

THE MOVEMENT FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Empowering Women of Color through Social Activism

BY PATRICIA ZAVELLA

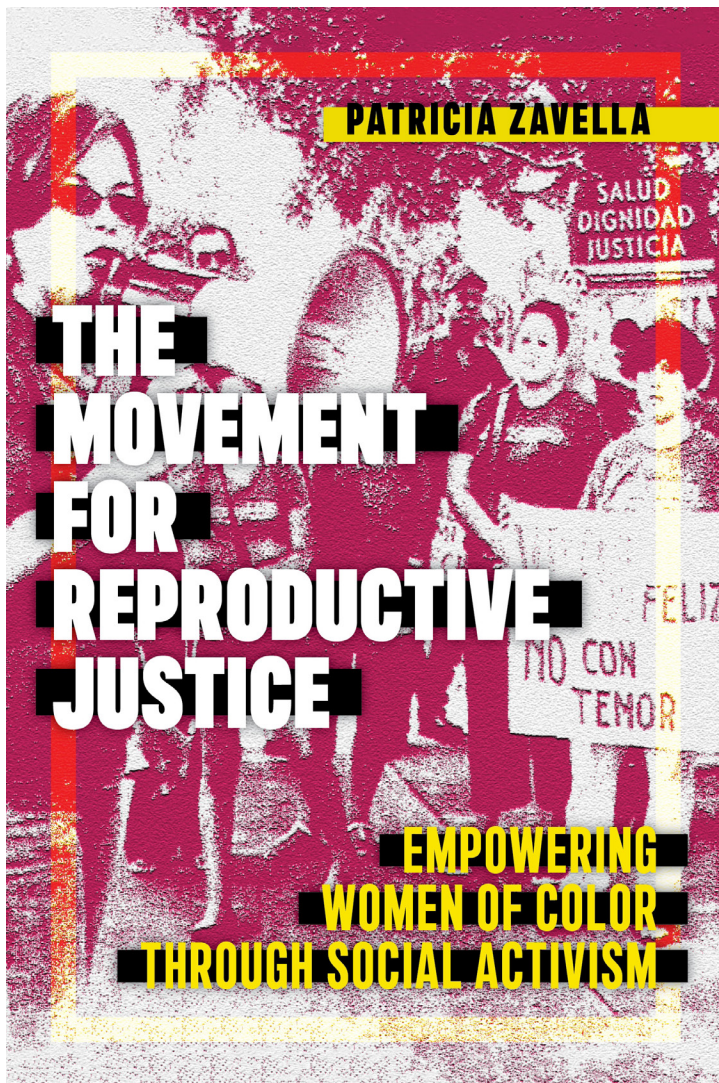
Instructor's Guide

Shows how reproductive justice organizations' collaborative work across racial lines provides a compelling model for other groups to successfully influence change

Patricia Zavella experienced firsthand the trials and judgments imposed on a working professional mother of color: her own commitment to academia was questioned during her pregnancy, as she was shamed for having children “too young.” And when she finally achieved her professorship, she felt out of place as one of the few female faculty members with children.

These experiences sparked Zavella's interest in the movement for reproductive justice. In this book, she draws on five years of ethnographic research to explore collaborations among women of color engaged in reproductive justice activism. While there are numerous organizations focused on reproductive justice, most are racially specific, such as the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum and Black Women for Wellness. Yet Zavella reveals that many of these organizations have built coalitions among themselves, sharing resources and supporting each other through different campaigns and struggles. While the coalitions are often regional—or even national—the organizations themselves remain racially or ethnically specific, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for the women involved.

Zavella argues that these organizations provide a compelling model for negotiating across differences within constituencies. In the context of the war on women's reproductive rights and its disproportionate effect on women of color, and increased legal violence toward immigrants, *The Movement for Reproductive Justice* demonstrates that a truly intersectional movement built on grassroots organizing, culture shift work, and policy advocating can offer visions of strength, resiliency, and dignity for all.



