 reasons to rethink reproductive "choice." *A Publication of the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College* 52: 1-4.
- Friedman, Elizabeth Jay, & Ana Laura Rodríguez Gustá. 2023. "Welcome to the revolution": Promoting generational renewal in Argentina's Ni Una Menos. *Qualitative Sociology* 46: 245-77.
- Global Health Policy. 2021. The Mexico City Policy: An explainer. *KFF*, 12 Feb. <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/mexico-city-policy-explainer/>
- Gould, Deborah G. 2012. ACT UP, racism, and the question of how to use history. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98(1):54-62.
- Gutmacher Institute. 2023. New data show that interstate travel for abortion care in the United States has doubled since 2020. 29 March. <https://www.gutmacher.org/news-release/2023/new-data-show-interstate-travel-abortion-care-united-states-has-doubled-2020>
- Halfmann, Drew. 2011. Recognizing medicalization and demedicalization: Discourses, practices, and identities. *Health* 16(2): 186-207.
- Hemmings, Clare. 2011. *Why stories matter: The political grammar of feminist theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. 1979. Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology* 85(3): 551-75.
- IndigenousAction. 2014. Accomplices not allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex.

- IndigenousAction*, 12 Feb: <https://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>
- Jones, Rachel K., Elizabeth Nash, Lauren Cross, Jesse Philbin, & Marielle Kirstein. 2022. Medication abortion now accounts for more than half of all U.S. abortions. *Guttmacher Institute*, 12 Feb: <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/02/medication-abortion-now-accounts-more-half-all-us-abortions>
- Kaplan, Laura. 2019. *The story of Jane*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Kelley, Robin. 2002. *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Kirstein, Marielle, Rachel K. Jones, & Jesse Philbin. 2022. One month post-Roe. *Guttmacher Institute*. 29 March. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/07/one-month-post-roe-least-43-abortion-clinics-across-11-states-have-stopped-offering>
- Kuhnhenh, Jim. 2014. During West Point commencement, Obama touts U.S. foreign policy but urges restraint. *PBS News*, 12 Feb. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/west-point-commencement-obama-touts-u-s-foreign-policy-urges-restraint>
- Lalisan, Samantha. 2020. Policing the wombs of the world's women: The Mexico City Policy. *Indiana Law Journal* 95(3):977-1004.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.
- Matteson, Emily. 2022. Abortion hope, abortion despair: Perspectives from Chile. *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, 12 Feb. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/abortion-hope-abortion-despair-perspectives-from-chile>
- McDaneled, Jen. 2013. White suffragist dis/entitlement: The *Revolution* and the rhetoric of racism. *Legacy* 30(2):243-64.
- McGovern, Terry, Marta Schaaf, Emily Battistini, Emily Maistrellis, Kathryn Gibb, and Sara E. Casey. 2020. From Bad to Worse: Global Governance of Abortion and the Global Gag Rule. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 28(3):54-63.
- Millar, Erica. 2023. Abortion stigma, abortion exceptionalism, and medical curricula. *Health Sociology Review* 32(3): 261-76.
- Mohapatra, Seema. 2023. An era of rights retractions: Dobbs as a case in point. *American Bar Association*. 29 March. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publication/s/human_rights_magazine_home/the-end-of-the-rule-of-law/era-of-rights-retractions-dobbs-as-a-case-in-point/
- Mohr, James C. 1978. *Abortion in America: The origins and evolution of national policy, 1800-1900*. Oxford University Press.
- Morgan, Lynn M. and Elizabeth F. S. Roberts. 2012. Reproductive governance in Latin America. *Anthropology & Medicine* 19(2): 241-54.
- Myers, John P. 2006. Rethinking the social studies curriculum in the context of globalization. *Theory & Research in Social Education* 34(3): 370-94.
- National Network of Abortion Funds. N.D. Self-managed abortion (SMA). *National Network of Abortion Funds*, 12 Feb. <https://abortionfunds.org/need-an-abortion/common-questions-abortions-abortion-funds/self-managed-abortion/>
- Olive, Dylan. 2022. Taller Salud is building a brighter future for Loíza. *Borgen Magazine*, 12 Feb. <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/taller-salud/>
- Pickney, Jessica. 2021. We don't need an abortion underground railroad—Black and brown people already lead the most powerful abortion fund network in the country. *Prism Reports*, 12 Feb. <https://prismreports.org/2021/12/15/we-dont-need-an-abortion-underground-railroad-black-and-brown-people-already-lead-the-most-powerful-abortion-fund-network-in-the-country/>
- Ross, Loretta J., and Rickie Solinger. 2017. *Reproductive justice: An introduction*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Shepherd, Katie, Rachel Roubein, & Caroline Kitchener. 2022. 1 in 3 American women have already lost abortion access. More restrictive laws are coming. *The Washington Post*, 12 Feb. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/08/22/more-trigger-bans-loom-1-3-women-lose-most-abortion-access-post-roe/>
- Siegel, Derek P. 2020. Medicalization and naturalization: Understanding abortion as a naturecultural phenomenon. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory & Technoscience* 6(2):1-25.
- Siegel, Derek P. 2023. How many trans people get abortions? An introduction to critical data studies. *Reproductive Politics in the Classroom*, a special issue of *Feminist Pedagogy* 3(2).
- Silliman, Jael, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena R. Gutierrez. 2004. *Undivided rights: Women of color organize for reproductive justice*. Boston: South End Press.
- Smith, Andrea. 2006. "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing." 66-73 in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, edited by Andrea Smith, Beth E. Richie and Julia Sudbury. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Spade, Dean and Ciro Carillo. 2021. A mutual aid explainer. *YouTube*, 12 Feb. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYPgTZeF5Z0>
- Sreenivas, Mytheli. 2021. *Reproductive Politics and the Making of Modern India*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Stifani, Bianca M., Martin Couto, & Alejandra Lopez Gomez. 2018. From harm reduction to legalization: The Uruguayan model for safe abortion. *Gynecology & Obstetrics* 143(4): 45-51.
- Sultan, Reina. 2022. Here's everything you need to know about abortion funds, post-Roe. *Prism Reports*, 12 Feb. <https://prismreports.org/2022/07/20/everything-you-need-to-know-abortion-funds/>
- Sutton, Barbara, & Elizabeth Borland. 2013. Framing abortion rights in Argentina's Enuentros Nacionales de Mujeres. *Feminist Studies* 39(1): 194-234.

Utt, Jamie. 2018. A case for decentering whiteness in education. *Ethnic Studies Review* 41(1): 19-34.

Verman, Nisha and Daniel Grossman. 2023. Self-managed abortion in the United States. *Current Obstetrics and Gynecology Reports* 12: 70-5.

Veroulis, Abby. 2022. Forced parenthood and failing safety nets: This is life in post-Roe America. *Mother Jones*, 12 Feb. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2022/08/abortion-bans-states-social-safety-net-dobbs/>

Weidner, J. 2023. "Feminist Encuentros in the 21st Century." In *Voices of change: Navigating resistance and Identity in Latin America*, edited by A. DeForest, C. Gill, C. Vicario, Z. Skigen, S.G. Guaman, S. Groom, S. Butler, N.A. Alworth, N. McGeveran, E. Hernández-

Medina, E. Urfrig, E.D. Goldfarb, J. Weidner, M. Coruh, & J. Ali. Claremont, CA: Claremont Colleges Library.

Derek P. Siegel (they/them) is an Assistant Professor of Sociology & Criminal Justice at Old Dominion University whose work addresses race, class, and gender inequalities with a focus on reproduction, parenting, and family. Their other research and teaching interests include medical sociology, queer and transgender studies, feminist theory, social movements, and qualitative methods. This work would not be possible without Derek's feminist mentors within and outside of academia whose activism motivate their research and teaching: thank you!



