

AMP Seeds Fall 2022 Season - Seeds Event Transcript

Bodily Autonomy & Care

Thursday, September 29th, 2022

Brenda Hernandez: Welcome my name is Brenda Hernandez. I am a brown Mexican woman with black hair that's tied back and I'm wearing glasses and rainbow drop earrings. I'm also the Deputy Director of AMP Seeds, a program, well, a division of AMP that supports and amplifies movement leaders, makers and shakers. I am so excited to welcome you to today's event: Bodily Autonomy & Care with Danny McLean as Moderator and our guest Jesse Levandov and Nina Reyes Rosenberg from MALA Forever and the lovely Coco Peila from the BlackGold Movement. Please show them some love in the chat. This event will have ASL interpretation and close captioning. Please be sure to turn on captions using the CC button at the bottom of the video frame. After the event, we invite you to join us at the Seeds Cafe, an intimate space to reflect collectively on today's event Zoom link provided to those at registered. Now let's start the show.

Danny McLean: Welcome everyone I'm Danny McLean. I am a Black woman wearing a white sweater and silver hoop earrings and I'm so honored to be participating in this conversation with some incredible storytellers who are going to give us some insight into their important work around issues of abortion access and bodily autonomy.

So we know that in June the Supreme Court announced its decision in Dobbs [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization], thereby revoking the constitutional right to abortion that had been the law of the land since 1973. Which is when the Roe v. Wade decision came down. So for those who follow abortion rights closely we know that prior to June access to abortion had steadily been shipped away at the state level for years. State legislatures particularly in the Midwest and the South had been passing laws that made it more difficult for people to access the full range of their reproductive health options.



Tonight we have the benefit of hearing from some leading thinkers and doers and communicators in the fight to maintain access to abortion. Jesse Levandov, Coco Peila, and Nina Reyes-Rosenberg are storytellers who use media to advance our understanding of why the fight for bodily autonomy and access to abortion is fundamental to community care and to various movements for liberation and self-determination. So welcome everyone! I'm so honored to be talking with you tonight. So we're going to start with Jesse. If you could tell us about the organization that you run with Nina, MALA Forever, and specifically I think you do a whole range of different kinds of things but I'd love to hear you describe MALA's work on storytelling, specifically on bodily autonomy and reproductive justice?

Jesse Levandov: Absolutely! Thank you so much Danny and thank you for having us tonight. It's such a pleasure and an honor to be here. My name is Jesse. I'm a white woman. I have long straight hair. I am wearing a green button-up shirt and a brown bandana around my neck. So just to share a little bit about MALA Forever, we are a feminist film and creative studio. We're based in New York City and in Los Angeles. And through a variety of mediums, we uplift queer and feminist stories and audiences through film and through video storytelling. And we're really excited to be sharing some work tonight. We have two pieces we're going to screen.

The first is a short video called "Thank You" which I'll introduce by- I'll just provide a little bit of context for how and why it was created. So a couple of years ago, we were brought in to create a series of test videos for different target audiences to test messaging around abortion for a national foundation that supports and resources grassroots organizing on the ground. And this foundation wanted to use and test the findings from a project called "Story at Scale", which was a year-long collaboration of researchers, data scientists, artists, organizers who worked collectively to develop and test new cultural strategies to advance gender justice as a whole, not just specific to abortion.

And to do this they conducted collaborative audience research, created narrative foundations for different target audiences to guide artists, organizers, organizations in storytelling that reflect a gender just future that's grounded in affirming joyful, liberated, empowering frameworks about gender justice that can be used then for specific calls to action. And through this work there were some core narratives about gender justice that emerged from different audiences that helped activists and artists



um ground in different stories and values to reach different audiences to create real tangible change and impact on the ground in different ways. So where we came in, this national organization wanted to test “Story at Scale’s” narrative findings, these strategies, and they wanted which were about gender justice as a whole and they wanted to test the efficacy of the messaging for abortion specifically.