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Women's & Gender Studies | Anthropology

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INTRODUCTION

The Movement for Reproductive Justice (pages 1-34)

SUMMARY

This book explores the often overlooked story in which women of color supported women's access to health information, expressed in the landmark publication *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, and more generally the women's health movement that pushed for greater access to culturally sensitive health care. The social movement for reproductive justice takes health advocacy further by pushing for women's *human right* to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent children in safe and sustainable communities. Reproductive justice advocates access to health care with dignity, encouraging women to express their full selves, including their spiritual beliefs, as well as policies that address social inequalities.

Reproductive justice activists use a holistic approach that advocates for communities free from state violence expressed through colonialism, neoliberalism, poverty, criminalization, or policies related to child welfare, environmental regulation, immigration, or education that impede women's rights. By including the right to bodily autonomy, reproductive justice pushes for access to parks and open space, the ability to earn a living wage, and afford healthy food and quality child care, and express spiritual and cultural traditions. Reproductive justice advocates agree with Iris Lopez, who argues for changing conditions to enable women's full reproductive freedom, so that "women and men have viable alternatives from which to choose, and that the best possible social and political conditions exist that allow women to decide, free from coercion or violence, if, when, and how many children to have."

There are over thirty reproductive justice nonprofit organizations in the United States (with one in Canada) that frame their work around intersectionality and human rights. Over the course of five years (2013-2018) Zavella conducted interviews with staff, participants, and allies working with thirteen reproductive justice organizations or independent programs located across the United States as well as attended workshops, conferences, training institutes, lobbying efforts, political events, and webinars organized by reproductive justice organizations. She also explored their use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter.

Most organizations using the reproductive justice framework are racially specific. There are, for example, Asian American women's groups, Black women's groups, groups that serve Latinx or Native American women, and so forth. Yet reproductive justice advocates work in impressive ways to honor solidarity and difference and uses the term, women of color. The women involved in these movements support one another, they build coalitions, and they share resources, even though they largely remain organized within their racially or ethnically specific groups.

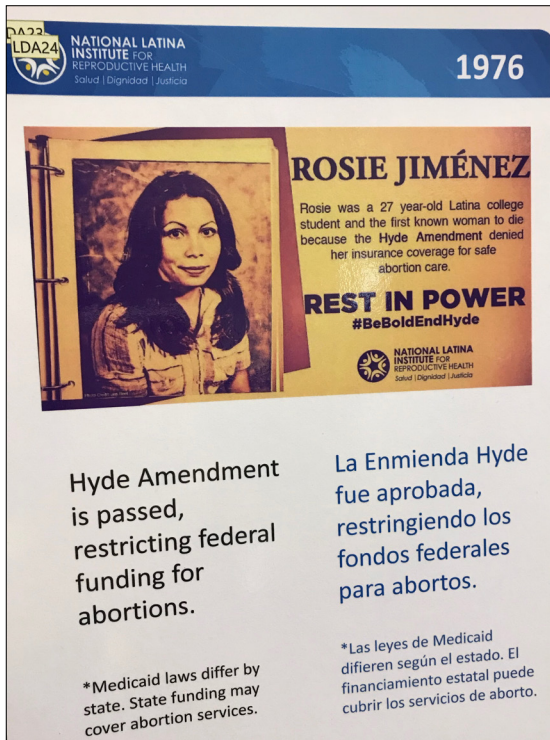
Zavella suggests an intersectional approach includes four dimensions:

1. epistemological practices that elicit alternative sources of knowledge about women's experiences;
2. an ontological project that accounts for multiple identities and complex subjectivity and reconceptualizes agency while acknowledging the simultaneity of privilege and oppression;
3. a form of coalitional politics grounded in solidarity rather than sameness;
4. a resistant imaginary that disrupts dominant social discourses about people of color and intervenes in historical memory, often using artwork or narratives.