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



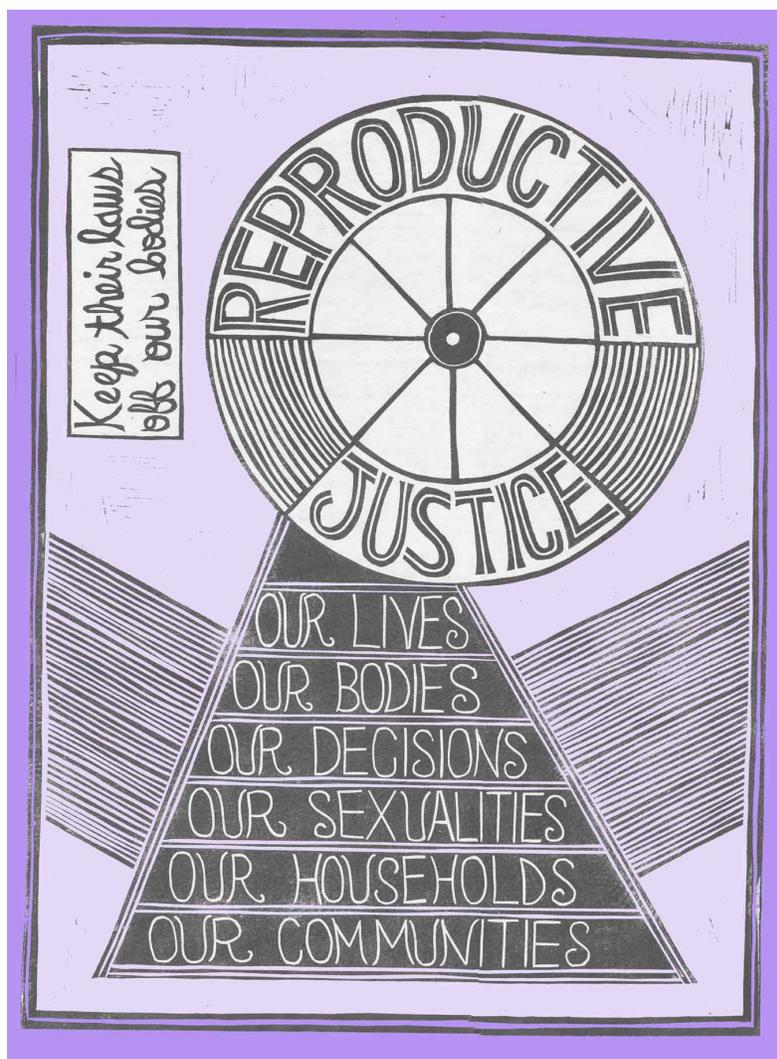
This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://open.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Reproductive Justice After Dobbs: A Forum

Edited by Sarah Chinn and Kimberly Mutcherson



"REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE" BY MEREDITH STERN VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

In January 2024, leading scholars in reproductive justice law participated in a panel at the American Association of Law Schools (AALS) Annual Meeting, "Teaching Reproductive Justice After *Dobbs*."

Organized by Jeffrey Dodge, Assistant Professor of Law, Joseph H. Goldstein Faculty Scholar, and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Penn State Dickinson Law and Naomi Cahn, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Virginia School of Law, the panel covered a range of topics crucial to legal pedagogy under these new and painful circumstances.

Co-editor Kimberly Mutcherson transcribed this conversation and edited it for length and clarity.

Rachel Rebouché, Dean of Temple University Beasley School of Law, Peter J. Liacouras Professor of Law: I will admit that I feel a little bit like a fraud because I'm actually not teaching while I'm the Dean, but I have taught a reproductive rights justice course as a seminar, and I thought I would kick us off today by offering some thoughts about how I explain the legal landscape post-*Dobbs* and some of the themes on which I focus. And I guess I'd start us with *Dobbs*. I think most people in this room know that when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Justice Alito, writing for the majority, listed five reasons why the court should discard precedent. And two, I think, are really striking in terms of their pedagogy punch. The first is reliance. So, you'll remember that Justice Alito opined that *Roe* and *Casey*¹ could be overturned because people in this country had not relied on abortion -- pre-viability abortion -- as a constitutional right.

He wrote that courts are not in the business of understanding or interpreting research about the pros or cons of abortion restrictions or permissions: those are empirical questions that courts can't possibly answer. But then went on to say, in dicta², but at length, why we might believe that abortion restrictions aren't so bad.

And it revolves around the idea that, in 2022 and beyond, pregnancy is a gift. It's not a burden. And that's because we have this really strong social safety net [audience laughter] that supports our pregnant people and protects their rights and interests [audience laughter], laws like the Family Medical Leave Act, giving someone time off work without pay or the Affordable Care Act, giving people the right to pay for health care services. So, the majority opinion implies that restrictions on abortion are not necessarily problematic or dangerous to people, ignoring the evidence that had been put before the court that tried to establish some of the realities of pregnancy and of abortion. As we heard in the oral argument of *Dobbs*, people have to resort to adoption or safe havens.

So, I like talking about that with classes that I spoke to about *Dobbs* because the court offers us one vision of the reality of law that, frankly, doesn't match lived reality. As public health scholars and as family law scholars, it's an opportunity to contrast that vision with competing visions of what pregnancy is about in this country — to talk about

the ways in which laws fail to support pregnant people and what we know about the country's maternal morbidity and mortality rates.

The second thing I focus on, and another reason that Justice Alito offered for overturning *Roe* and *Casey*, is that the tests announced in those cases were unworkable. The undue burden test of *Casey* was unworkable because it was confusing, produced disparate results from courts and in court decisions, resulted in conflict, and deepened the debate about abortion in this country.

So, where are we now? The test that *Dobbs* announced was rational basis review³ that returned abortion law to the states and allowed states to ban all abortion from the earliest moments of pregnancy (and if you haven't read that section of *Dobbs* listing legitimate state interests, they are breathtakingly broad). Is that test a more workable test in the present legal landscape? I would suggest workability is another great opportunity to think about where we are after *Dobbs* and to introduce some of the legal developments that have happened after *Dobbs*.

Our legal landscape is one of fracture. I probably don't have to say to this room that a third of the country now bans abortion, almost all abortion, and many states from the earliest moments of pregnancy. We have seen litigation particularly in Texas, around the exceptions written into those abortion bans, what they mean, how they apply, and whether or not a federal law like EMTALA⁴ pre-empts the Texas abortion ban.

Almost the same number of states have passed so-called shield laws, which are laws that seek to insulate abortion providers, and people who help them, who provide legally protected reproductive health care as defined by their home state. Most of those shield statutes also include gender affirming care in that definition.

What a shield law seeks to do, though it hasn't been tested yet in any court, is to keep states from extraditing providers or others who are not fleeing from justice, shield them from civil penalties, from criminal sanction and prosecution, stop depositions, stop investigations, and protect their medical malpractice insurance and protect them from discipline in their own state. There are significant limitations to shield laws: for one, the Massachusetts provider that has a shield law in place can't step foot in Texas and expect the Massachusetts law to protect them.

But when we look at the "ban states" up against these "shield states," a picture of contestation between states emerges. And what is really interesting to think through with students is what that contestation means for our current legal system.

What does it mean to have these looming battles around travel, around enforcing shield laws, around out-of-state prosecutions? Or the conflict between federal law and state law, as the EMTALA example illustrates? And what is happening to abortion access on the ground? Six of those shield states define legally protected reproductive health care as "regardless of where the patient is." That

language has emboldened a group of providers to define abortion care as where they are, New York, Massachusetts, for example, rather than where the patient is -- Texas, Florida, you name it. There has been a surge of mailed medication abortion across the country from the shield states where that language about patient versus provider location exists. That surge is at the heart of what's happening in courts and before legislatures, responding to the shifts in how abortion is delivered. So, for example, at the heart of the *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine* litigation is mailed medication abortion.⁵ The FDA approved mifepristone, the first drug in medication abortion, 23 years ago in 2000, and removed restrictions in 2016 and 2021 – the latter lifting the requirement that a patient pick up mifepristone in a healthcare facility (a clinic, usually a clinic, or a hospital or medical office), which is what enabled mailed medication abortion to proliferate. There are real costs to focusing on mailed medication abortion and telehealth for abortion, but there's no doubt that it's changed the practical landscape and it's shaping the legal landscape as well.

The litigation, as a teaching tool, brings together so many areas of law that previously were not central to the reproductive rights field. In this way, we can resist abortion exceptionalism, and also RJ [Reproductive Justice] exceptionalism, by thinking about how issues across fields matter in these conversations -- in administrative law, in family law, and across the courses that we teach.

I'll give you the example of the Comstock Act. That is also part of the conversation around mailed medication abortion. It is an 1873 act that prohibits mailing anything, and that's the language of the act, anything, which includes drugs, personal protective equipment, you name it, that helps in producing an abortion.

And there's an argument embedded in the *Alliance* litigation that the Comstock Act is good law and it's essentially a nationwide abortion ban – of mailed medication abortion and all abortion because everything that helps support abortion care is mailed.

Again, that poses questions that are fascinating to consider. Not just at the level of doctrine, not just at the level of due process or the ways in which laws should or should not be enforced, but also the types of decisions that courts and legislatures and policy makers are making about what this legal landscape should look like. So, with that, I'll stop, and I'll turn it over to Aziza. Thank you.

Aziza Ahmed, Professor of Law, N. Neil Pike Scholar, and co-director of the BU Law Program in Reproductive Justice at Boston University School of Law: I teach Reproductive Rights and Justice, Constitutional Law, and Human Rights. I cover reproductive rights issues in each of these courses.

In Reproductive Rights and Justice, in addition to abortion, I cover a range of topics including gender-based violence and HIV AIDS as well as sex work and trafficking. We cover both doctrine and relevant theory.

For today, as I was trying to think what would be helpful to this conversation, I wanted to reflect on how I teach one aspect of the abortion conversation that's happening right now, which is about the criminalization of abortion provision.

Since *Dobbs* there have been many conversations on the intersection of criminal law and abortion care. There are a range of new questions: if and how will providers be prosecuted? What are the various legal avenues that will create vulnerability to prosecution? How creative will prosecutors get in terms of prosecutions for mishandling a corpse or chemical endangerment? There's the specter of fetal personhood that hangs over these questions and changes how to think about prosecutions.

