

## **Navigating Reproductive Justice and Cancel Culture: The Need for ‘Calling In’ to Foster Change**

In June 2022, in the *Dobbs v. Jackson* ruling - the Supreme Court issued the decision to remove the right to an abortion from the U.S. constitution, on the foundation that the Fourteenth Amendment does not protect this right. In the wake of growing polarization in the U.S., there has been a rise of cancel culture, where people are publicly and harshly criticized. Individuals and organizations perceived as complicit in the erosion of reproductive rights have faced increased scrutiny and calls for accountability. This intensified environment has prompted debates over the boundaries of free speech and the effectiveness of cancel culture as a tool for change. In the past, people fought for unrestricted free speech, but their current emphasis lies in seeking immunity from speech that they deem unsettling, or attempting to silence others with opposing views.<sup>1</sup> Victims of harm sometimes assert their own authority to “cancel” or seek accountability from those they believe have wronged them. However, this cancel culture impedes the presence of meaningful dialogues, which are essential to implement social changes.

It is this moment that requires the “Calling In” culture – a term first introduced by activist Loretta J. Ross - which describes the method to address social issues by creating space for growth, understanding, and sympathy.<sup>2</sup> The #MeToo movement provides a compelling example of the effectiveness of this approach. The term “MeToo” was first introduced in 2006, but not until 2017 did it become well-known via actress Alyssa Milano’s viral tweet, which received 12 million responses on social media within 24 hours. The movement unites individuals in a collective effort to advocate for the rights and well-being of victims. By creating a space for survivors to share their experiences and find solidarity, it inspires change and works towards a society that protects and empowers victims while seeking justice in a constructive manner.<sup>3</sup>

Reproductive justice, a longstanding concept, is at risk as current policies cannot provide adequate healthcare services to marginalized groups, particularly women of color. The term “reproductive justice” was built on the framework of being a fundamental human right, and consists of the basic ideas: “the right not to have a child; the right to have a child; and the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments.”<sup>4</sup> The *Dobbs* ruling has now placed even more tension on women of color as prior to this ruling, more than half of abortions were among these groups.<sup>5</sup> The abortion ban in some states forces women with lower income and resources to travel to other states where abortion is still legal. The Supreme Court’s ruling has also aggravated the economic disparity, as for Black, Latino, and Indigenous populations, out-of-state healthcare services are cost prohibitive. The question remains: How long will it take before the collective voices can reclaim women’s freedom to reproductive justice?

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<sup>1</sup> Sigal R. Ben-Porath, *Cancel Wars: How Universities Can Foster Free Speech, Promote Inclusion, and Renew Democracy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2023), 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Bennett, “What if Instead of Calling People Out, We Called Them In?” in *The New York Times* (November 19, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Loretta Ross & Toni M. Bond, “Calling In Rather Than Calling Out: When #MeToo Meets Reproductive Justice” in *Rewire News Group* (April 5, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (California: University of California Press, 2017), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Dehlendorf, Lisa H. Harris, and Tracy A. Weitz, “Disparities in Abortion Rates: A Public Health Approach” in National Institutes of Health (nih.gov, October, 2013).