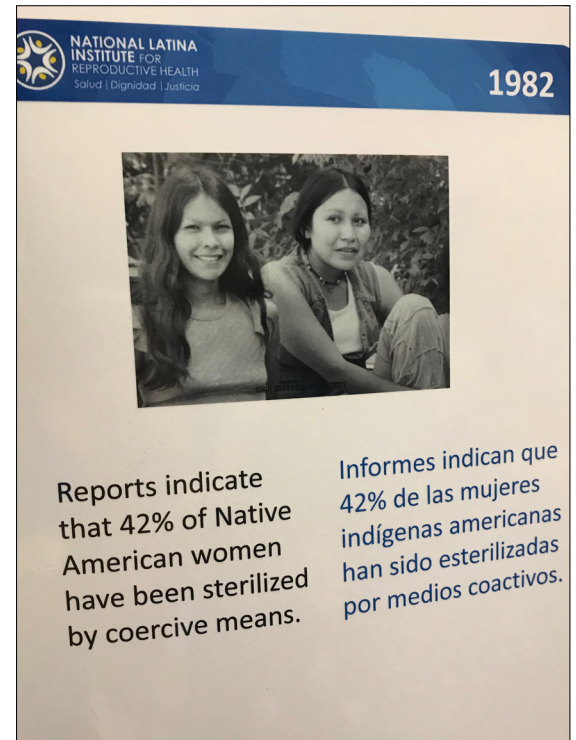
The movement for reproductive justice suggests that issues far beyond those directly related to reproductive health should be included in reproductive justice activism.

The reproductive justice movement uses a human rights approach that builds on the thinking of indigenous human rights activists who embrace a collectivist view toward human rights and the notion the right to have rights extends to vulnerable people and nature. These activists also claim the right to cultural citizenship and to use their preferred language and cultural expressions in public. Further, the movement for reproductive justice self-consciously and strategically problematizes collaboration and advocates wholeness of body/mind/spirit among activists and participants.

The approach to change constructed by advocates of reproductive justice, situated in intersectionality and human rights praxis, is fluid and complex and leads them to craft particular strategies and develop campaigns around specific issues that are explored in the book. The overall argument in this book is the organizations discussed here provide a compelling model for negotiating across difference during social activism. Further, in the current political era, in which the war on women and targeting of immigrants seems particularly egregious and there are widespread questions about whether "the resistance" can maintain its cohesion, the movement for reproductive justice offers a model for multiscale politics in relation to opposing conservative agendas and the disparagement of specific groups of people.



Hyde Amendment poster sponsored by NLIHR, 2018. Photo by the author.



Native American reproductive coercion poster sponsored by NLIHR, 2018. Photo by the author.



Reproductive Justice in the Southwest panel at Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social Summer Institute, 2015. Photo by the author

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define “reproductive governance.” What recent attempts at the state or federal level aim to further reproductive governance?
2. What are examples of each dimension of intersectionality?
3. How does intersectionality relate to your own experience and identity?
4. Does intersectionality include everyone, including those who are privileged?
5. If social movements are groups of individuals who collectively challenge authorities over a sustained period of time, often using public means to express their grievances and resistance, how does inclusion work within social movements when some have privileges and others do not?
6. Zavella uses the analytic of poder (power), “the ability of structurally vulnerable people to develop skills or capabilities and aspire to better conditions or even wellness.” How does this poder framework illuminate women’s activism?
7. What are the three ways in which the RJ movement integrates human rights and intersectionality?
8. Drawing on her own experience, Zavella suggests that workplaces often are not friendly to women with children. What has been your experience or observations about how working mothers experiences work when they have children?
9. How does neoliberalism, which, according to Laura Briggs, entails a “massive disinvestment [by the government] in families and communities,” affect where you live?
10. What is activist research?

CHAPTER 1

Culture Shift Work (pages 35-66)

SUMMARY

This chapter explores the centrality of cultural politics as reproductive justice organizations collaborate strategically with artists and researchers to inform specific campaigns. It discusses five initiatives that contest vilification of women of color and stereotypes about “the family” and offers alternative narratives and representations. Zavella suggests that through reframing, where communities of color are recognized for their histories of strength and resiliency, reproductive justice activists contest dominant thinking about women of color. Social activists also serve as cultural translators of the reproductive justice framework, providing literal translation into languages other than English and offer interpretations that resonate with women’s experiences. These activists also promote the discourse about empowering women of color.