There are also questions that are coming up around HIPAA, for example, when does a sort of, a potential violation of criminal law or a criminal act that has been committed require some sort of disclosure of patient health information by a physician?

When I teach the topic of criminalization of reproduction and abortion, I like to first ask the students how and why did criminal law become a legitimate space for this conversation to be occurring at all? Why should it be okay for us to have turned to criminal law? When did that happen? When did the road get laid for us to walk down this path? And I try to use a broader historical lens to teach and show to the students the continuities and discontinuities between the pre-*Dobbs* moment and the post-*Dobbs* moment. You know, what came before *Dobbs*, and how does it connect to what came after? And I think that the past really sets the stage for how criminal law was going to easily insert itself into the post-*Dobbs* conversation about the regulation and management of abortion. And, of course, it begins in many ways with the story of the governing of poor people and women of color and Black women in particular through the criminal legal system.

When I teach this material, I focus on a few themes. And these are themes that come up throughout the course of the semester in my class. First, at a very broad level, is to ask students what makes the management of some bodies and some types of reproduction through criminal law acceptable?

This begins a conversation about eugenics, race, class, and disability. Focusing in on the management of family, pregnancy, and abortion allows for a discussion about the continuities and discontinuities of the political narratives in the pre-*Dobbs* and post-*Dobbs* moment. It is also useful to show students how both conservative and progressive forces have utilized the criminal law to manage not only reproduction but families. Here I think it's useful to spend some time in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to show how late-20th-century political and cultural shifts laid the foundation for the use of criminal law to manage families, pregnancy and abortion after *Roe*.

As we all know well, Reagan's presidency leaned into a discourse of personal responsibility -- often manifesting

as racist narratives about African American dependency on welfare. This idea is used to help scale back the welfare system and we begin to see how criminal law is going to take the place of social welfare programs. The work of Bernard Harcourt, Jonathan Simon, Dorothy Roberts, Michele Goodwin, and Aya Gruber is helpful in thinking about the question of a reliance on criminal law by conservatives *and* progressives. These scholars show how the “war on crime” replaced basic social welfare functions.

Further, the 1980s are an important period for understanding the rise of the “moral majority” and a new anti-choice religious politics in the Republican Party. It’s an important moment to see the turn of the Republican Party towards the particular modes of religious activism that are anti-choice.

Though I focus on reproductive rights, I do try to make sure students understand that the regulation of reproduction is tied to the regulation of families through criminal law. To make this point I start with the Moynihan Report⁶. Through reading the Moynihan Report students can see how the state sees the study and regulation of families as a key government function related to the management of populations. The Moynihan report specifically allows us to discuss how race relates to the regulation of families, what does it mean for the state to produce good citizens?

Naomi Cahn and June Carbone's work is also instructive in thinking about how the state structures and supports some families while punishing other families. Again, Dorothy Robert's work on family regulation and Khiara Bridges scholarship on the regulation of pregnancy helps draw out specific examples of how the state manages the creation of families.

In covering this material, I also spend some time thinking about the role of scientific evidence and expertise in various debates about abortion and reproductive rights. Questions of scientific evidence and expertise are especially key in the conversation about the criminalization of pregnancy and abortion.

How do we make sense of this? I use that as an opportunity to think about the war on crime and the war on drugs. We'll talk about the 1980s, and I do a class on the purported “crack baby epidemic” asking how did this happen? Here's an epidemic which serves as a powerful example of the realities and possibilities of holding women criminally accountable for behavior during pregnancy, which of course is now part of the general conversation especially when it comes to a self-induced abortion.

And in many of those cases, you see a very specific reference to the fetus as being a child, the idea that you're delivering drugs to your fetus, that this is another being, and so it opens up doors to think about questions of fetal personhood. Because this intersects clearly with a lot of work that I'm doing, I also think about questions on the role of scientific evidence, for example. We talk about it both in the context of the crack baby epidemic and then I try to make those dots as we're thinking about criminal prosecutions in the context of pregnancy and abortion later, but you know, thinking about, for example, how the

small sample size studies that were produced by one physician in the 1980s basically get absorbed into the logic of the carceral state and are used to prosecute and punish women and, of course, particularly poor Black women at that time.

It helps, I think, explain the ongoing prosecution of women. There's a sort of continuous line that's from that period until today. There's no discontinuity there at all. It's just, it's going on. Wendy Buck's work is great on that, you know, thinking about how the opioid epidemic is playing out for many pregnant women in Tennessee. And so, you get this continuity and then you get *Dobbs* layered on top of that.

In this class, in this set of classes where we think a little bit about evidence and expertise, I also raise an issue that I've been working on a lot, which is this test called the floating lungs test, which is a test that's used to prosecute women for when a woman is claiming she's had a stillbirth. In a very famous case, the Purvi Patel case that happened in Indiana, for example, she had, in fact, taken medication abortion. And, in those contexts, they take the lungs of the fetus, and they float them. And, if the lungs float, then the child is said to have taken a breath and therefore deemed to have been born alive. And then the woman can be held accountable for homicide, etc. I've been working on this for a long time, and it was a little bit more satisfying to teach this year for the reason that there's a ProPublica reporter that's very interested in this topic. [Patel] has been pushing us and Daniel Medwed at Northeastern and I have started a Floating Lungs Working Group. We're working now on this issue to see how we can actually make change, with a bunch of other people who have done expert testimony and forensic scientists and medical pathologists. I'm going to try to see how I can get students involved in that in the future.

But then, of course, by the time we get to this point we are in the 2000s, and the Purvi Patel case was, I think, only less than 10 years ago. We're right before *Dobbs* and the arc of criminal law is taking us right up to the *Dobbs* moment. I think then, when we read *Dobbs*, the students really get a sense (and of course there's many other themes we're thinking about alongside criminalization), but when *Dobbs* hits the class, they're sort of primed to see that there wasn't a switch that was flipped. It was actually completely in line with what had been going on, and with a few other people I've written--- sorry, I'm doing all these plugs because there's so much happening---this special issue we have coming out of the *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* from our program that I co-edited with Nicole Huberfeld and with Linda McLain and a bunch of people here. I had an article with a few other people in which we talk about how you can look at the *Dobbs* decision, and part of the way of reading the *Dobbs* decision is actually through this sort of generalized attack on public health and welfare that we've seen since the 1980s onward. What you see post-*Dobbs*, and the sort of stepping in of criminal law in that particular moment is exactly in line with what we've been seeing for the last 30 years. In fact, if you read it from that lens, it's not a surprising decision at all because you can read *Dobbs* as almost a furthering of, or a sort of moving forward of the

agenda to undermine the public health state. We saw this, of course, over and over again in COVID as well. The attempts to pass some sort of piece of federal legislation or some CDC policy and then it being undermined because it was essentially seen as a threat in the context of conservative politics.

Once we get to *Dobbs*, we then return back to all the issues I began with, which are the myriad issues that have now emerged in the context of the post-*Dobbs* moment. And here, too, we talk a lot about what it means, in a world where you have criminal prosecutions, especially for providers, to train physicians, to basically set the stage for a new generation of people who will be doing abortion care and provision.

Yeah, and maybe I'll stop there. Thank you.

Kimberly Mutcherson, Professor of law and past co-Dean at Rutgers Law School in Camden: It's so, so, so great to be here. And I'm going to sort of do a disclaimer in the same way that Rachel did, which is I stepped down from the deanship not too long ago and was not doing as much teaching as I would have liked during those years when I was Dean. So, it's really exciting for me to be able to get back into the classroom a lot more than I was. I want to talk about a few different things and really ultimately end up focusing on one of my courses in particular. But first I want to lay out what my premises are as I'm thinking about teaching and particularly teaching in the reproductive justice space.

First is that I really think it's important for a lot of us to be thinking about how we meet this post-*Dobbs* moment for our students. I imagine that a lot of you, like me, had students who were just in disarray when *Dobbs* came down: "Why am I in law school?" "None of it means anything?" "It's all the worst thing that's ever happened." And so I do think that part of what I am trying to do and, I assume that a lot of us in this room are trying to do, is really help some of those disaffected and disillusioned students sort of think about what comes next. How do you remain engaged? How do you remain thoughtful? And how do you think of yourself, no matter where you end up as a lawyer, how do you think of yourself as an activist? What are the ways in which you can be a part of movements even if you're working at a law firm or whatever it is that you end up doing for work?

The second thing is that I care a lot about creating space in the curriculum for conversations that they may not be having in their other classes. Conversations about race, about gender, about class, about inequality, about the law as a consistent tool of oppression and injustice. And I just think that they don't often, do not as often as they should, get opportunities to have those conversations and to have them in a really robust and critical way.

