

*"The Mohawk belief that a woman is the first environment makes the strong connection between women's health, the health of the entire community, an environmental justice."
(p.143)*

Embracing Reproductive Justice as a Male Advocate: Insights from *"Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice"*

It is imperative to acknowledge that the pursuit of reproductive justice is a collective effort, necessitating the involvement of not only birthing people but also men who stand as allies, advocates, and partners in the fight for equal rights and autonomy. For MERJ's first book organization-wide book we delved into "Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice," edited by Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena Gutiérrez. The book chronicles the tireless efforts of grassroots organizations, activists, and advocates who have tirelessly worked to advance reproductive rights and challenge oppressive policies. As male supporters of reproductive justice, MERJ aims to explore the significance of men's role in advocating for reproductive justice while emphasizing the need for gender equality in this essential movement.

Understanding Reproductive Justice through the lens of *Undivided Rights*

"Undivided Rights" offers a profound insight into reproductive justice, a concept that transcends simplistic pro-choice or pro-life narratives. Reproductive justice advocates for the autonomy of individuals in making decisions about their reproductive health, free from forced sterilization, discrimination and coercion. It encompasses not only the right to access safe and legal abortion but also the right to have children and the right to parent in a safe and supportive environment. MERJ embraces the definition that reproductive justice means recognizing and respecting birthing people's autonomy over their bodies, choices, and futures. It entails understanding that reproductive decisions, whether it involves choosing to have an abortion or becoming a parent, are deeply personal and should not be subjected to interference or judgment.

Centering the Voices of Womxn of Color

Undivided Rights illuminates the stark racial disparities that have historically existed concerning sterilization practices. The book untangles how sterilization looked different for various racial groups, emphasizing the intersectionality of reproductive justice.

In the United States, the history of sterilization is intertwined with systemic racism and eugenics. During the 20th century, there were disturbing instances of coerced and

forced sterilizations, primarily targeting marginalized communities, particularly women of color. African American, Indigenous, and Latin(x) women were disproportionately affected by these practices. These sterilizations were often performed without informed consent or under the guise of medical necessity, highlighting the systemic injustices faced by these communities.

The nuances between birthing people's experiences based on differing racial groups reminds us that advocating for reproductive justice means addressing not only gender-based discrimination but also racial disparities in healthcare, immigration statuses and reproductive rights. As male supporters, we must actively work to dismantle these systemic inequalities and ensure that all individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, have equal access to reproductive healthcare and the right to make decisions about their own bodies.

As male allies, it is crucial for us to recognize that women of color have been at the forefront of the reproductive justice movement and that white women have often monopolized, polarized or dominated the national conversation about reproductive rights. This serves as a poignant reminder that in order to dismantle systemic barriers for all birthing people we need to listen to ALL birthing people.

Act to Challenge Stereotypes and Stigmas

Undivided Rights courageously confronts the stereotypes and stigmas associated with reproductive choices, particularly abortion. The book unveils how anti-choice rhetoric has been used to shame and stigmatize women who have abortions, often portraying them as morally deficient or irresponsible. MERJ works to actively combat these harmful narratives and foster a more compassionate and understanding society. We, men can play a pivotal role in reducing stigma by engaging in open and empathetic conversations about reproductive choices, sharing stories that humanize the experiences of those who have had abortions, and standing up against efforts to shame or judge birthing people for their decisions.

Focusing on the YOUTH

Undivided Rights underscores the importance of comprehensive sex education as a key theme. The book asserts that providing young people with accurate information about their bodies, sexuality, and reproductive options is essential for making informed decisions and reducing unintended pregnancies.

Engage in Political Activism: The Fight for Reproductive Justice Needs YOU

Things to Do:

- Support/Join reproductive justice organizations
- Participate in protests and rallies
- Leverage our voices and resources (money, time, power and energy)
- Champion policies that safeguard and expand reproductive rights.
- Listen and learn from the experiences of ALL womxn, particularly Womxn of Color
- Actively confront our own biases and privileges around topics like: abortion, menstruation, infant/maternal mortality, menopause etc.
- Engage in conversations with other MEN about the importance of reproductive justice

Conclusion

While birthing people bear the primary burden of reproductive choices, men have a responsibility to stand beside them, support their decisions, and actively work towards a more equitable society. Male allies, informed by these historical differences, must commit to dismantling these injustices and advocating for a future where all individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, have equal access to reproductive healthcare, control over their own bodies, and justice. We have a pivotal responsibility as men to join the reproductive justice movement.