New Mexico Day in Recognition of Young Parents sponsored by Young Women United, 2014. Photo by the author.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define framing. How does the movement for reproductive justice engage in framing?
2. What are some dominant stereotypes about women of color in your community?
3. Define “culture shift work.”
4. What are the benefits of contesting negative representations of women of color?
5. Which of the five initiatives discussed in this chapter was compelling and why?
6. Do you know of any particular campaigns that offers alternative narratives and representations of women of color?
7. How have people of color expressed their strength and resiliency in the face of historical oppression?

CHAPTER 2

Collaborating Across Difference (pages 67-104)

SUMMARY

This chapter addresses Kimberlé Crenshaw’s question, what are the “ready-to-work skills” of intersectionality, by focusing on two campaigns run by reproductive justice activists. One is about the human right to health care in Texas that led eventually to the lawsuit *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt* when the Supreme Court ruled in 2016 that Texas laws should be struck down. The other campaign is about the repeal of the Maximum Family Grant rule in California that had penalized women by not increasing their grants if they had additional children even if because of contraceptive failure. This chapter demonstrates that reproductive justice movement activists work intersectionality using particular methods—cross-sectoral collaboration, support for one another, storytelling in safe spaces, and a strengths-based approach that concretize the praxis of intersectionality through “world-making”—creating a collective politicized identity that incorporates constituents across the political spectrum, ranging from faith-based to LGBTQ activists.



Giving testimony at Human Rights Hearing sponsored by NLIRH, 2015. Photo by the author.

Estudio de Caso: Juventud LGBTT Indigente

¿Qué derechos son violados?

- La juventud LGBTT constituye el 5% de la población joven
- Sin embargo componen el 40% de la población jóvenes indigentes.
- Sujetos al abuso en casa, en la escuela, en hogares temporales y en los centros de detención
- Hostigamiento por parte de individuos y grupos religiosos
- Falta de comprensión acerca de las necesidades e identidad
- Un 62% de tasa de suicidio en la población joven
- Un 58% de la juventud LGBTT indigente está sujeto al abuso sexual

5% GENERAL YOUTH POPULATION
40% HOMELESS YOUTH POPULATION

new ALTERNATIVE FOR HOMELESS LGBT YOUTH

Training on LGBTQ youth, Human Rights Hearing sponsored by NLIRH, 2015. Photo by the author.

NATIONAL LATINA INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
Salud | Dignidad | Justicia

Acuerdos Grupales / Group agreements

- Expresar su curiosidad, trate de no juzgar
- Exprésese pero dé la oportunidad de que otras personas lo hagan también.
- Cada persona tiene el derecho a la palabra y los demás la obligación de escuchar.
- Círculo de conocimiento.
- Preguntas y agregados

- Express your curiosity, try not to judge
- Express yourself but give the opportunity for other people to do it too.
- Each person has the right to speak and others have the obligation to listen.
- Circle of knowledge
- Questions and additions

Group agreements at Leadership Development Institute sponsored by NLIRH, 2018. Photo by the author.

Roles para el Rally

- MC (Maestr@ de Ceremonia)
- Orador
- Porras
- Contacto con la Policía
- Medios de comunicación
- Seguridad
- Entrevistas
- Fotos/Video
- Bienestar/Combustible
- Primeros auxilios

Roles for a Rally, Leadership Development Institute sponsored by NLIRH, 2018. Photo by the author.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define the “politics of translation.” How have RJ campaigns engaged in the politics of translation?
2. What is the meaning of “world-making”? How does the RJ movement engage in world-making?
3. What are examples of cross-sector collaboration either locally, regionally, or nationally?
4. If storytelling is a methodology, how is storytelling different from gossip or telling stories such as sitting around the campfire?
5. Can you think of examples where storytelling made a difference in the political arena?
6. What are examples of social movements organizing diverse constituencies within their communities?