The third thing is to really challenge assumptions about what a broad and coalition-based movement should or must look like in order to be successful and being very clear that law is only a part of that movement and often it is not the most important part of that movement. We tend

to really center ourselves as lawyers and lawyers who are activists and the truth of the matter is that, yes, law plays a huge role in lots of people's lives but, and particularly when it comes to abortion law, it isn't central to how people live every single day for a lot of folks in this country.

And then finally, and this is a thing I was talking to folks about before we started this panel, my sense over the last several years has been that so much discussion of reproductive justice is actually just reproductive rights that's wrapped in this patina of reproductive justice. It's really not reproductive *justice*-based work. And you see that in the academy, you see it in the real world where people sort of feel like, well, I'm supposed to be talking about reproductive justice, so that's what I'm going to say when I start, and then I'm going to do exactly what I would have done anyway that has nothing to do necessarily with RJ. I find that incredibly frustrating and so I've worked really to be very clear that reproductive justice was a movement and is a movement that it is not a theoretical framework, at its start, and that we should always be thinking about it in those terms, that it is a movement, that is trying to actually affect the world that we live in.

And this sort of question about how people are using RJ is something I would really love to talk about more in the Q&A because I'm getting very fed up and angry. Well, I'm fed up and angry most of the time, but this is particularly starting to drive me quite bonkers right about now. And because of that, *Dobbs*, frankly, hasn't substantially changed the way I teach because I was never teaching based on an understanding that *Roe* had been anything more than a deeply, deeply qualified victory that created a deeply qualified and stratified right to abortion in this country. And I was never teaching abortion as central or necessarily a pivotal aspect of RJ in the first place. So, I can continue to do a lot of what I have already been doing but do it in a way that now recognizes that *Dobbs* has made things worse, but the world was already garbage before *Dobbs*. [audience laughter].

The course that I want to talk about is a course that I've been teaching for 20 some years now that when I started it, I called it Bioethics, Babies, and Baby Making, and I will stand by it. I will not change the name, I refuse. It's got the nice alliteration, BBB, you know, it's very cool. But the other thing that it allows me to do because it is a course that is not just a law course, it's a bioethics course, it allows me, and it allows the students, to have much broader conversations about the issues that we're talking about that they often find to be very difficult---very personal in some ways and allows us to have conversations about morality and about ethics and all of this good stuff that supposedly is irrelevant to law but that is infused in so much of these areas of law.

So, how do I teach in my BBB class? One thing that I didn't do when I started teaching and that I do pretty consistently now in this course, not necessarily in some of my other courses, but I find it really important in this course, is set a sort of collective standard for the classroom. Why are we here? Who are we as a collective? How do we want to talk to each other? What is the language that we are comfortable using or not using?

Being sure that we are willing to give people grace. Being sure that we are willing to keep people's confidences if they want to share something in the classroom that they don't want shared outside of the classroom.

I really want to create a space, and I never call it a safe space because a lot of these conversations don't feel safe at all, but I do want it to be a space where people feel like they can talk about really hard things. And they can say things where they feel like "I don't have my thoughts completely formed here, but I want to be able to share this and I want to be able to be in conversation with everybody here." That is a really important way, at least for me, to start the conversation and it also allows me share some of my vulnerabilities about having these conversations as well. I talk about how we teach in an environment now where there's always this, this fear of like, "am I going to end up on Twitter because I said something in the classroom?" and all of that good stuff. So, I think it's nice to put that out there.

The other thing that I do very early on is set us in a historical context. As Aziza was saying when she was talking about the Moynihan Report, I think I've gotten past being shocked by it and now I'm just sort of irritated that other people aren't teaching these things before our students get to law school. I work really hard to make sure that students have a deep historical understanding of how we got to where we are. So sometimes that's about starting with talking about J. Marion Sims, the father of American gynecology who performed absolutely abhorrent and unethical experiments on enslaved women. I mean, absolutely horrifying. We talk about the history of forced sterilizations in this country and the Relf sisters⁷, which gives us a chance to think about the intersection of race and class and gender and disability. We talk, obviously, about the Hyde Amendment⁸. We talk about the family policing system. And we do it through this context of thinking about things like Native American boarding schools, which are a reproductive justice issue. The Chinese Exclusion Act, which is a reproductive justice issue. And making it very clear to students that this country has been a mess since the beginning and, again, none of this is new. All these things that we are talking about and all these things that we are looking at are fundamentally a part of our system—they are not aberrations. And what we need to be thinking about is how do we change the entire system; not how do we fiddle around the edges of it.

Because I teach these issues in a bioethics context, it also means that I get to use a lot of materials that go beyond the law, which is really fun. Some of that is historical, it's sociological, it's philosophical, it's from anthropology. It's a way that I'm trying to give students a really wide range of tools for understanding these issues that we are dealing with in the context of the law, and frankly, to be very clear to them that often law is the least useful way to attack some of these problems and try to fix some of these problems.

And I'll just stress here, obviously we read Dorothy Roberts, but she's not the only person we read. There are a lot of folks who are writing and have been writing

incredible work in this space that includes using work from people who are activists and not just folks who are academics.

Two other things that are really important to me about how I teach my bioethics class. One of the things that I say to my students, and this is going back to bringing some of my own vulnerability into the classroom, one of the things that I have learned and that has fundamentally changed the way I think about the world comes from incorporating a lot of disability studies work into my Bioethics, Babies, and Babymaking class and really pushing students to fundamentally think differently about what disability is and how it gets constructed. The difference between the medical model and the social model of disability, which for a lot of them they've never heard before. It's just never been put on the table for them before. And so even if there's just a little bit of an opening for them to think differently about what does it mean to have a body that works differently? What does it mean to have a mind that works differently? Understanding how we construct those differences within the law and then oppress people on that basis, I think, is always really useful.

And then, finally, of course, having lots of space to talk about the family policing system and the ways in which that system has been used in incredibly biased ways to fundamentally destroy lots of families.

So just a couple of specifics that I want to throw out there about what I do in BBB. The way that the syllabus works (and I'm certainly willing to share my syllabus, and I'm sure that other people here are willing to share as well), we start out and we do this sort of philosophy thing about personhood which is always really fun. And then we go from there to abortion; we go from there to assisted reproduction; we go from there to decision making for pregnant women and forced obstetrical interventions. Then we go to criminalization of pregnancy, and then we end with decision making for children— children with disabilities or children with various kinds of diseases or illnesses. So, we really run the gamut.

One of the things that's really interesting as we go across the semester is, you know, this is a self-selecting group of students, and so when we start with abortion, right, it's all autonomy, autonomy, autonomy, never, never, never. And then we start to move into some of these other areas, and you can sort of watch the students start to get uncomfortable, so somebody's at full term doesn't want to get a C-section, and they're thinking "This is a baby and all you have to do is a C section. It's really not a big deal, right?" And the students are sort of squirming in their seats. It is a sort of moment to really kind of recognize that these are really deep and difficult issues, but if you take a position, then you have to decide where are the places where you're willing to step away from that and why?

What *Dobbs* feeds into this in a way is how the state's interest in potential or fetal life has really been elevated, or at least the Supreme Court has allowed states to elevate that interest, and so that means something obviously in

abortion cases, but it also potentially means something in sterilization cases. It certainly can mean something in embryo disposition cases, so what happens when a state decides that an embryo is a person, and you can no longer destroy it, you can no longer use it for research, you can no longer leave it frozen in perpetuity? Maybe we have to let all those embryos be adopted by people who want to make babies because who would leave a baby frozen? What kind of person are you? We have really, really great discussions within the context, particularly of assisted reproduction, about the idea of parental licensure. Should we be able to figure out who deserves to be a parent and who doesn't deserve to parent? Should an assisted reproduction process be like an adoption process? And if so, who should play a role in that? I always sort of force them to make a list. What are the questions that you would ask if you had to license someone to be a parent? That's always a fun question.

And then we talk about other really difficult cases. The Ashley X case which probably, some people here either know about or have taught about, which is the case where you had a young girl who had a significant fetal anomaly, basically was never going to have a mental capacity beyond maybe a six-month-old, but her body was growing at the exact rate that anybody's body could grow. Her parents ended up having procedures done to give her a hysterectomy, to remove her breast buds, and then growth attenuation to basically keep her small because they said that if she got too big, they wouldn't be able to care for her at home anymore. That's always a fascinating discussion with students. And then we also have a really great discussion about the Jahai McMath case, which involved a young woman, a young Black girl, who went to a hospital to have her tonsils removed and something went very wrong, and the hospital staff was terrible in terms of dealing with her and her mother, and she ultimately ended up being declared brain dead in California, which is where the operation took place. Then her mother moved her to New Jersey because in New Jersey you cannot take somebody off of a ventilator if you have religious objections to it. So, she moved her all the way to New Jersey. And that of course raises lots of questions about who gets to make these decisions? Who gets to parent? But also, some really serious questions about why did this happen to this child? You cannot take a child to get her tonsils out and then expect that she's going to end up brain dead at the end of it.

I love, love, love teaching this class. I love the kinds of conversations that I get to have with students. And I love the feeling that when they leave that classroom, they have been challenged in really fundamental ways, both about their sense of what the law is and what the law should be, but also their sense about what families are, who constitutes a family, and whether and how the law should continue to insert itself into those questions. Thanks!

