
RJ | A³ in A² | 2013

Reproductive Justice: Activists, Advocates,
Academics in Ann Arbor

Michigan Meeting
May 29-31, 2013
REPORT

June 29, 2013



Program for Sexual Rights and Reproductive Justice
1500 E. Medical Center Drive, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109
Conference details at <https://sites.google.com/site/a3ina2/>

Thank you, again, for hosting this challenging and productive event. We all learned so, so much about reproductive justice and the pleasures and pressures of academic/advocate partnerships. I came away with deeper relationships, more of a sense of the possibilities and some concrete next steps in continuing the work. Thank you for this generous opportunity.

- Sujatha Jesudason, Ph.D.
Director, CoreAlign
University of California, San Francisco

Thanks to all of you for inviting me and I look forward to working with you in the future. It was a wonderful conference, exceeding my expectations.

- Loretta Ross
Co-founder, SisterSong
Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective

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How we decided on the title *RJ: A3 in A2*

Our plan for the Michigan Meeting was to see if we could productively bring together activists, advocates, academics in a meeting to facilitate networking, stimulate ideas for working together, explore barriers to collaboration, and exchange information about reproductive justice both in the US and internationally. The event was open and welcoming to U-M students, staff, and faculty, as well as community members.

Reproductive Justice (RJ) is a topic of societal importance that crosses disciplines and interest groups. It explores basic issues of gender, race, class, and power in considering the ability of women and men to decide to have children, not have children, and raise their children in a supportive society free of barriers.

We used the *RJ: A3 in A2* title because it was short, catchy, and it captured our idea of bringing people together to see whether there were avenues for collaboration, what potential obstacles to collaboration existed, and how barriers could be managed in academia and advocacy.

We created a multi-media conference, including a historical exhibit (now online) at the Hatcher Library and a Rackham display of handmade quilts from women around the world, depicting stories of maternal loss. A few participants said we should change our name to “A4 in A2” to recognize the important work of artists and visual communication and expression in RJ work.

Our purpose

The purpose of the conference, as stated in the original grant proposal, is reproduced here.

Central theme

We proposed an international conference on reproductive justice. The goals of the conference were to 1) advance RJ worldwide; 2) define the role of academic institutions in the RJ movement; 3) place the University of Michigan at the forefront of scholarly institutions in the search for and study of RJ.; and 4) create a forum in which new partnerships among activists, advocates, and academics could be forged and envisioned for future work.

Intended participants

Intended participants included students interested in RJ from the University of Michigan and other institutions nationally and internationally; academics, advocates and activists working in RJ; and international human rights scholars working on women’s rights and health issues. The faculty included a mix of advocates and academics working on RJ issues, as well as students working in the area, many of whom served as note-takers in the sessions.

Organizers

Organizers were based in the U-M Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and its Program for Sexual Rights and Reproductive Justice (Timothy R.B. Johnson, M.D., Edward B. Goldman, J.D., Lisa Harris, M.D., Ph.D., Alexandra Minna Stern, Ph.D.), along with committee members based elsewhere in U-M (Ford School, LS&A, Women’s Studies, Law School, School of Public Health).

We organized both Internal and External Advisory Boards, with the goal of maximizing support and advice as we shaped the conference. This strategy worked well in informing us about scholarship and advocacy groups whose voices needed to be included.

External advisory board

| NAME | AFFILIATION |
|-------------------|--|
| SUSAN BERKE FOGEL | National Health Law Program |
| LIZA FUENTES | Ibis Reproductive Health |
| SUJATHA JESUDASON | CoreAlign and University of California at San Francisco |
| ZAKIYA LUNA | Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice at Berkeley Law |
| KIRSTEN MOORE | Former President, Reproductive Health Technologies Project |
| JUDY NORSIGIAN | Boston Women’s Health Collective, <i>Our Bodies, Ourselves</i> |
| LYNN PALTROW | National Advocates for Pregnant Women |
| LORETTA ROSS | Co-Founder, SisterSong |
| EVALINE SHEN | Forward Together |
| RICKIE SOLINGER | Historian, curator, and independent scholar |

Internal advisory board (U-M)

| NAME | AFFILIATION |
|-----------------------|---|
| JOSE BAUERMEISTER | School of Public Health |
| ROSARIO CEBALLO | Department of American Culture |
| JOHN CHAMBERLAIN | Ford School |
| MICHELLE DEBBINK | Medical School |
| SARAH FENSTERMAKER | Institute for Research on Women and Gender |
| EDWARD B. GOLDMAN | Medical and Law Schools |
| LORRAINE GUTIERREZ | Literature, Science & the Arts, Psychology |
| LISA HARRIS | Medical School |
| PAULA JOHNSON | School of Public Health |
| TIMOTHY R.B. JOHNSON | Medical School |
| NADINE NABER | Departments of Women’s Studies and American Culture |
| RACHEL SNOW | School of Public Health |
| ALEXANDRA MINNA STERN | Medical School and Department of American Culture |

How did the conference seek to address the aims of the Michigan Meeting?