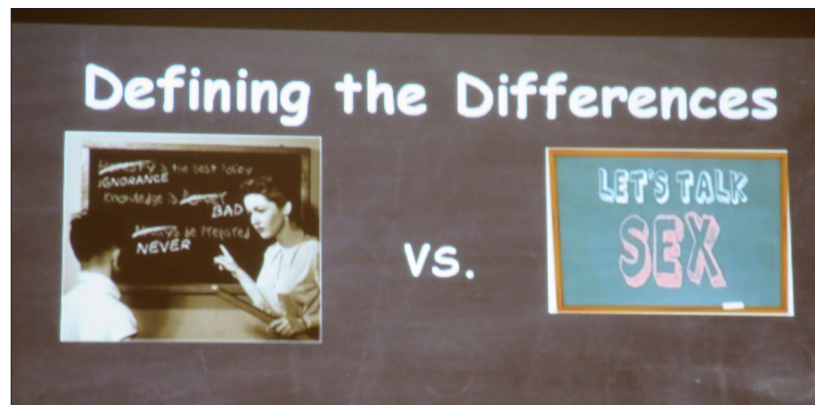
Gabriela Valle presenting on bodily autonomy, sponsored by CLRJ, 2014. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER 3

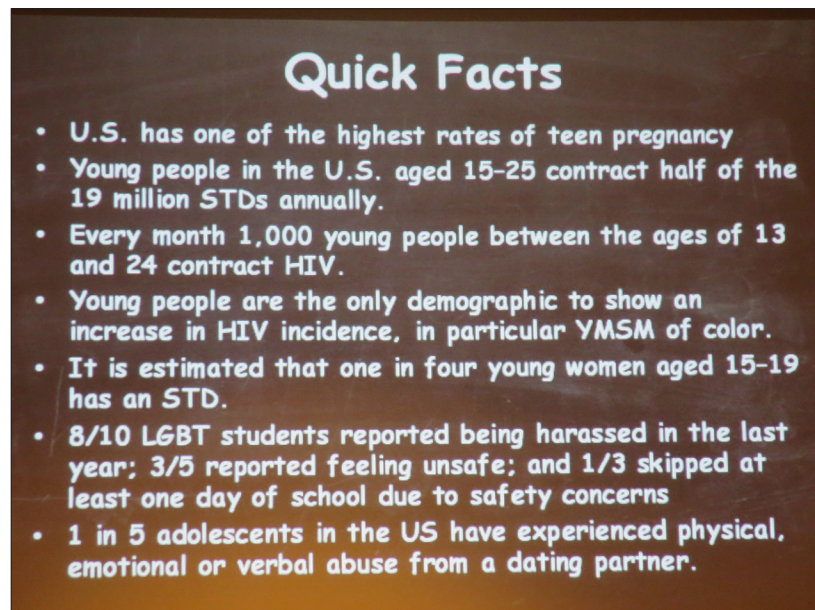
Youth Mobilization (pages 105-140)

SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on youth mobilization by three different reproductive justice organizations that use the language of youth empowerment—Forward Together in Oakland, Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health in Chicago, and Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights in Denver. It demonstrates that increasingly storytelling is becoming a methodology within the movement for reproductive justice, and illustrates how organizations train youth to use narratives to convey analyses of social problems and to garner support from policy makers and community members for specific changes. Youths' participation in reproductive justice youth programs helps them to navigate the transition to adulthood with the understanding that true empowerment addresses structural inequalities.