Meghan Boone, Associate professor at Wake Forest University School of Law: I love being on a panel with this group of people who are just my favorite scholars, and I'm actually really glad that now I'm speaking after Kim because I think our animating goals were very similar, and then we took them in different places, which I think is interesting.

I teach *Dobbs* in lots of different circumstances. I teach individual rights and liberties constitutional law, so we teach it there. I teach family law, so we teach it there. I actually teach a sort of standalone survey course on reproductive justice. Definitely teach it there. I have yet to find a way to get it into civil procedure, but I have not given up yet [audience laughter].

But despite the fact that I have many opportunities to talk about *Dobbs* and abortion rights, I found myself very frustrated by the limitations of the opinion. Both the majority and the dissent. And, similar to Kim, I'm really frustrated that it didn't, I felt like it didn't give space naturally to accommodate the ways that my students are reacting to this new reality, or their sort of overwhelming despair to the universe that they now find themselves in. And there's sort of a sense of confusion about how they've even arrived at this moment. And just talking about *Dobbs* and why it was or was not correct, or how we got there, just, it didn't seem to get to the underlying emotional response that I wanted to address.

So, I created a short course that widened the lens to talk about how the law treats abortion and how it could treat abortion without tying it to the way the law historically has treated abortion. So not necessarily assuming from the outset that it is a substantive due process privacy issue⁹, but saying, like, if we started from a blank slate and we thought about this from lots of different legal angles, what might we come up with?

I tried it once as a once-a-week seminar at Wake Forest, and I also taught it as a standalone weeklong intensive at WashU during their winter term. I found there was a lot of student interest so I want to talk about what we cover in the course and the approach that I take and then just maybe make a pitch for why either this type of course or this type of approach might be something that you would consider in your own classes.

So, what do we cover? We start with *Dobbs*. We start with a discussion of the history behind *Dobbs*, the arguments in *Dobbs*, and how that situates it in the substantive due process history that they know and love from first year Constitutional Law (or know and *don't* love from first year Con Law).

And then we go through, thematically, week by week, and we do a week on all the equality/ equal protection arguments. And we read scholarship there. And then we do a week about common law arguments for abortion rights and what that looks like. And we think about property, or tort, or criminal law.

We talk about other constitutional arguments. So, arguments under the First Amendment, freedom of speech, freedom of religion. We talk about procedural due

process. We talk about Takings¹⁰. We talk about the Thirteenth Amendment arguments, and the Eighth Amendment arguments, and I won't tell a lot of war stories, but I always feel compelled to say, when we talk about the Eighth Amendment, I poll the students and say, if you had to decide right now, if you had to be pregnant without the ability to terminate or spend nine months in a minimum security prison, which would you choose and why? And the vast majority of my students very thoughtfully choose prison. Which I think is interesting because in general, I'm teaching at Wake Forest University, I have a room of well-resourced individuals who could probably accommodate in a practical respect for an unplanned pregnancy and yet, thoughtfully, they choose prison, which I think is interesting.

We also spend a week talking about why the law maybe doesn't do it . . . about why we might want to remove this whole discussion from a legal framework and talk about it in a sort of political/democratic process framework, in a public policy framework, in a public health framework. I have not done this yet, but the next time I teach the course, I'll add a human rights framework to spend some time thinking about comparative law approaches to abortion rights also. So as far as – I know this is a pedagogy panel – as far as the work that I'm requiring from my students as we're working through these alternative bases for abortion rights, these different frameworks, are mostly sort of short response papers asking them to analyze these different options more deeply. What's different about this type of argument versus this other type of argument? How does the presence or absence of the idea of fetal personhood make this argument different? Does fetal personhood matter to the First Amendment? Does it matter to the Thirteenth Amendment? How does that change the arguments?

We also do a thing where I ask them to go out “in the wild” and identify versions of these arguments in op-eds and TikToks and sort of the ways that when we talk about “my body, my choice,” that can be undergirded by this idea of a property argument. A property belief in the body. They go out and find the ways that people are talking about abortion and then connect them to these theoretical frameworks we're talking about in class.

I focus on a deep dive on a much shorter list of readings. Although there has been such an explosion of interesting things written in this space that I feel like the next time I teach the course, it's going to be even harder to decide what that short list of things will be. But I try to leave lots of open space in the class so that we read one or two things closely and then we start the class by just talking about what surprised them, what interested them, what spoke to them, and then letting the discussion go there.

So, the benefits that I have found from this sort of short course, very intensive approach to just abortion rights—and I should say, in my Reproductive Justice class, obviously we talk about abortion rights, but of our 13-week semester, we'll do two or three weeks that focus there, and then generally I focus on a much broader range of topics. But I love being able to take this intensive and just

say, “This is the only thing we're doing. We're really digging in.” I get to engage with, and the students get to engage with, the decades of very interesting and creative scholarship. And also, now, get to talk about the sort of hot-off-the-presses litigation that's happening. That lots of these ideas have been floating around for decades, and now, for the first time, people are putting them up in court and saying, “Okay, if not substantive due process, if not privacy, then equality, then freedom of religion.” That these things are really getting litigated in real time.

I just think it helps students understand *Dobbs* in a broader context, not limiting their thinking to the sort of terms of the debate as set by the decision itself or the history of abortion rights. But forcing them to just think really broadly including about arguments that make them uncomfortable.

One of my favorite students is a young woman of color and she is very upfront with me, and she said, “Professor Boone, when I saw it was the 13th amendment week, I was ready to come in and tell you why it was absolutely incorrect to talk about abortion and the 13th amendment.”

But after we did the class, she ended up writing her final paper all about that argument, and how it just changed her thinking, and she got really excited about it. So, I feel like helping the students to work through those uncomfortable different ways of thinking about it is exciting.

Most importantly, I think that it helps them shake off some of the sense of futility and sadness that they come in the room with. Since the class is a seminar, the students are self-selecting. Most of my students who sign up for a class on abortion rights have a specific worldview and they come in and they do so with a sense of despair that [the federal right to an abortion] has been lost, and it might never be regained, and if it is regained, the only option is to go back to the world that we had before. And I think, by taking the time to just think creatively and broadly about these different, interesting arguments, it allows them to have a sense of hope and optimism, allows them to have a sense of agency, that they can talk to their friends and loved ones and groups about this in a new way.

Rachel talked a lot about the opportunities that *Dobbs* had given us. And I recognize obviously, like, the world is shit and always has been, but also, if you're looking for a silver lining, I think what *Dobbs* has given us is this moment where lots of people are interested in the bigger question of what's next? What else? How can we get around and over and through this in a way that I think is really exciting. None of this is new, and also, this doesn't have to be the last or only word about this subject. That maybe, *maybe* the law does have something to offer, but maybe it's not the law we thought it was going to be. Maybe it's a different set of legal principles or ideas. So, happy to share a syllabus if anyone wants to teach a short course on different, alternative bases for the abortion right at their own institutions.

But even if you don't, I would like to sort of encourage everyone that when we teach *Dobbs*, not to teach it just as the death knell of substantive due process, but also as

an invitation to think more broadly about these rights and how they sound in lots of different bodies of law. Thank you.

Notes

1. *Planned Parenthood of Pennsylvania v. Casey* was a 1992 Supreme Court case that upheld *Roe*, ruled against “undue burdens” on those seeking abortion (such as parental or spousal consent or lengthy waiting periods), and scrapped the *Roe* model of pregnancy trimesters in favor of the standard of viability.

2. Dicta are statements made in a Supreme Court decision that do not have the weight of a holding (which creates precedent and is binding for the judiciary) but are still available as sources to make another court’s decision more persuasive and authoritative.

3. Rational basis review, or the rational basis test, is used by courts to determine whether a statute or ordinance is constitutional. For a rule to pass this test, it must establish or preserve “legitimate state interest” – that is, the right of the state to uphold certain rules whose interests are so pressing that they override the rights of the individual. In addition, there must be a “rational” connection between the goals of the state and the means the state uses to achieve those goals (bearing in mind that all these terms are *very* subjective). Finally, rational basis is the least stringent of judicial reviews of statutes and ordinances: it isn’t concerned with protected classifications such as race, gender, religion, national origin etc.

4. EMTALA is the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, passed by Congress in 1984, which ensures medical treatment of anyone who walks into a hospital emergency room, regardless of their ability to pay. If patients need further care, hospitals must admit them.

5. The Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine is an organization of anti-choice physicians that has vocally supported all anti-abortion legislation in the United States (for example, it applauded Texas’s Fetal Heartbeat Act for its “passion for protecting preborn children.” “Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine Statement Following Texas Fetal Heartbeat Act Taking Effect.” September 2021. <https://app.box.com/s/pr02wt8w969h0rvc6yikated0oqlqng>. In *FDA v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine*, the AHM argued that the Federal Drug Administration did not properly approve mifepristone, the drug that causes the uterus lining to degrade and then contract to expel a fetus, for pregnancy termination (this case was largely in response to the FDA’s approving mifepristone to be sent through the mail, due to the COVID pandemic). Although the AHM initially achieved a pause in the production and prescribing of mifepristone, higher courts countermanded the stay. Finally, the FDA countersued, arguing that the AHM did not have standing, since they didn’t have a compelling interest in the administering of the drug. In June 2024, after this panel took place, the Supreme Court held that the AHM did not have standing and that mifepristone could be produced and prescribed according to FDA guidelines.

