



*Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 00, No. 0, 2020, pp. 1–11  
doi: 10.1111/josi.12384

This article is part of the Special Issue “Reproductive Justice: Moving the Margins to the Center in Social Issues Research;” Asia A. Eaton (Issue Editor). For a full listing of Special Issue papers, see: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.2019.76.issue-1/issuetoc>

## Reproductive Justice Special Issue Introduction “Reproductive Justice: Moving the Margins to the Center in Social Issues Research”

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**ABSTRACT:** *Reproductive justice recognizes that women and girls’ reproductive health is shaped by intersecting systemic oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism) which affect their ability to make meaningful choices about their reproductive lives. The articles in this issue represent a coordinated effort to apply the reproductive justice framework to the scientific study of social issues. Consistent with reproductive justice principles, all articles acknowledge the foundation of reproductive justice in the experiences and knowledge of women of color; consider the roles of power, privilege, and oppression throughout the inquiry process, and address the utility of findings for improving the lives of marginalized groups through structural and social change. With this special issue, we hope to reframe the relationship between research and practice on marginalized populations’ reproductive health, and contribute to efforts to apply reproductive justice across domains of social science, including psychological science.*

### Introduction

Research has shown that the reproductive health of women and girls is intricately tied to their cultural, social, economic, and political locations (e.g., Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Chrisler, 2012; Inhorn & van Balen, 2002; Tornello, Riskind, & Patterson, 2014). As such, researchers and practitioners must acknowledge women’s health decisions, processes, and outcomes as extensions of their interactions with others and with systems, rather than as individual phenomena. The reproductive justice paradigm rises to this challenge, framing

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and analyzing reproductive health in terms of familial, community, societal, generational, political, and economic influences and their interactions. Reproductive justice recognizes that the ability of women and girls to make meaningful choices about their reproductive lives is shaped by intersecting systemic oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism).

While several interdisciplinary meta-theories provide systems-level lenses for examining human health, reproductive justice framework is especially appropriate for exploring women's health because it identifies connections between reproductive health and gendered sociopolitical complexities that impact women's lives around the globe (Luna, 2009; Silliman, Ross, & Gutiérrez, & Fried, 2016; SisterSong, 2018). Neither traditional feminist theories, which problematize gender, nor traditional critical race theories, which problematize race, adequately provide a means for understanding the varied, intersecting, systematic inequalities that shape reproductive health outcomes. Bridging this gap, reproductive justice provides a more critical lens than traditional systems paradigms by exposing oppression and power dynamics in an attempt to address the reproductive challenges diverse marginalized women face. Thus, reproductive justice extends beyond the mainstream reproductive rights movement's focus on gender equality and choice by positioning bodily autonomy and reproductive decision making within social-structural contexts, such as education, violence, poverty, labor, incarceration, LGBT rights, and immigration.

The reproductive justice framework was founded in the early 1990s through the advocacy work of women of color (WoC) grassroots health organizations in the United States (Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice [ACRJ], 2005; Gilliam, Neustadt, & Gordon, 2009; Silliman et al., 2016; SisterSong, 2018). Originally conceived as a framework for illustrating links between reproductive health and social justice, reproductive justice became pivotal in providing community leaders with guides for identifying how reproductive oppression is connected to the struggle for human rights (ACRJ, 2005; Luna, 2009). As "a theory, a practice, and a strategy" (Silliman et al., 2016, p. viii), reproductive justice is now used in Law, Public Health, Social Work, Psychology, Social Policy, Education, and Women's Studies scholarship to understand and address a variety of pressing social issues (e.g., Hoover et al., 2012; Luna, 2011; Luna & Luker, 2013; Rogers, 2015; Smith, 2005; Verbiest, Malin, Drummonds, & Kotelchuck, 2016).