This conference sought to bring together scholars and activists from around the world to address RJ from a variety of interdisciplinary viewpoints. The goal was to build a core of scholars and activists who could work together to support research, study and discussion on RJ.

We provided opportunities for students and the general public to participate during the conference.

Thanks to both advisory boards, we were able to recruit leading voices in the RJ movement to attend and present at the conference.

Because we expected a large meeting, a conference planner was necessary, as was someone familiar with the potential issues in bringing advocates and academics together. We were fortunate to retain Jean Steppe of Steppe Solutions to help with logistics and organization. Jean has staffed other Michigan Meetings and was able to provide excellent, highly professional support. We were equally fortunate to retain Emily Galpern. Emily has worked for and managed advocacy groups, developed national conferences on RJ, and is currently a consultant on nonprofit organizations. She was critical in identifying and inviting speakers, managing the conference, and helping us understand the roles and goals of the various participants and their organizations. She also helped facilitate the flow of the conference.

Budget

Budget: Our total budget was \$50,000 from Rackham, \$50,000 from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology to allow us to invite international speakers, and added support including \$9,300 from our co-sponsors: African Studies Center, Dept. of American Culture, Institute for Research on Women and Gender, Latina/o Studies Program, and Center for Advancing Research and Solutions for Society. Our final accounting shows that we spent \$102,597, bringing conference costs well within our budget.

Organization

Pre-conference workshop and panel, Wednesday, May 29

The Wednesday pre-conference served to bring the U-M community together and acquaint them with RJ work across disciplines through short presentations by students and faculty showcasing their work. Many U-M scholars were able to learn about intriguing projects taking place across the university. The presentations were followed by a discussion among the audience facilitated by Lisa Harris, M.D., Ph.D.

On Wednesday afternoon, participants and the general public also experienced the *Birthing RJ* exhibit and an interdisciplinary panel focused on the role of exhibits and visual media in the RJ movement and scholarship. One interesting point in identifying barriers to working together was that all panelists faced their own professional concerns. For example, the library archivist noted that while she was happy to locate images for the exhibit, she did not feel able to draft the accompanying interpretative language, since that was not part of her professional role at a library devoted to the non-partisan collection of historical materials.

Conference, Thursday, May 30 - Friday, May 31

The actual Michigan Meeting took place at Rackham over these two days. The beautiful Rackham space facilitated a functional and elegant conference. We were able to display the White Ribbon Alliance quilts throughout Rackham. We used the auditorium for panels and discussion sessions, as well as for a sneak preview of a film in progress, *No Más Bebés Por Vida*, about the forced sterilization of Mexican-American women in California.



The conference was structured to avoid “talking heads.” During the four panels, each panel member was given ten minutes to present ideas that then served as the basic for panel and audience discussions around collaboration. Panels were followed by facilitated table discussions to allow for networking, as well as topical and methods working sessions facilitated by pre-identified specialists. We allowed ample time for discussion by hosting breakfast, lunch and snacks and by creating places to meet and talk. To keep people alert and active, we offered stretch-and-flex breaks each day.

To afford all participants a level playing field, we sent out weekly reminders starting one month before the meeting. Each focused on a different RJ theme (what is RJ? international aspects, basic readings) and each also contained conference information, information about Ann Arbor sights and restaurants, the Peony Garden, etc. Participants found these very helpful in building excitement and helping to plan for the meeting. Following the meeting we sent out a final note with a survey for feedback. Feedback received was very positive and constructive.

Conference speakers were selected and hosted by a U-M committee formed of members of the Global Health Initiative, the Medical School, LS&A Departments (Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, History, and Women’s Studies), the School of Public Health, the Ford School, and the Law School.

We used the fourth floor Rackham auditorium for panel presentations; we used the auditorium, the entire fourth floor space, the third floor Earl Lewis room, and the second floor West Conference room for break-out sessions. Check-in, book sales, displays from participants, the main portion of the quilt exhibit, lunch, breaks, stretch-and-flex, and networking took place in the Assembly Hall and the outdoor terrace.

Did we accomplish what we promised?

Interdisciplinarity

The interdisciplinary nature of our Internal and External Advisory Boards was an extremely helpful quality in organizing a cross-discipline meeting.

Participants

We had to close registration at slightly over 200 due to extraordinary high demand to attend. Leaders in advocacy, academics from across the US, participants from around the world, students both as participants and as note-takers all helped us have rich and facilitated discussions. We did not charge a registration fee and were able to provide limited stipends to allow students to attend.