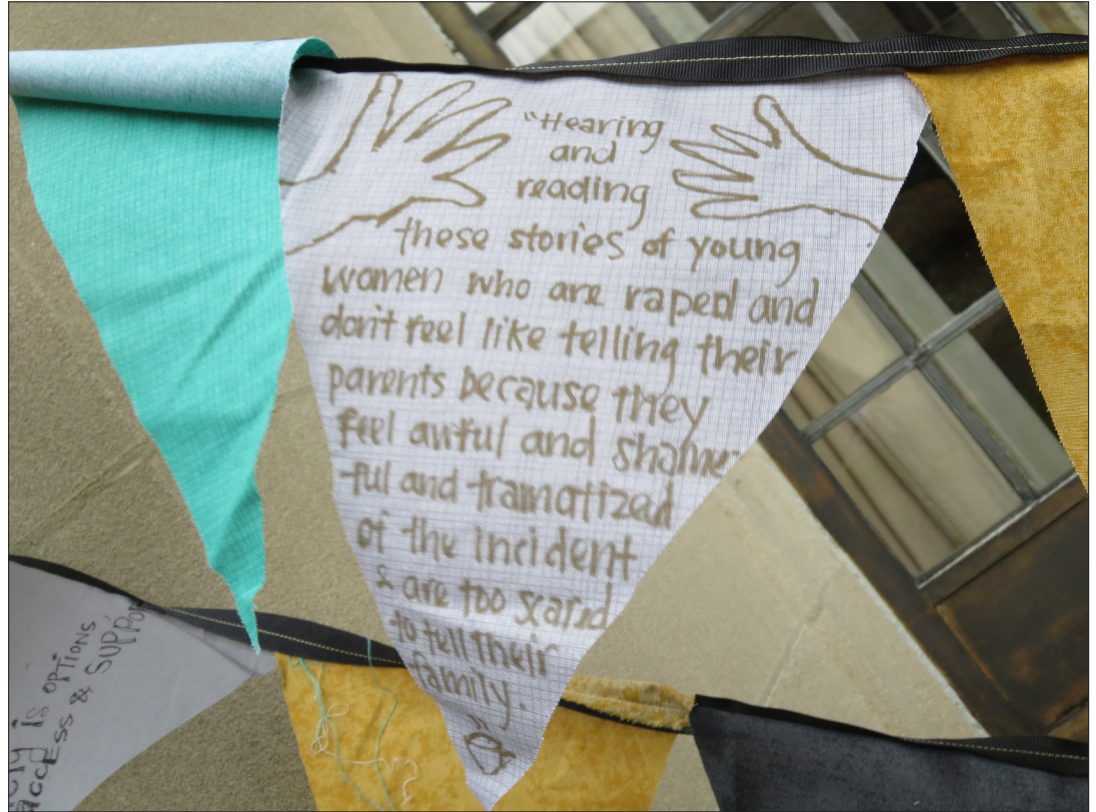


Presentation on Sex Ed sponsored by Advocates for Youth, 2014. Photo by the author.



Quick Facts sponsored by Advocates for Youth, 2014. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER THREE



Youth art on parental notification of abortion, sponsored by ICAH, 2014. Photo by the author.



Youth art on parental notification of abortion, sponsored by ICAH, 2014. Photo by the author.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does youth mean in your community?
2. In the context of reproductive justice programs, what does “youth empowerment” mean?
3. Are there differences between youth and adults when it comes to identifying as women of color?
4. How does storytelling work in these youth projects?
5. What was the process of political socialization for youth in each organization?

CHAPTER 4

From Self-Care to Healing Justice (pages 141-180)

SUMMARY

This chapter explores the framing “from self-care to healing justice” by drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa’s thinking about spiritual activism. It illustrates how four organizations—Tewa Women United, Forward Together, Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights, and Youth Women United—encourage self-care as well as public practices that help communities heal from historical trauma through spiritual activism. Zavella suggests that the work of self-care and spiritual activism in communities of color contests the individualism embedded in neoliberal health-care systems and instead crafts the collective politics of healing justice.