And so we were asked to create pieces for two particular target audiences and then, if the video tested well with these audiences, they could then be employed by different organizations, organizers who were doing who are doing advocacy work around abortion specifically and they can adopt them, adapt them to support specific calls to action to support their work. And so the core narrative idea from the “Story at Scale” findings that we were employing in this particular video that we’re going to screen was safety and community, which they defined as stories of belonging, building and organizing strong safe communities, families and in-groups—and how safe spaces make people freer to be themselves, how safety is created and increased in community.

So these are stories of small and big victories. And the audience that they were testing this message, this kind of narrative foundation with, is what they called “The Justice Rising” audience which are, they defined, as ‘creative leftists who want safety and freedom’. So our task as filmmakers, as storytellers, was really powerful and interesting and we were called to adopt these core narrative ideas and create a video grounding in this idea of safety and community with this “Justice Rising” audience in mind. So Nina and I worked together. We wrote a script. We produced and directed this video that is called “Thank You” that we’re excited to share with you now.

[video plays]

Actress: Thank you for calling in sick on a Tuesday. Thank you for lending me the money when my insurance wouldn’t cover the abortion and I had to come up with \$500 I didn’t have. Thank you for being there for me so I could be there for myself. Thank you for being hot tea and bad joke, co-pilot to bright futures filled with unimaginable joys and inevitable loss.

Thank you for being there. For reminding me that everybody deserves access to the care that they need, whether that’s a procedure or a pill or a hug or a companion. That when we say, “My body, my choice”, we also must say, “How are you getting home?” That when we say, “Freedom to decide”, we also mean, “You are safe here.”



That when we say, “I had an abortion”, we also mean, “I didn't do it alone.” Access is about having options. Access is about being able to show up for each other fully with nothing to hide. To hold space for my mind, my body, my soul– all of me. Someone was there for me so I want to be there for someone else.

Danny McLean: How powerful! Do you want to– I have a question but is there anything Nina that you want to say, I'm sorry, Jesse that you want to say? Or Nina? About what we've just seen before I jump in with a question about it?

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: I did want a shout out– we worked with a really phenomenal crew and cast on this. A really good friend of ours named Darby Rose produced the video and we did this in, I want to say, November of 2020 so it was a very small, skeletal, pandemic crew and we worked with an amazing DP named Kim Cohen and our sound person Stephanie and a really fantastic editor named Tee Vaden. And so it was a really powerful experience creating this video in a way that also reflected the community values of the project and why we were doing it. And it was a really great community feeling on set and throughout the course of the project. And also our client Natalie Green was the representative of the foundation that we worked with and she's been on the front lines of campaign work and digital campaigning and affirmative gender justice and reproductive justice for a long time. We just like learned so much about this storytelling for this particular issue through this project and got to do it in community.

Danny McLean: Yeah one thing that strikes me, and it's such a beautiful story and message, and one thing that strikes me is that it's really grounded in these ideas of like abundance and taking care of one another and feeling powerful and how we like feel powerful and help our peers, and like, our beloveds feel powerful. And it's not at all grounded in like, or putting any attention on, like the right wing ideologues or like anti-abortion advocates and their like rhetoric.

What is the, I mean you may have already touched on this Jesse, but I wonder if either of you want to just talk about why that is really the focus? Like why that was the fhiifocus and why you think that that's a better way to talk about abortion rights than like the strict like policy focus and politics focus? Because that's so often what we hear



in the mainstream. You know, it's midterm season, so like, there's a lot of like the typical ads that you're going to see are very different from what I just saw.