Speakers

Speakers came from throughout the United States, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Ghana. In total, 19 speakers and 4 moderators served on the four large panels, and 15 facilitators led the working sessions. We hosted lunch on Thursday and Friday and also provided coffee and networking breaks to facilitate discussion. Thanks to Dr. Johnson, we were able to host meet-and-greet dinners on Wednesday and Thursday evenings for the speakers and organizers. Friday evening and Saturday morning we hosted as many of the speakers and External Advisory group as could stay to thank them and talk about what we learned. The Saturday session reviewed the conference, talked openly about barriers and began the discussion of next steps (innovative idea instead of people just going home and back to daily work).

Sessions

The subject matter and formats of the working sessions were diverse, including topical issues, reports of successful collaborations, and networking. The conference was about building relationships and processes not focused on a specific outcome, but a great deal of educational material was presented in a format that encouraged discussion and exchange of ideas. We provided ample time for networking, viewing the exhibits, and conversation with speakers.

Panels

| TITLE Panelists | MODERATOR Date |
|--|---|
| PANEL 1: FRAMING REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE Loretta Ross, Eleanor Hinton Hoytt, Liza Fuentes, Richard Adanu, Kierra Johnson | EMILY GALPERN May 30, 9:15-10:45 am |
| PANEL 2: CULTIVATING COLLABORATIONS: ACADEMICS & ADVOCATES DISCUSS PARTNERSHIPS Lynn Paltrow, Jeanne Flavin, Sujatha Jesudason, Zakiya Luna | KIRSTEN MOORE May 30, 1:00-2:30 pm |
| PANEL 3: TAKING IT TO THE LIMIT: ADVANCING REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IN ACADEMIA Catherine DeAngelis, Michele Goodwin, Renee Morhe, Melissa Gilliam | TIMOTHY R.B. JOHNSON May 31, 9:00-10:30 am |
| PANEL 4: REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: LOOKING FORWARD, ANTICIPATING CHALLENGES Susan Berke Fogel, Gamal Serour, Ena Valladares, Jill Adams, Miriam Yeung | JUDY NORSIGIAN May 31, 3:30-5:00 pm |

Topical Working Sessions 1, May 30, 2:45-4:00 pm

| TITLE | FACILITATOR |
|--|-------------------|
| AFFORDABLE CARE ACT AND THE FUTURE OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE | Edward B. Goldman |
| REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND THE NEW EUGENICS | Judith Daar |
| MASS INCARCERATION, "WAR ON DRUGS," AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE | Lynn Paltrow |
| INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN WOMEN'S HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE | Yirgu Gebrehiwot |
| HUMAN RIGHTS, INTERNATIONAL LAW, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND INTERSECTIONALITY | Loretta Ross |

Topical Working Sessions 2, May 31, 11:00 am-12:30 pm

| TITLE | FACILITATOR |
|--|-------------------|
| REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES, REPRODUCTIVE LABOR, AND COMMERCIALIZATION | Francine Coeytaux |
| YOUNG PEOPLE AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE | Kierra Johnson |
| THE POWER OF LANGUAGE | Rickie Solinger |
| INTERNATIONAL RJ FOCUS ON ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION | Emmanuel Morhe |
| TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PUBLIC POLICY | Tracy Weitz |

Methods Working Sessions, May 31, 1:30-3:00 pm

| TITLE | FACILITATOR |
|--|-----------------|
| CLINICAL ADVOCACY: WHAT CAN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS DO? | Liza Fuentes |
| CHALLENGING STATE AND FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS, FROM LITIGATION TO LEGISLATION | Michele Goodwin |
| INFORMED CONSENT: PROCESS AND METHOD | Judy Norsigian |
| COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES | Lorena Marez |
| RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY WITHIN "HARD TO MEASURE" COMMUNITIES | Miriam Yeung |

Our goal

We wished to consider the place for scholarly institutions in the quest for RJ, given that until now, the movement has been largely advocacy-based. As we said in our proposal:

We seek to define the place of academic institutions in the struggle for RJ. While America is on a campaign to restrict women's rights, internationally women's rights have been increasing both by custom, laws and treaties, and we need to learn from other countries.

Results

All the feedback about our endeavors to facilitate fellowship and joint collaborations for projects, information exchange, research useful to RJ, and ideas for student placement was extremely complimentary. We heard about successful collaborations and opportunities for the future. Comments continue to arrive with the message that "This was the best conference I have ever attended!"