Narratives and analyses guided by reproductive justice purposefully center WoC and other marginalized women and girls, analyze the influence of power structures and sociocultural norms on reproductive health, address intersecting oppressions, and consider dynamic interrelations among personal and environmental factors (SisterSong, 2018). Reproductive justice also focuses on empowering and organizing communities of women and girls to challenge structural oppressions. For example, inadequate health care, lack of access to prevention tools and education, poverty, and various forms of oppression have been found to directly contribute to the sexually transmitted infections (STI) outcome

disparities experienced by Black women (e.g., Boyd, Ruvalcaba, Stephens, & Madhivanan, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2016; Geter, Sutton & McCree, 2018; Kelso et al., 2014; Toth, Messer, & Quinlivan, 2013). By identifying and naming the ways in which these structures directly and indirectly influence STI prevention or acquisition, interventions have been able to improve providers' communication (e.g. Beach et al., 2011; Fray & Caldwell, 2017; Pierre- Victor, Stephens, Clarke, Gabbidon, & Madhivanan, 2017), and increase Black women's access to relevant health care services (Aziz & Smith, 2011; Castillo-Mancilla et al., 2014; Wyatt, Carmona, Loeb, & Williams, 2005). Reproductive justice approaches have also identified and addressed sexual health agency within this population (Dalmida, Holstad, DiIorio, & Laderman, 2012; Javier et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2010). For example, research by Nguyen et al. (2010) found that many HIV-positive women use spirituality to cope with living with HIV.

### **Reproductive Justice in Psychology**

Over the past two decades, many scholars have expanded the discourse around reproductive justice to forge new ways of constructing inequality, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and social-justice-based praxis. However, the field of psychology has been slow in applying this paradigm (see Chrisler, 2012). We suggest this is because, like feminist and critical-race theories, reproductive justice presents an epistemological challenge to our field (Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2016). It requires a shift in traditional understandings of how to conceptualize and implement psychological research, and how research activities relate to human welfare. Below, we highlight three traditional elements of psychological science that become problematized when applying the reproductive justice framework: (1) slow acceptance of non-westernized and/or gynocentric lenses; (2) resistance to critiquing power within and across the research process; and (3) the tradition of isolating the individual, as the unit of study, from the systems in which they are embedded.

Like intersectionality theory (Collins, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; hooks, 1984), the framework of reproductive justice has revolutionary roots, being founded by feminist WoC to upend hegemonic and oppressive practices for the purpose of global liberation (Ross, 2018). However, mainstream scholarship, which privileges neoliberal individualism and the global north (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, Sullivan, & Markus, 2019; Patil, 2013), has been slow to adopt these transformational frameworks, or has appropriated and misrepresented them (Bilge, 2013; Kurtis & Adams, 2017). The field of psychology is perhaps slower than the average social science to unlearn the default use of a Western lens for selecting and evaluating scholarly issues and approaches (Grzanka, 2017). For example, Heinrich, Heine, and Norenzayan's (2010) article on psychology's long history of overreliance on WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) samples was published only 10 years ago. Meanwhile, the field's

responsiveness to this urgent critique has been slow (Nielsen, Haun, Kärtner, & Legare, 2017; Rad, Martingano, & Ginges, 2018). With this special issue, we hope to participate in bringing reproductive justice into mainstream psychology and social science, while preserving and revering its origins in and attention to WoC and other marginalized peoples. As a case in point, the title of this introductory article, “Reproductive Justice: Moving the Margins to the Center in Social Issues Research,” was humbly borrowed from feminist scholar and activist bell hooks (hooks, 1984), who explored the marginalization of Black women in both American society and feminist theorizing.