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: Yeah, that was really– I would credit Natalie with really presenting that as the mission to us because she really came to us and was like based on what “Story at Scale” just did through this research discovered that we need to change the narrative about abortion even in progressive circles. And that part of when we characterize abortion as something that is sad, as something that is negative, or a last resort it feeds into a lot of the harmful narratives that the other side is trying to use against us and to take our rights away. And so that was part of the goal was to actually present a narrative about abortion that we call the affirmative power of abortion. And that was language that the client presented to us as well of like, “Abortion is something that is a positive and affirming tool that is just a natural part of healthcare and there's no reason to to play into the shame around it.”

Jesse Levandov: Thank you that was such a powerful way of putting that and we learned so much from the “Story at Scale” findings. And what was like particularly powerful about this story pillar, this narrative idea is that we got to remember and think about and ground in the ways in which abortion is a community issue that impacts all of us in different ways. So to be able to ground in that for this particular and like think about just like a personal and intimate way to tell a story about abortion that isn't ground in facts but it's grounded in relationships and emotional experiences– what it like feels like and looks like to have an abortion and also be supported in community, to be supported by people that love you and that you love. And to be supported through acts of care and that's also- I think it was really powerful to reframe the narrative in that way even for ourselves as we were making this project.

Danny McLean: Thank you, it's brilliant. I would love to bring Coco into the conversation because it seems like this idea about changing the narrative about abortion even in progressive circles, right? Like even with people who are not, you know, on the other side of the aisle or whatever, there can be more kind of, like, retrograde ways of talking about abortion that it seems like you Coco and your work with the BlackGold movement and the “I Am Jane” initiative, are you really tryin'g to shift that as well? I wonder if you could talk to us about the BlackGold Movement and



the “I Am Jane Rowe” hip hop and [reproductive justice] initiative, what are they? What are these two entities and how did they come about?

Coco Peila: Well thank you, thank you for this question and I'm gonna do my very best to try to answer it. Just real quick my name is Coco Peila. I'm a light-skinned Black woman with a gigantic brown afro and some big gold hoops and a polka dot shirt, a white polka dot and black shirt. And yeah Danny it's such a good question. So BlackGold Movement is an intersectional black feminist hip-hop organization um Grassroots organization and the “I Am Jane Rowe” hip-hop and reproductive justice initiative is...at BlackGold movement, I'll just say we think of initiatives as just a fresh or innovative or creative flexible way to address issues that have been in existence for a long time.

And because the foundation is hip-hop we're always trying to figure out, you know, how do we address this through hip-hop storytelling and music of the African diaspora? So for us a lot of folks who have been excited and engaging with BlackGold Movement have been this justice rising crew that Nina and Jesse are talking about but also a lot of the folks that we're talking to and engaging with are different people in the hip-hop community. And the goal with BlackGold movement a lot of the time is to mobilize the hip-hop community you know engage the hip-hop community and the artists within the hip-hop community around these issues so that we can amplify different perspectives and different solutions. And through folks talking about and using this ancient, you know, technology of hip-hop, you know, to talk about lived experience and solutions as I said earlier.

So that I'll just share that to say that some of the folks in our community either don't know about the history of this battle and who's been engaged and or don't have a context for it or have misinformation and have just by way of- where our communities have ingested a lot of propaganda and misinformation- also, you know, one of and I- and bring me back if I am, you know, running all over the place! I promise- there's always, it's always coming around full circle but sometimes it takes a while so just bring me back.

Danny McLean: Take your time.



Coco Peila: So one of the things I was going to say is just that a lot of the folks in the community– well I was going to say like one of the ways that sexism works just like a lot of oppressions, but this one in particular, sexism and a lot of the intersecting oppressions that basically we're fighting against in reproductive justice is– it's around like dismissal and minimizing and invisibilizing these struggles and issues. Particularly when we talk about bodily autonomy for, you know, all folks, not just folks with wombs but all folks, sometimes the thinking and the information and the language ends up coming in from outside of our communities. And so, a big thing that we're doing at BlackGold Movement and with the 'I Am Jane Rowe' initiative, it's about making the information accessible and inviting people who are on the front lines being impacted so much, you know, by these issues into the conversation because we know that it's actually from within the communities that are being impacted the most that the solutions to these issues come.