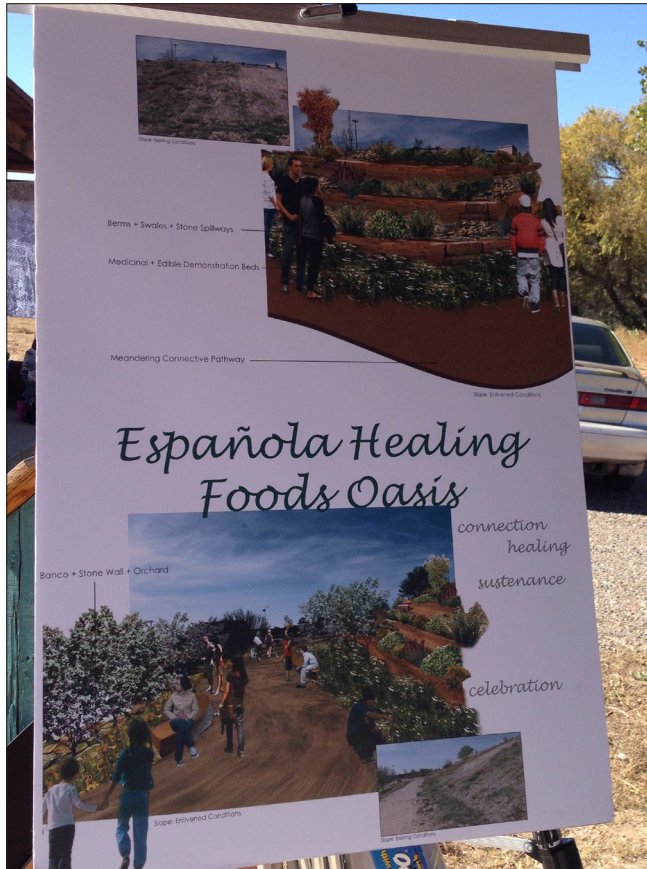


Ancient traditions of Northern New Mexico sponsored by Tewa Women United, 2015. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER FOUR



Woman is the First Environment sponsored by Tewa Women United, 2015. Photo by the author.



Española Healing Foods Oasis sponsored by Tewa Women United, 2015. Photo by the author.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain “spiritual activism,” “healing justice,” “cultural sovereignty,” and “radical citizenship.”
2. Healing justice includes a number of spiritual practices. Which of these sound intriguing in relation to communities you know well?
3. In the four examples of reproductive justice organizations that incorporate self-care or spiritual practices into their work, we see a tremendous range of what is considered spiritual. Do any of these repertoires resonate with your own sense of spirituality?
4. Do you see other work sites allowing for or bringing in self-care or spiritual practices?
5. How does spiritual activism, cultural sovereignty, or radical citizenship work within community-based organizing in other sectors?
6. How does these four organization’s spiritual activism counter neoliberalism?

CONCLUSION

Reproductive Justice Advocacy in the “Post-Truth” Era (pages 181-202)

SUMMARY

The conclusion reflects on how the movement for reproductive justice addresses the increased polarization of politics around immigration and reproductive rights in the wake of the 2016 election. The Trump administration has supported unprecedented changes in immigration policy and border enforcement as well as changed funding for reproductive health and emboldened conservative forces opposing abortion. Zavella suggests that women of color in the movement for reproductive justice draw on a long-term history of crafting a politics of inclusion that aims to empower those who are marginalized by intersecting systems of power. These activists insist that low-income women of color have the human right to access to health care with dignity as well as the right to health itself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the four contributions of the movement for reproductive justice that makes it unique?
2. Are there new forms of reproductive governance in your community that affect women’s health or access to health care?
3. What is the current political discourse related to immigration? Do you believe “legal violence” toward immigrants has increased or are there changes for the better?
4. How are activists organizing to critique the treatment or representation of immigrants?
5. Activists have only recently begun to push for the human right to health or well-being. What does a human rights framework provide that is different from other approaches?
6. If the reproductive justice movement offers a model for collaborating despite differences within and between constituencies, how would intersectionality and human rights work in other movements?

About the Author

Patricia Zavella is Professor Emerita in the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *I'm Neither Here nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty* and coauthor of *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*.