6. The Moynihan Report is shorthand for a 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, that was initiated by then Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, researched by his staff, and written by Moynihan himself. The main finding of the report was that Black social and economic inequality was due in large part to what he saw as the dissolution of the working-class Black family: “the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown.” For Moynihan, this instability was caused by the comparatively high number of Black working-class families headed by women. While Moynihan did point to the economic crisis caused by racial and gender disparities in wages, he focused more on the “tangle of pathology” caused by the primacy of “matriarchal” Black families, in which “Negro children without fathers flounder — and fail.”

7. Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf, sisters who are still living, were involuntarily sterilized in 1973 by tubal ligation at the ages of twelve and fourteen, respectively. Because the two Relf sisters were African American and cognitively disabled, Montgomery Community Action – a social services agency largely funded by government sources – picked up the sisters and their mother Minnie. Minnie was told that the girls would be receiving “shots,” and was asked to sign a consent form that she did not have the education to read. Ultimately, the Relf family, with the help of the Southern Poverty Law Center, filed a class action suit against the federal government for directing federal funds towards involuntary birth control (primarily Depo-Provera and IUDs) and sterilization.

8. The Hyde Amendment, sponsored in 1979 by Republican Illinois Congressman Henry J. Hyde, was an amendment to a funding bill for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It bars the use of any federal funding for almost all abortion services. As well as preventing poor women from using Medicaid to pay for abortion care, the Hyde Amendment shifted the financial burden onto the states – currently 16 states use their own funds to cover non-emergency abortions.

9. Substantive due process is a doctrine that derives from the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments: that both federal (the 5th Amendment) and state (the Fourteenth) governments may not deprive a person of “life, liberty, or property without due process of law.” This principle was initially applied to contract and labor law where, in several cases in the 1930s, the Supreme Court ruled that state measures to regulate a minimum wage violated the right of employers and employees to freely contract conditions of work. At the same time, the Court also used substantive due process to protect the rights of voting, association, and free speech, especially of what it called “discrete and insular minorities.” Over time, different iterations of the Supreme Court have expanded what scholars have called the “penumbra” of various parts of the Bill of Rights within the principle of substantive due process to affirm rights to privacy (establishing the right to contraception and, until recently, abortion), oppose “invidious racial discrimination” (overturning laws outlawing interracial marriage), overturn same-sex sodomy laws, and unhitch the right to marry from gender.

10. "Takings" derives from the clause in the Fifth Amendment that bars the government from taking private property for public use without appropriate compensation. Many of the cases that deal with the Takings clause focus on state and federal government's powers of eminent domain – the ability to lay claim to private land for public purposes, like laying a railroad or power lines.

Sarah E. Chinn teaches English at Hunter College, CUNY. A member of the *Radical Teacher* editorial collective, she's the author of three books, *Technology and the Logic of American Racism: A Cultural History of the Body as Evidence* (2000), *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (2009), and *Spectacular Men: Race, Gender, and Nation on the Early American Stage* (2017), as well as articles in

Signs, GLQ, Prospects, American Quarterly, American Literature, and WSQ.

Kimberly Mutcherson is an award-winning professor whose scholarship focuses on reproductive justice, bioethics, and family and health law. She has presented her scholarship nationally and internationally and publishes extensively on assisted reproduction, families, and the law. She has been a Scholar in Residence at the Birnbaum Women's Leadership at NYU Law School, a Senior Fellow/Sabbatical Visitor at the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law at Columbia Law School, and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://open.library.pitt.edu/).

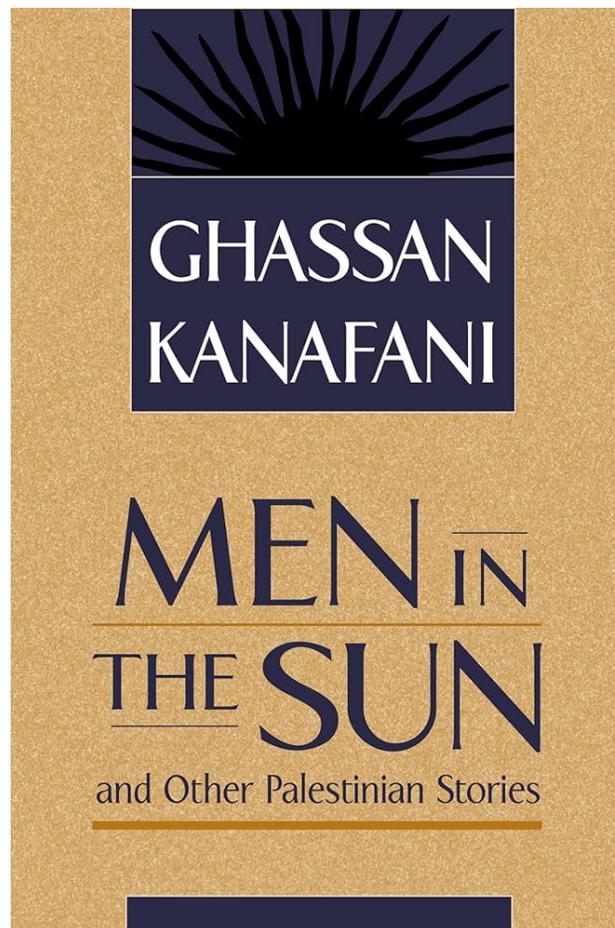
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note

Ghassan Kanafani's "Men in the Sun"

by Linda Dittmar



GHASSAN KANAFANI'S "MEN IN THE SUN"

The following teaching note appeared in Radical Teacher #120 (2021). We are publishing it again, even as destruction envelops Gaza in collapsing concrete, cries of pain, and the smell of death. Ghassan Kanafani's "Men in the Sun" is timelier now than ever. Published in 1963, its account of three Palestinians migrating in search of livelihood foretells the fate of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians today—wounded and traumatized, displaced, and displaced yet again, their future unknown. It is a story that demands re-telling and re-teaching.

Inescapably, much of Palestinian literature is about loss of homes and lands and family and dispossession, where the initiating event was the Nakba: the 1948 "catastrophe" of mass exile, when Israel expelled some 750,000 Palestinians from their villages and towns in what was becoming Israel. It's a devastation that continues to this day. The writing that responds to this trauma is a literature of mourning, protest, and resistance, written above all to sustain one's own people and for the world to see.

Among these narratives, Ghassan Kanafani's novella, "Men in the Sun," may be, to date, the harshest. When I teach it in my undergraduate course in Israeli/Palestinian literature, I pair it with Kanafani's other iconic more directly militant novella, "The Return to Haifa." Each makes for powerful reading, helping American students see both the terrible losses incurred through the Nakba and the dignity of resistance.

Ghassan Kanafani was killed by a car bomb in Beirut in 1972, presumably planted by the Israeli Mossad. He was a Marxist Palestinian journalist and activist killed for his presumed behind-the-scenes role in a massacre at Israel's main airport. The novellas, however, are not about militant violence, though of course war is their inescapably grim backdrop. "The Return to Haifa" concerns a Palestinian couple returning (twenty years later) to see their abandoned house, where unexpectedly they encounter their long-lost son, now in Israeli army uniform. The choice is his: to stay with his adoptive Jewish mother, herself a holocaust survivor, or reclaim his Palestinian identity. "Men in the Sun" tells the story of four Palestinian men's illegal journey to Kuwait.

While the following concerns only "Men in the Sun," "The Return to Haifa" is equally crucial, both as a companion piece and on its own.

The template for "Men in the Sun" is familiar: a few migrants, in this case three Palestinian males, are trying to reach Kuwait illegally. They are now in Iraq, where each lands in the office of the sleazy agent, "the fat man," who offers dubious passage at exorbitant prices. Instead, they each accept improvised passage from a fellow Palestinian driving an empty water-tank lorry.

It's not a spoiler to say that these men come to a bad end. It's a familiar story, unbearable yet recurrent. Like other writers, Kanafani individualizes his characters and the histories and traumas each of them carries. The template is global but the particulars are Palestinian, all

originating in a Nakba that is barely mentioned. It is the story of global forces but also a story of the specifically Palestinian tragedy called "Nakba." As individuals, these men engage our empathy; as part of a collective they lay claim to our politics.

The cast of representative characters includes the following: Abu Qais, a middle-aged married man; Marwan, a teenager, who needs to support his family once his older brother's remittances stopped; and Assad, a seasoned young man who already knows the lies and challenges that beset this journey. The lorry driver is Abdul Khaizuran, a former Palestinian freedom fighter who got wounded in battle. Each is marked by his own experiences and yearnings, gradually revealed through conversations and extended introspective flashbacks. This braided structure allows both our empathy and our understanding to unfold gradually, drawing us increasingly into the tragedy that unfolds here.