And so you know uh it's about creating– so with 'I Am Jane Rowe' of course, what we used to call 'women's issues', those issues, folks oftentimes are not trying to talk about it or like I said earlier have been given misinformation. So this is kind of a, like a refresh like, "Hey what's going on with you? How is this impacting you?" This is definitely connected to your life and you can– but we want to know you know how you're experiencing it. And then, you know, what do you think is the solution to this?

And also it's an opportunity to create a database or not. Even– I wouldn't even say, "Create the database" but I would say kind of highlight the database that is our community and our lived experiences and all the information that we have that when we come together and everyone gets a chance to speak and give input we realize, "Oh we have all the information and we have all the solutions right here with us." But everyone needs to be invited to the table and affirmed. So I don't want to run on and on but you know is there a specific question about "I Am Jane Roe"? I want to make sure I don't–

Danny McLean: No, I mean–you know, I think in just a moment we're gonna get to see a video that is part of the collaboration that you've been working on with Nina and Jesse. Is there anything that you want to say to set that up? I mean, you've given us a great kind of big picture of the the purpose of the initiative but do you want to talk at all about what what we'll see or not even– I'm thinking really about your collaborators and



maybe how you all came together around the table to produce what you have produced?

Coco Peila: Yes. Thank you so much for that wonderful question. So ‘I Am Jane Rowe’ the initiative includes a song entitled ‘I Am Jane Rowe’ featuring Ryan Nicole who is an artist-activist MC just like deeply, deeply rooted in Oakland and Aima the Dreamer who is the same. And there's production, the beat production was made by Cheyenne G and we also collaborated with Aya de Leon from Berkeley and Cheyenne is also from Berkeley, California on writing the song. And so the the vision around the song was, you know, “Whoa something is happening.” Our community is– around us at least– isn't really talking about it or paying attention to it and seems like maybe folks don't really know how important this is, like how dire things are.

What– how can we get folks to pay attention in a way that isn't like shaming or condescending or that requires them to have to assimilate or any of those things? So we just put our heads together and started writing. And Aima the Dreamer wrote the chorus which you'll see a little bit in the clip but their vision initially was like, “I don't want just a regular chorus. I want this to actually be something that, once people learn it and hear it, we can actually take this out into the streets during protests. We can take this to, you know, any place where we're gathering as community and have this call and response that can continue to energize and embolden folks and connect folks.” And I could go on forever about how brilliant and generous and powerful these folks are that myself and BlackGold Movement got to collaborate but I think the clip will probably speak more about it.

Danny McLean: Thank you, thank you. Can we go ahead and see it?

[captioned videos play]

Coco Peila and BlackGold Movement:

Did somebody say *integrity*?

Integrity!

Somebody say *integrity*!

Integrity!

Somebody say it's real in the battlefield.



It's real in the battlefield!

Ryan Nicole: Fela Kuti says music is a weapon. It has existed since the beginning of man and it always galvanizes people. Whether it's a spiritual galvanizing, whether it's to move the people towards politics, whether it's just to move people to party. It's the one space where everybody can collect.

Coco Peila: So this is a song called 'I am Jane Rowe' and it's a part of BlackGold Movement's 'I am Jane Rowe' hip-hop and reproductive justice initiative. Aima?

Aima: Yes Coco?

Coco Peila: Aima the Dreamer, I gotta go all the way down...

Aima: To the Earth.

Coco Peila: To the Earth. Okay so Aima the Dreamer wrote the chorus. And when Aima wrote this, they said, "I wanted to be something that folks can chant. A protest chant. So that when we hit the streets, we can bring this to them." Are y'all ready?

Aima: They ready.

Coco Peila and Black Gold: Okay they ready! It's ready. This one stay ready right here. Okay make some noise for yourselves! Make some noise for your life. Yes. Are y'all ready? Y'all gotta join in.