Second, reproductive justice’s centering and empowerment of those facing the greatest barriers to reproductive freedom requires a shift from conventional ways of thinking about research. Psychological science has traditionally prided itself on being an unbiased science that objectively uncovers truth (Lovibond, 1970; Sheldon & King, 2001; Warner et al., 2016). From this position, it is assumed that researchers examine the factual structure and functioning of their populations, aiming to document and understand “human nature” (Sheldon & King, 2001). This positivist positionality, however, ignores the ways in which people are not simply subjects, but active agents who have their own subjectivities shaping their decision-making processes and behaviors (Leong, Holliday, Trimble, Padilla, & McCubbin, 2013; Sugarman, 2015). Moreover, the definition of “human nature” has historically been based on the dominant groups (Glick, 2008; Sears, 1986), failing to accurately describe the range of human conditions and experiences. These narrow definitions and understandings will have increasingly limited validity as our world becomes more multicultural, and result in flawed and dangerous research, policy, advocacy, practice, and education. In sum, reproductive justice requires that we challenge and rebuild basic constructs, such as who and what is included in and used to represent “human well-being” and “human nature.” As the creation and defense of constructs is a fundamental task of science (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002), reproductive justice offers the opportunity to redefine and revolutionize our field—moving us from making incremental contributions to knowledge to taking leaps of understanding in established and new domains of inquiry.

In fact, we argue reproductive justice requires that researchers no longer think simply about “producing knowledge,” but rather about operationalizing their construction of knowledge throughout the research process. Using reproductive justice, the task moving forward is not only that of asking which questions to explore, but also which groups and systems should be considered in framing and addressing those questions. How and why were these groups and systems identified? These types of questions will require researchers to move outside their comfort zones to co-constructing knowledge and developing research processes with their “subjects.” Thus, reproductive justice does not simply challenge the researcher to critique power structures which shape participants’ lives, but also to challenge

the power structures in which they negotiate their own programs of research and research foci.

Those in nonclinically focused areas of work are perhaps even less likely to integrate the community and the consideration of “practical implications” *throughout* their research process. However, reproductive justice can play a critical role toward changing this, especially in light of the increased pressure placed on researchers to move away from their ivory towers and share their work in meaningful ways with the communities they study. The National Institutes of Health (NIH), for example, has specifically prioritized translational research after facing criticisms that the enormous resources being put into understanding disease mechanisms were not resulting in commensurate gains in new treatments, diagnostics, and prevention (Butler, 2008). This means researchers must approach the ways in which they ask questions, design studies, and disseminate findings from an applied lens as well as a basic one.

Although there is only a small body of reproductive justice research in the field of psychology to date, what exists demonstrates the importance of reproductive justice as a framework in practice, research, and application (e.g., Chrisler, 2012; Grzanka & Frantell, 2017; Morison & Herbert, 2018). For example, Chrisler (2012) brought together over twenty-five scholars to address reproductive rights from a transnational, human-rights perspective in her book *Reproductive Justice: A Global Concern*. A joint initiative from the American Psychological Association (APA) Divisions 35 (Society for the Study of Women in Psychology) and 52 (International Psychology), it served to expand the traditional focus of reproductive rights by including topics that are not often explicitly referred to as reproductive issues using the reproductive justice lens. For example, it included a chapter on infant-feeding options (Johnston-Robledo & Murray, 2012). However, there is a need for continued and systematic explorations that specifically highlight reproductive justice’s utility for answering today’s most pressing health inequities.

### **Our Goals and Vision for the Current Issue**

As reproductive justice centers and values social justice, those in our field embracing the tenants of reproductive justice are challenged to use them in our daily interactions with clients and students, the development of research ideas, and/or teaching approaches. To help guide the use of reproductive justice in the research process, specifically, we have identified three strategies that should be applied: acknowledge the specific contributions of WoC; analyze the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression; and provide application to marginalized groups cross-culturally. The articles included in this issue each use these guidelines.

*Applications of reproductive justice acknowledge and clearly articulate their foundation in WoC’s experiences and knowledge. Naming WoC’s role in the*

founding of this framework is crucial for two reasons. First, learning and remembering the history of a thought invokes notions of agency, change, human progress, the role of material circumstances in human affairs, and relevance of historical events and norms for decision-making. Historically-situating findings and ideas also increases our comprehension of the constraints, opportunities, and forces informing human experiences in the present. Second, given the burgeoning plurality of voices in our field invoking intersectional and social justice paradigms, it is critical to distinguish the unique and parallel elements of reproductive justice.