The story is beautifully told, with special sensitivity to the landscape as well as the characters' inner worlds. The tension of the narrative is, of course, the need to cross the borders. Abdul Khaizuran maneuvers the passage deftly, having the men step briefly into the empty water-tank at the checkpoint and then climb out shortly after leaving it. But things go wrong at the second checkpoint, where he is delayed by joking border guards. Not accidentally, the jokes are about his having been with a "dancer"—that is, jokes about sexual prowess that are hard for him to bear: Abdul Khaizuran was wounded in battle between his legs.

While this wound is literal, all four men are struggling with vulnerable empowerment. It's a notion of manhood where virility means self-sufficiency, dignity, and self-respect. In each case being cut off from the anchor of traditional communal life and self-sufficiency means damage to the sense of self, on top of the literal privation, that drove them to attempt this dangerous migration. Different in age and life experience, they are united in this damage and in death. At the end they are just bodies Abdul Khaizuran needs to dispose of.

Still, while the narration is powerful and even lyrical, the crux of "Men in the Sun" is in its ending, when Abdul Khaizuran discovers his passengers' dead bodies. Kanafani doesn't spare us Abdul Khaizuran's anguish. A decent man, we see him distraught by his passengers' deaths. But he also has to dispose of them, and ultimately it is not a funeral but a rubbish heap that receives the three men we've come to know and care about. Here, too, the description is merciless, closely evoked down to minor details. Moreover, before leaving, Abdul Khaizuran turns back to the bodies once more, taking whatever money they have, including Marwan's treasured watch.

"Men in the Sun" ends as Abdul Khaizuran, feeling that his head would explode, cries out into the night:

"Why didn't you knock on the sides of the truck? Why didn't you say anything? Why?"

The desert suddenly began to send back the echo:

Why didn't you knock on the sides of the truck? Why didn't you bang on the sides of the truck? Why? Why? Why?

Like many other refugee stories, "Men in the Sun" speaks to us even if we don't know much about the Palestinians. The story--evocative and beautifully written--is not unlike others from Syria or the Congo, Guatemala or El Salvador, even if the particulars are different. The concluding question of "Why?" resonates not only regarding the men not sounding the alarm but about what set them on this desperate journey to begin with. In this "Why?" the particular and the collective mingle: the

Palestinian story and the larger story of displaced people in desperate search for work and refuge.

Now Professor Emerita, **Linda Dittmar**'s recent book is *Tracing Homelands; Israel, Palestine, and the Claims of Belonging*. Linda taught literature and film studies at the University of Massachusetts--Boston for forty years, including two Fulbright grants to India and teaching at Tel Aviv and Paris universities. Linda is a long-time member of Radical Teacher's Editorial Board.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

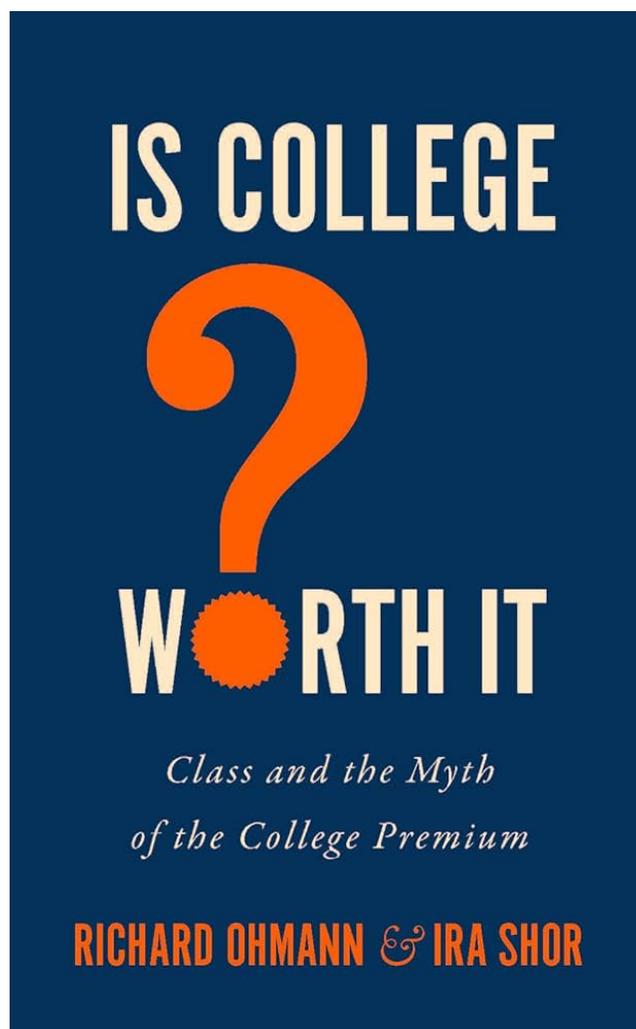
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review

Is College Worth It? Class and the Myth of the College Premium

by Bob Rosen



IS COLLEGE WORTH IT? CLASS AND THE MYTH OF THE COLLEGE BY RICHARD OHMANN AND IRA SHOR

Is College Worth It? Class and the Myth of the College Premium. By Richard Ohmann and Ira Shor (2024). Johns Hopkins University Press.

When Dick Ohmann mentioned several years ago that he was working on a book challenging the notion of the “college premium” – the additional lifetime income that graduating college supposedly brings – at first I wondered why. Whether the payoff is real, whether it’s more or less than the often promised one million dollars, seemed like an issue for mainstream economists, and hardly worthy of the kind of sophisticated radical analysis Dick had brought to such subjects as mass culture, the politics of literature, and class and language.* But starting from this deceptively simple question, *Is College Worth It?* develops an expansive critical analysis of an array of important topics, from work to inequality to ideology to, of course, capitalism itself.

Dick died before he could finish his book. In a moving preface, Ira Shor describes meetings and correspondence with him in his last months, during which they agreed that they would work together for as long as possible to revise the five existing chapters and to sketch out the planned sixth chapter, which Shor would write. (For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to “Ohmann’s” arguments when discussing chapters 1 to 5 and “Shor’s” for chapter 6.)

To calculate the college premium, one compares the lifetime income of a college graduate, minus the cost of college, with the lifetime income of a high school graduate. The college graduate loses four years of income and incurs the cost of college, but presumably makes up for this with greater income for the rest of their working life. Academic studies such as “The College Payoff” from Georgetown University and interactive websites such as the US government’s College Scorecard try to calculate the premium, which they always find to be substantial. Politicians, business leaders, and college officials eagerly tout the premium and typically cite the figure of a million dollars. Parents and students considering college, education policy makers, and the general public can’t easily ignore such promises.

But how true are college premium claims? Ohmann wades bravely into a field cluttered with complicated studies, many of them badly designed, and his second chapter offers an excellent lesson in what makes for faulty social science data analysis. His challenges to the validity of these studies are multifaceted and complex, but by sharing the evolution of his thinking rather than just presenting conclusions and arguments, he carries us along with him. Perhaps the biggest flaw Ohmann reveals involves a confusion between correlation and causation. Many cheerleaders for the college premium overlook or minimize the “thunderously obvious” (114) point that those who go to college may differ from those who don’t – due to such possible personal characteristics as industriousness, intelligence, and eagerness for wealth. And that’s still without taking into account socioeconomic factors such as race/ethnicity and gender, family

connections, quality of pre-college education, and the ability to afford college in the first place. Even those studies that try to adjust for some of these differences often ignore differences in college majors (say petroleum engineering vs. art history) and type of college (selective vs. non-selective). Ohmann also points out that the job market is changing ever more rapidly, so that an investment in, say, an IT degree might not bring the expected payoff if you graduate into a world where such jobs have been automated or outsourced overseas.

This is just a small sample of the kind of scrutiny to which Ohmann subjects studies of the college premium, but his point is clear: The claim of a unitary premium guaranteed to all who graduate college is shaky at best. *Is College Worth It?* concludes, not surprisingly, that there is a college premium – but who gets it and how big it is are far more complicated matters than the popular studies imply. As Ira Shor puts it in his chapter, “College pays off for some but not for most, making the college premium both true and false, real and illusory, accessible and restricted at the same time, depending primarily on race, class, and gender.” (192)

Given all its complexities and uncertainties, why then does the notion of a college premium maintain such a grip on both individual thinking and public discussion about higher education? This brings us to the heart of *Is College Worth It?*, which is Ohmann’s analysis of the ideological role that the idea of the college premium plays. The emphasis on the premium is rooted in and reinforces the belief that the key purpose of college is to increase earning power. This is, of course, a real and legitimate concern for all but the wealthiest, but it can marginalize the importance of college as a place of social and intellectual growth and therefore the less “profitable” areas of study such as the social sciences and the humanities. This meshes easily with the view of college as a business, with a focus on efficiency, accountability, key performance indicators, and all the other monitoring and quantifying activities that plague students and teachers alike. It also reinforces the positioning of the student as a consumer purchasing a product as well as an investor banking on a significant return rather than, say, as an active learner seeking a rich, critical understanding of their world.