Lifting up every voice (I am Jane Roe)
My body, our choice (I am Jane Roe)
Our rights and wombs (I am Jane Roe)
Don't belong to the court rooms (I am Jane Roe)

Lifting up every voice (I am Jane Roe)
Our bodies, our choice (I am Jane Roe)
Our rights and wombs (I am Jane Roe)



Don't belong to the court rooms (I am Jane Roe)

Coco Peila: It's a protest song. it's a song for battle and it's a song to encourage and embolden and activate the strength and the power of all of our voices.

Coco Peila and Black Gold:

I am Jane Rowe

I am Jane Rowe

I am Jane Rowe 1-9-7-3!

Roe, I am Jane Rowe

I am every woman who has ever said no

I am every woman baby, it's all in me

You gonna have to take your ban up off my body

1-9-7-3

That's that (Norma Nelson), that's that RBG

That's that Constitution.

Oh y'all wanna see

a women's revolution? Honey, that's the tea

This the team

My partners, my sisters be

Ready to lift up every voice

Do it blissfully

Ready to hit up the streets

Reminisce with me

They wanna strike down Roe, that's history

This hers. Freedom of speech, that's the word

Freedom to choose

whether or not to give birth

Freedom to recast our ballots at midterms

Trying to take away our rights,

fuck around and get burned!



Aima: Hip-hop culture is a culture. And so when we're talking about a community issue and we're talking about an issue that affects people in our families, hip-hop is a perfect vehicle to deliver that message because it always has, you know?

[video end]

Danny McLean: Wow. I have a question about what we've just seen, but I want to ask those of you who you know were performing in it or created it, is there any immediate anything you want to say after to share with our audience about that piece of media that you created? I can jump in with the more specific questions if that's helpful. I just didn't know if anybody was like, chomping at the bit to say something.

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: Well, my name is Nina. Just to introduce myself, I'm a fair-skinned, biracial Mexican-American and Jewish woman. And I got to make this with my bare hands and just pick up a camera and go film these amazing community moments with Coco and Aima and Ryan. This was a performance at the Oakland Museum that was just this great community event with all these families and small children there. And I got to ask them questions during the interviews about what guides their work. And it was just a really beautiful organic process of just documenting and getting to witness and enjoy just the power and the activation and getting to participate in this resistance work in such a joyful, empowering way.

Danny McLean: Thank you Nina and were there– is there a specific, I may have missed this, but like how are you thinking about using the video? What are the different ways that the video will be used?

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: Yes, the story of how this came together is Coco and I have actually known each other since they were teenagers in the Bay Area doing spoken word together and doing all kinds of artistic organizing at a very young age and have just stayed connected in different ways over the years. And I forget who– I think Coco reached out to me. I forget– we just had some–we had a series of conversations over the summer that were about how could we join forces with what MALA Forever does and what BlackGold Movement is doing? And how could we use video to support the



work of BlackGold Movement and to support the “I am Jane Roe” song and challenge and the “I am Jane Roe” initiative specifically?

And part of the inspiration for just the mini doc concept, so what we're hoping to do is edit a short documentary that goes more into depth about the movement and the song and...there's amazing footage and lots more amazing interview material that will go into that. And we actually had a really amazing experience doing another mini doc about another musical artist named Gavin Turek that we sort of put together over many years and shared it publicly I think in August over the summer and it just really immediately found an audience.

It was behind the scenes of the making of a song and taking it to the stage and I think that what we saw was that there's a real craving for communities and for audiences to just spend time behind the scenes with powerful women, amazing women of color, like amazing artists and just see. One thing that I just kept thinking about as we were making this was just ‘who is this video for?’ And I think it's really for folks who want a role model, folks who want to speak out about the things that they're passionate about or just want to create the art that shares their voice. And sometimes that's a scary thing to do and we just need- it's so good to see role models of real people doing this. And so it's just really inspiring to get to have that as an entry point into just how can we tell the story of the work that's happening and use that as a vehicle to really engage audiences around this and in a way that calls people in and invites them to participate too?

