



# STORYTELLING PROJECT MODEL

Reproductive Injustice

# Introduction to Reproductive and Birth Justice

## Reproductive Justice

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. This framework, coined by Black women activists in the 1990s, integrates reproductive rights, social justice, and human rights, addressing systemic inequalities affecting marginalized groups.

## Birth Justice

Birth justice centers on the right to equitable, respectful, and culturally affirming care during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. It highlights disparities in maternal health outcomes and advocates for dismantling medical racism and other forms of oppression in perinatal care.

## Reproductive Injustice

Reproductive injustice occurs when structural barriers—such as systemic racism, classism, ableism, and sexism—deny individuals their reproductive and parental rights. Examples include forced sterilization, restricted access to abortion and contraception, the criminalization of pregnancy outcomes, and disparate maternal and infant mortality rates.

# Using Lee Ann Bell's Storytelling Project Model

Bell's model emphasizes understanding and addressing social justice issues through four types of stories: stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories, and transforming/emerging stories.

See below for the application of these story types to reproductive and birth justice.

## **Stock Stories**

These are dominant narratives that justify and uphold systemic inequalities.

Example: *"Maternal health outcomes are poor for marginalized communities because individuals in these groups don't seek proper prenatal care or make healthy choices."*

This narrative ignores systemic barriers such as lack of access to quality healthcare, medical racism, and socioeconomic disparities.

## **Concealed Stories**

These stories expose the realities of those marginalized by stock stories and highlight the structural roots of injustice.

Example: *"Black women face significantly higher rates of maternal mortality not because of individual choices but because of systemic racism in healthcare systems, including implicit biases and underinvestment in their communities."*

Concealed stories amplify the lived experiences of those impacted by reproductive injustice.

## **Resistance Stories**

These narratives show how people resist and challenge oppression.

Example: *"A grassroots organization led by Indigenous midwives offers culturally relevant prenatal and birthing services to counteract the harms of medical racism and reconnect birthing people with traditional knowledge."*

Resistance stories often feature advocacy, organizing, and direct action efforts.

## Transforming/Emerging Stories

These are visionary narratives that imagine and work toward a just future.

Example: *"Communities build holistic, community-led birthing centers that integrate doulas, midwives, and medical professionals, ensuring equitable and respectful care for all."*

Emerging stories focus on systemic change and the creation of new paradigms.



## **Activity: Identifying Stories in Your Community**

**Step 1:** Ask participants to brainstorm examples of stock, concealed, resistance, and transforming stories related to reproductive and birth justice.

**Step 2:** Facilitate a discussion on the systems and structures that uphold stock stories and how concealed stories challenge them.

**Step 3:** Explore local or national resistance efforts and engage participants in envisioning emerging stories for a more just future.

## **Activity: Sharing Stories through Art**

- Use visual arts, spoken word, or digital storytelling to help participants express and share concealed or resistance stories.

## **Tips for Ethical Storytelling**

- **Respect Lived Experiences:** Obtain consent and prioritize the storyteller's safety and comfort.
- **Acknowledge Power Dynamics:** Be mindful of who tells the story and how it's told.
- **Center Marginalized Voices:** Focus on amplifying the voices of those most impacted by reproductive injustice.

## Case Study: Birth Justice Storytelling in Action

**Scenario:** A local community health organization collects stories from birthing people to advocate for systemic reforms in maternal healthcare. Through storytelling, they identify concealed stories of discrimination and resistance efforts like the establishment of a community doula program. These stories are shared with policymakers, resulting in increased funding for equitable care initiatives.

### Conclusion and Next Steps

By using Lee Ann Bell's storytelling framework, communities can challenge harmful narratives, celebrate resilience, and reimagine systems rooted in justice. Begin by identifying stories in your own community and consider how storytelling can support advocacy for reproductive and birth justice.