The college premium dovetails nicely as well with Horatio Alger myths of advancement through hard work, with a corresponding focus on individual as opposed to social improvement, with theories of “human capital development” (88), and with promotion of the marketplace as the final and proper means for defining value and making social decisions. And, of course, a claim of a single college premium, equally available to all, obscures the class structure within which education operates and which it also helps reproduce. It suggests that the student born into poverty and relegated to underfunded schools has the same choice – college or no college – with the same outcomes as the student who has benefitted from expensive private schools, SAT prep, and rich and highly educated parents.

The ideological work done by the focus on the college premium expands when college is promoted as economically beneficial not only to the individual student but to society as a whole. Progressive proposals for “college-for-all” (169) might very well mean culturally richer lives for Americans and better informed citizens, but Ohmann challenges claims that they would mean better economic conditions as well. The comforting belief that more education for more people would benefit everyone reinforces the ideology that we’re all in it together, that employers and employees have the same interests, that the magic hand of the market translates individual strivings into general good. “The rule of capital gains legitimacy,” Ohmann writes, “if citizens believe that more and better schooling can repair the inequalities and divisions troubling our society (along lines of race and gender as well as class).” (164)

An emphasis on the college premium also encourages and justifies increasing vocationalism in higher education, as Ira Shor thoroughly documents in Chapter 6. As colleges scramble for both funds and students, as public and government support for higher education declines, as students increasingly face the prospect of endless college debt, and as employers increasingly demand specific skills, “badge” programs – certificate programs that “certify technical competence in a specific field” (202) – are becoming ever more popular. Thousands upon thousands of these sub-degree programs are on offer in such mini-fields as digital marketing, strategic hospitality, mindful inclusion, brand storytelling, and supply chain analytics (just a small sampling from a single college website).

As the tech sector and digital work in particular grow in size and influence, these badges and certificates, cheaper than degree programs, continue to proliferate. Students with “pre-college privilege” (197), and a few lucky others, will continue to enjoy something like the traditional four-year, best-times-of-your-life college experience and reap a sizeable college premium, but for

most, the badge regime will only intensify the way that the education system “confirms existing inequities while presenting itself as an open ladder to be climbed” (192). Shor concludes the book by tracing how we got here and signs off with a proposed “egalitarian educational agenda” (206) that we must struggle for.

Is College Worth It? is a wonkish book, to be sure, but thanks to Ohmann’s casually eloquent style and Shor’s extensive knowledge, it rewards the effort. And it ends up celebrating, if only by implication, the liberatory value of a genuinely critical education.

Reading this book is unlikely to increase your lifetime income but it most definitely will enrich your understanding of the workings of capitalist ideology.

Note

For an overview of Ohmann’s career, see the book’s introduction by Jeffrey J. Williams, and for a sampling of his contributions to this journal, which he helped found, see *Tribute to Richard Ohmann*, in *Radical Teacher* #123 at

<http://radicalteacher.library.pitt.edu/ojs/radicalteacher/issue/view/30>

Bob Rosen taught English at William Paterson University for 43 years. He is currently co-managing editor of *Radical Teacher* and has edited or co-edited three collections of articles from the journal. He has also published *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer* and, with Pamela J. Annas, *Literature and Society* and *Against the Current*.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

Playbook

by Patricia L. Hamilton



"CONSENSUS" BY BEC YOUNG VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

Playbook

1

Without so much as raising a skeptical eyebrow,
the Director of Composition recounted as if reading a verdict
the lie the cunning freshman boy had just told him:

I'd targeted him from the beginning of the term.
The truth? He'd done nothing distinctive.
But I'd dared to question his polished prose,

which unspooled in a smooth argument until it snapped,
piling into a jumbled heap of words, so I was a pitiless harpy,
talons shredding the prospects of a promising young man.

A shock wave radiated from my gut
to my brain, triggering a landslide in the terrain
of my self-confidence. Somehow, I was the accused.

2

Only after watching decades of news clips—women
in tailored black suits, grim-faced in courtrooms
or before Congress, their eye-witness testimony

eviscerated by slick, smirking men—
did I realize that long-ago episode for what it was:
a scenario from the Playbook.

3

That boy imagined me as the wrong species.
I was a writing spider with infinite patience:
I spun my sticky signature web, then waited.

Daily I surveilled the dim, fifth-floor library stacks
to see if a trio of books had been returned.
Two weeks stretched tediously to three.

Then one day, the web trembled.
With photocopied pages and a rainbow of highlighters,
I tied every plagiarized sentence to its source.

The judiciary council hearing was open-and-shut.
I knew nothing about the Playbook, but I knew everything
about supporting a claim with evidence.

Patricia L. Hamilton is newly retired after thirty-five years in the college classroom. The author of *The Distance to Nightfall* (Main Street Rag Press), she won the Rash Award in Poetry in 2015 and 2017 and has received three Pushcart nominations. Recent work has appeared in *Ibbetson Street*, *Evening Street Review*, *Poetry South*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, and *Prime Number Magazine*. She lives with her husband in Jackson, Tennessee.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

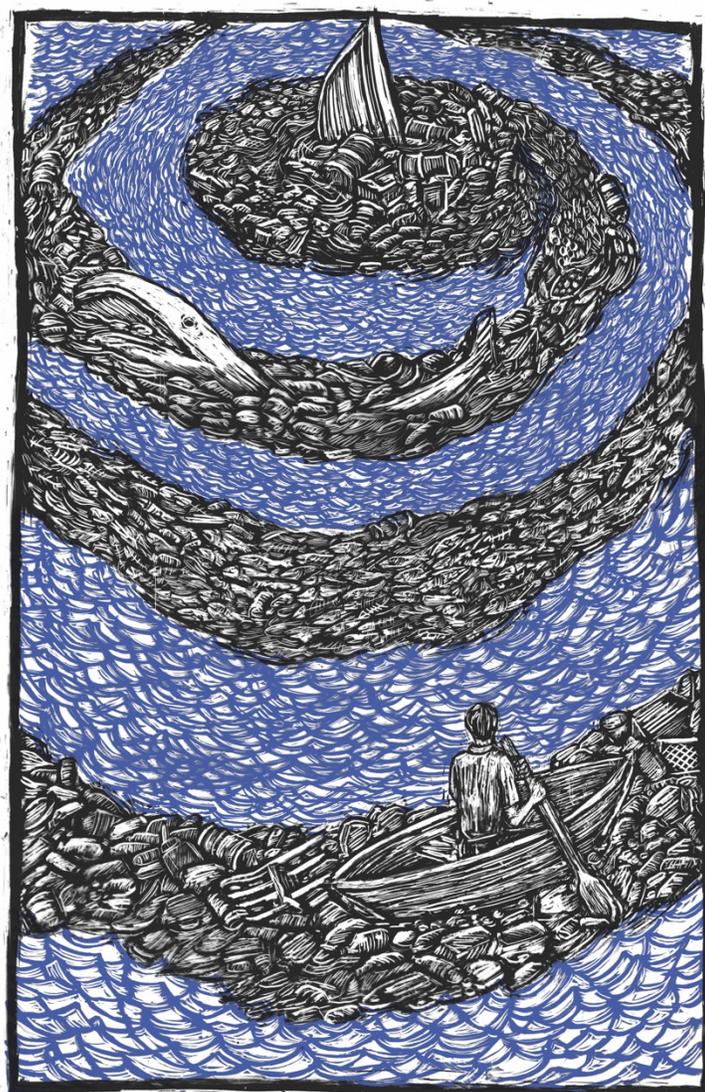
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

Headed North

by Amber Moore



"OCEAN DEATH SPIRAL" BY ERIK RUIN VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

Headed North

We left Tennessee.
It had to happen anyway
but
this would have confirmed it
otherwise.

It's sweet-smelling --
like the land is baking something tender,
with a light syrup and flaky salt.
It's almost so pleasant that you forget
The rot that
halts us, jams us, makes us sore
and panicky,
crawling off to be elsewhere.

I think about it alot; what would have happened
if we stayed?
A likely flight home, booked in a
frenzy. Or a brutal drive, masked
with mounting terror
but
gratitude too
for having this escape hatch to blast me
north. To cold, to quiet,
to quick and warm hands, unquestioning.

Where being less is so often more,
and so often
exactly what we need.

I haven't been back,
though I miss the loud fervor
and the man who sang,
"I'll always, always want it all" because
me too, yes.
Please.

Amber Moore is an Assistant Professor of Teaching with the Department of Language and Literacy Education at The University of British Columbia. Her research interests include: adolescent literacies; arts-based research; English education; feminist pedagogies; teacher and teacher librarian education; rape culture; and representations of youth in popular culture and YA literature. Her scholarship can be found across a number of publications such as *English Journal*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).