- (1) *The roles of power, privilege, and oppression are integrated throughout the inquiry process.* Intentionally acknowledging these forces serves the dual purpose of positioning the researcher in their work, and the work in broader contexts. Specifically, this approach obligates researchers to consider their own privileged positions across research processes. Further, judiciously analyzing the roles of power, privilege, and oppression increases researchers' ability to understand their underlying mechanisms, and identify ways future work can address inequities that exist in our society. This is achieved through critical discussions examining the systematic political, economic, and social environment influences that contribute to societal imbalances negatively impacting behavioral outcomes.
- (2) *The utility of findings for improving the lives of marginalized groups in terms of structural/social change (e.g., policy and practice) nationally and internationally is addressed.* Although discussions of research, clinical, and practical implications typically suggest how research findings may be practically important and inform subsequent research, reproductive justice calls for movement beyond the traditional identification of gaps in the literature, and the unique contribution of the present study. Rather, reproductive justice applications require the initiation of a dialogue on action and steps toward liberation. This effort to address the gap between science and practice encourages a sense of joint ownership, mutual collaboration, and respect between researchers and relevant communities using accessible and scientifically rigorous approaches. This ensures that the research is not only an accessible and effective contributor to change efforts, but also has meaning for those that would most benefit from this knowledge.

### **Content of the Current Issue**

The current issue is an early step toward integrating these guiding reproductive justice frameworks into psychological research examining reproductive health cross-culturally. Toward this end, the articles selected for this issue are all

grounded within the discipline of psychology and its related praxis—although not all authors are psychologists. Further, each study also includes a section in the discussion focused on complicating the issue in terms of how it would look for different groups (e.g., immigrants), and considering the extent to which their sample and findings are WEIRD (Henrich et al., 2010). Authors of all articles have also been encouraged to transform their articles into one-page white articles, written in plain language and accessible to the public. Finally, there is considerable focus on future directions, as the point of reproductive justice is to ask questions about implications and to develop solutions and coalitions.

The selected articles highlight not only the utility of a focused issue on reproductive justice, but also its timeliness and importance. Beyond the diversity in population identities here (e.g., transgender and nonbinary people, fat people), there is a clear focus on the global application of reproductive justice, with articles on targeted populations from New Zealand (Huang, Sibley, & Osborne, in press), India (Stephens & Eaton, in press), Nicaragua (Grabe, Rodríguez Ramírez, & Dutt, in press), Canada (LaMarre, Rice, Cook & Friedman, in press), Australia (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, in press), and the United States (e.g., Smith, Sundstrom, & Delay, in press). Methodological diversity is also a hallmark of this issue, as the issue includes qualitative (Grzanka & Schuch, in press), quantitative (Huang, Sibley, & Osborne, in press), mixed methods (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, in press), and systematic review (McClelland, Dutcher, & Crawford, in press) research approaches.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this special issue reframes the relationship between research and practice on marginalized populations' reproductive health, and contributes to the ongoing development of efforts to apply reproductive justice across domains. In an increasingly global context, researchers and practitioners must become skilled at identifying and reflecting on the influence of power, privilege, and oppression (including their own) in the work they do. By disseminating accessible research that speaks directly to these issues, the field will be able to more accurately and adequately address the reproductive health experiences of marginalized people everywhere.

