



Reproductive Justice Means More than Being Pro-Choice

Sherry Warren

Minister for Women's and Gender Justice

Much of my focus has been on the reproductive justice (RJ) landscape and its movements since I started this newly (re)created position on July 1. The Dobbs vs. Jackson decision that nullified women's constitutional right to abortion has generated a deluge of rhetoric, legal changes, and arguments. It is a lot to keep up with. I hope to break down some of the lingo here.

Reproductive Justice (RJ): The RJ movement takes the conversation about access to abortion to a deeper level that addresses intersectionality, oppression, and self-determination. SisterSong is one of the most well-networked organizations focused on RJ; it is also the largest multi-ethnic group that centers the perspectives and needs of women of color. Through analysis, organization, and mobilization, SisterSong moves the conversation from access (often a pro-choice stance) to justice and the human rights of birthing, not birthing, the needs of people who identify as women and/or have uteruses, and their ability to practically access abortion if they choose. People with means have access to abortion whether it is legal or not. The Guttmacher Institute has published work on the current landscape of access, states' laws, and crossing state borders to obtain abortions. Their research indicates that nearly one in ten abortion seekers crossed state lines for abortion healthcare even before Roe was overturned. Many women do not have the ability to hazard this trip.

People with Uteruses: You may have noticed a change in language in the RJ community, media, and overarching conversation about abortion and healthcare. In general, folks working for RJ recognize that not everyone with a uterus identifies as a woman, and not everyone who identifies as a woman has a uterus (both for numerous reasons). Because the RJ movement is inclusive and intentionally focuses on the needs of those most marginalized, it recognizes, includes, and addresses trans and non-binary people's ability to become pregnant. This seems like a good place to introduce another term—TERF. TERF is an acronym that stands for “trans-exclusionary radical feminist.” This type of transphobia got media attention when J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, tweeted comments that rejected acknowledging trans women as women.

Fetal Personhood: This gives fetuses the same rights and protections as fully formed humans living outside of uteruses. These bills have been introduced repeatedly at both state and federal levels. One of the more recent efforts is the federal Life at Conception Act, which is fraught with tensions of philosophy, religion, and science. Even with incredible advances in technology, we are not able to identify a pregnancy at the moment of conception. Moreover, these proposed laws are offering rights to someone who does not yet exist. Fetal personhood makes the legal claim of a pregnant woman in Texas who was pulled over for driving “alone” in the HOV (high-occupancy vehicle/carpool) lane seem reasonable given that Texas wants to give equal rights to her unborn that she carries.

The UCC celebrates and loves people of all gender identities; so does God. Overwhelmed by all this language? I recommend the Human Rights Campaign’s glossary, which will shed some light on this topic. I am also available for consultation and education in your conference, association, congregation, or other UCC gathering.

Reproductive Justice is an approach to healthcare and justice that is new for some and that is shifting in some ways by centering the voices of marginalized people away from the perspectives of many prominent feminists, historically speaking. Still, it feels very familiar in other ways. Consider, for instance, the Our Whole Lives curricula that teach accurate, age-appropriate information on human

development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. Reproductive Justice is the model of analysis and advocacy that I am learning to use as UCC Minister of Women’s and Gender Justice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sherry Warren is the Minister for Women’s and Gender Justice for the United Church of Christ.

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