As was to be expected, we encountered challenges. Trust needs to be built and maintained so that we can build constructive partnerships. Academics have appropriated movement ideas and frameworks in the past; advocates want to create safeguards to avoid such exploitation in the future. Participants were excited and eager for more discussions and new ideas for networks.

What did we learn?

▲ COLLABORATION

Activist-Advocacy-Academic collaborations are hard work but can be rewarding and productive. Jeanne Flavin and Lynn Paltrow's co-authored publications and work for NAPW demonstrate this.

▲ POWER DIFFERENTIALS

Power differentials among collaborators need to be acknowledged and navigated with RJ goals and ideals in mind; this holds for race, class, and other kinds of power and privilege. Loretta Ross addressed this point eloquently throughout the conference.

▲ RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST

Relationships and trust are at the core of RJ advocate-academic collaborations; without these two ingredients, partnerships are likely to falter. Sujatha Jesudason emphasized this in her comments.

▲ A₄, NOT A₃

We realized that the conference might have been even more appropriately called **A₄ in A₂**, recognizing the important work of artists and visual communication and expression in RJ work. Heather Ault passionately made this point at Wednesday's opening panel.

▲ TIMELINE

RJ work won't be completed in a day, week, month, or even year – perhaps not even in one decade. Engaging in RJ requires big vision and signing up for the long haul. As one participant said: "You need to have skin in the game." Academics cannot be seen as "studying women," but as participating in moving RJ forward over the long term.

Feedback from participants

We include below a sampling of reflections from conference participants.

Students enjoyed meeting leaders

It was useful to me and others, as it provided an opportunity to dig deep into RJ issues with experts and folks with new ideas. I believe we achieved our objectives; in particular, the sessions I participated in came away with top goals/ideas to move forward on. It was also amazing to network with such high-profile people.

Experienced practitioners acquired new ideas

I really enjoyed the large sessions where several perspectives were shared and argued. It certainly gave me some ideas, and in some cases validation, for work I have done, am doing, or would like to do. The networking was marvelous and I met several people with whom I will try to reconnect and collaborate.

Community members gained connections and inspiration

... I came away motivated and inspired, having made new friends in the process. I appreciate the opportunity...

Advocates found great value

Thank you all. Bringing RJ into the academy (and vice versa) is a worthy endeavor. I was glad to be a part of the inaugural effort...

and

I thought it was a lively meeting, with old connections strengthened and new ones forged...

Activist speakers were excited about possibilities

Thank you all for this eloquent summary of the conference experience. It resonates with me - particularly the reflection about being challenged, humbled, and invigorated. I've already sent the four of you notes, expressing my sincere congratulations and gratitude, but your effort and achievements justify some repetition here. I commend you on your courage in tackling such an ambitious endeavor, your receptivity in listening to feedback, your inclusivity of various important voices, and your passion for the problems we're all trying to conquer and the people we are wish to serve. Thank you for including me as a panelist and participant.

Academics were enthusiastic about the experience

I want to congratulate you on a magnificent experience for all concerned.

International participants appreciated the chance to foreground RJ and make connections

[The conference] created a great opportunity to have better understanding of the dimensions of RJ. Definitely new links have been established for collaborations in optimizing women's health through upholding basic socio-legal rights across the world. To everyone I say thank you for your warm and active participation. Anticipating interdisciplinary work.

and

Here in Ghana, our participation in the conference has already created some level of awareness of RJ among academics and some colleagues have expressed interest in having good understanding of the concept. Notably, I have been nominated by my department to speak on RJ in clinical care. This

will be at a conference of Ghanaian physicians at home, North America and the UK (medical knowledge fiesta, 2013) in Kumasi. I think it is a great opportunity to interrupt with Ghanaian academics in medical practice about the issue.

U-M participants were stimulated by their introduction to RJ

All I can say is wow! What a terrific panel this morning. As a person new to this topic I learned a great deal, appreciating even more how generative your program will be.

Media coverage by press, twitter and blogs

Some participants sent tweets during the conference. We collected a complete set of over 400 tweets. The tweets tried to capture high points and interesting observations and were very positive. We did not have an official blog, but know that some participants were blogging during the conference. *The feminist wire* has asked us to write an article about the conference.

Follow-up

We sent a survey to the participants asking for feedback, ideas and collaborations that are forming as a result of the conference. Responses have been positive and constructive. We will continue to be in contact with participants.

Summary



All the feedback indicates this was a successful conference that built positive relationships to move RJ forward. It also showcased barriers to relationships and suggested how to manage those barriers. Concrete collaborations have emerged. For example, Core Align, the Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice at Berkeley Law, and the U-M Program for Sexual Rights and RJ plan to work together on a legislative briefing book. This conference built community, opened doors, and generated new academic-advocate RJ initiatives.

SUBMITTED BY

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