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Doing It for Ourselves

Research Justice and Black Feminist Sociology

Introduction

Oparah details how Black feminist sociology (BFS) can evolve into a more communal process via research justice. She describes the formation and management of Black Women Birthing Justice (BWBJ) -- a grassroots organization dedicated to removing unnecessary risk for Black women and their infants. BWBJ challenges the medical abuse and coercion that Black women and transfolk experience prepartum and postpartum.

Research Justice

To approach birthing justice research, BWBJ synthesized a new research process from methodology textbooks and research justice that formed a space for the powerful and intimidating emotions associated with pregnancy, birth, loss, and medical abuse. Research justice validates emotional and embodied knowledge that is typically dismissed by scholarly elites. **Participatory action research** (PAR) is often used for research justice because PAR is based on scholar-community equality. Community members are encouraged to formulate research goals and lead the research methods. Individuals involved in the projects can inspire action to address the findings.



Black Women Birthing Justice

Formed in 2011, BWBJ offered a definition of **Birthing Justice** that situates it within the reproductive justice movement. Birthing Justice educates communities about birthing options, empowers parents throughout pregnancy and postpartum, and challenges medical abuses via legal reform. Birthing Justice will create more positive birth experiences for women of color by eliminating race, class, gender, and sexual inequalities. Beyond quantitative data about morbidity and harm, researchers must consider lived experiences of pregnant people to identify patterns and sites in medical practices that need reform.



The Next Wave of BFS

The future of BFS will focus on communities most impacted by systemic oppression. We will need to intimately connect with the communities we study to understand their politics and knowledge production process. Research must be done by those within the community to prevent the commodification of research projects by academia and corporations.



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