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Preview "Reproductive Justice by Loretta J. Ross. Reproductive Justice: An Introduction (Reproductive Justice: A New Vision for the 21st Century Book 1). by. Loretta J. Ross" A super informative and comprehensive introduction to the subject of reproductive justice, a coin termed in 1994 by Black women to emphasize the need to intersect reproductive health issues with social justice issues. Reproductive justice goes beyond the pro-life/pro-choice debate to insist that reproductive health is more than just the right to have an abortion and the right to affordable, accessible contraception. Reproductive justice is "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities," according to SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, the first organization founded to build a reproductive justice movement. In 1997, 16 women-of-color-led organizations representing four communities of color " Native American, Latin American, African American, and Asian American " launched the 1 ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES: OVERVIEW AND PERSPECTIVE USING A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE FRAMEWORK INTRODUCTION Assisted reproductive technologies (ART) have enabled millions of people in the world to have biological children who otherwise would not have been able to do so. According to the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology, more than three million babies have been born using ART worldwide in the last 30 years, enabling infertile women and men; single women and men; and lesbian, gay, and transgender couples to form genetically-related families. These new technologies ha Reproductive Justice is a term coined by a group of women of color intending to link reproductive rights and social justice. While acknowledging reproductive health and reproductive rights, reproductive justice takes that further with a lens on intersectionality, movement-building, and other human rights. Topics relating to reproductive justice range from abortion access, access to birth control, or the ability to have a home birth, to environmental racism and LGBT+ rights! "The human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have research-article2017. Regular Manuscript. Counseling Psychology and Reproductive Justice: A Call to Action. The Counseling Psychologist 2017, Vol. 45(3) 326-352 © The Author(s) 2017 Reprints and permissions: sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav httpDs:O//dlo: i1.o0r.g1/1107.171/0770/10101010000001071766999988771. SRH issues affect virtually all people, especially those whose sexual and reproductive behaviors and identities are stigmatized. In this article, we make the case for the importance of SRH and rights in counseling psychology, and introduce the reproductive justice framework as a means to incorporate these issues into research, training, practice, and advocacy for social justice.

For example, a recent study by the Center for Reproductive Rights [4] and SisterSong (a women of color reproductive justice collaborative) suggested that African American women living in Georgia and Mississippi—two states with among the highest maternal death rates in the country—experience key inequities, including poor quality sexual and reproductive health information and services, lack of access to needed reproductive care. Numerous programs and initiatives are underway across the country that support reproductive health equity by addressing the social determinants of health.

Assessing reproductive justice in Israel: Narrations by refugee women on embodied experiences of discrimination in South Tel Aviv Hannah Reinl. 103.

A woman's anger Aleksandra Kusnierkiewicz.

Back to the Past: Brazil's Backlash of Reproductive Justice in its Domestic and Foreign Policy. by Aline Beatriz Coutinho & Kristina Hinz.

With its recent votes against the inclusion of "sexual and reproductive rights" and "sexual education" in the resolutions of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), Brazil, alongside countries like Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, is breaking with its foreign policy tradition of the last 25 years.

Back in 2004, SisterSong brought a reproductive justice approach to the march's leadership and helped to mobilize busloads of newly energized, diverse supporters, making the march one of the largest of its kind in U.S. history.

In addition, the movement's social justice focus provides a concrete basis for building radical coalitions with organizations fighting for racial, economic, and environmental justice, for immigrant, queer, and disabled people, and for systemic change in law enforcement, health care, and education. True reproductive freedom requires a living wage, universal health care, and the abolition of prisons.

The galvanizing impact of reproductive justice extends beyond these mobilization and coalition-building strategies. Preview "Reproductive Justice by Loretta J. Ross. Reproductive Justice: An Introduction (Reproductive Justice: A New Vision for the 21st Century Book 1). by Loretta J. Ross

A super informative and comprehensive introduction to the subject of reproductive justice, a coin termed in 1994 by Black women to emphasize the need to intersect reproductive health issues with social justice issues. Reproductive justice goes beyond the pro-life/pro-choice debate to insist that reproductive health is more than just the right to have an abortion and the right to affordable, accessible contraception. The Reproductive Justice movement has put out various statements noting how problems like police violence are important for reproductive justice.

These issues have come to the forefront in thinking about the role of medicine in perpetrating anti-Black policies in medical care both contemporary and historical, and finding solutions for the medical racism that is exacerbating Covid infection inequalities. This month the CDC found that "age-adjusted hospitalization rates are highest among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native and non-Hispanic black persons, followed by Hispanic or Latino persons."

Reproductive justice: an introduction (reproductive justice: a new VISION for the 21st century) (Vol. null).