Danny McLean: Thank you for that. I wonder-I want to go back to Coco and talk about some of what we saw in the video. You know you pointed out that there are a lot of people in our communities, maybe like specific to your community in the Bay Area, who are like directly impacted by this issue but might feel like they're outside of the political debates about abortion rights which I think is such an important point. And I wonder, as you and your collaborators were actually writing the lyrics, what were some things that you had in mind about the language that you wanted to use? Like the story that you wanted to tell, the references that you wanted to make to make it accessible, inviting, relevant to people's lives?

Coco Peila: Another incredible question Danny! Well yeah so I think we all approached our rap verses and the different parts of the song really differently. And really the main



goal was you know that question of like what is in from your perspective what is going on when you think about reproductive rights? When you think about abortion and particularly Roe v Wade? Because we were talking to different folks in our community and some folks were like ‘oh yeah isn't that that one thing?’ And then some people really knew it, had been invested in the work for a long time. And some people were like ‘I don't- I've never heard of that.’

And a lot too because um you know hip-hop has its roots right in the continent of Africa and in Black culture, a lot of folks were like, ‘That's not our issue, you know. That's not a Black issue and as a matter of fact that's actually a distraction from our issues.’ And that's- it was interesting to encounter, like I said, a lot of like misinformation about actually the role of feminism and reproductive justice in- the misinformation about the role of feminism and reproductive justice as like a purposeful distraction and a purposeful, divisive mechanism you know in the Black community and in Black Liberation movements.

So right away I'll say, the other thing is that the folks that- all of us have really different identities and identities that in the world are seen as identities that shouldn't get along. Shouldn't agree. Shouldn't be allied with one another. So for example, you know, Ryan Nicole and well Ryan Nicole is a a Black, married, heterosexual, Christian, cis woman, and you know Aima the Dreamer is a non-binary, you know, Femme and I you know like- we, it's, I would say the biggest thing was actually speak out from your perspective. In a way, don't hide or gloss over the differences like, ‘How is this impacting you as all of those identities?’

That maybe we go into community and sometimes we might pull back and hide or not talk about because we have assumptions that, oh we talk about our experience from these identities, other people will make assumptions about who we are or it's going to start drama. And actually, you know, one of the underpinning and driving pieces was modeling for our community, “Yeah we're all different and actually we're natural allies to one another and this impacts us all even if it's different how it's impacting us.”

So I think, in a way, it was just like do your best shot at modeling speaking out from who you are and from your identities because part-you know the piece that Nina spoke on was then we had a social media challenge and invited folks to write their own rap verses or you know lyrics about Roe. And the hope is really to continue to amplify the different experiences, you know, perspectives and solutions. I don't know if that-oh



and the last thing I'll say too, as far as accessibility, like none of us knew a ton about Roe v Wade previously. Like we knew about it but on the whole, we're really working on inviting folks to speak and them not feeling like "I have to go take a course. I have to go read a book. I have to speak in a certain way in order to be able to speak out." It's more about you know get- gather some information and notice that that information is actually speaking about your life and you don't have to know all the the historical dates or all the names of people in order to speak on this but also each of us chose different little tidbits of information to pack into our lyrics to kind of- almost like a treasure hunt like, "Okay guess what because, you know, maybe you might hear 'RBG' and you don't know what that means and you go and you're like 'Roe versus Wade' 'RBG.' what the hell are they talking about?"

And that's also the hope and that's also part of the power of hip-hop and has always been the case. Like even-I'll just say this last piece like regionally as a kid growing up on the west coast, I would hear things in east coast rap and I'd be like, "What are they talking about?" It wasn't until I moved to New York, I'm like, "Oh this is what they were talking about!" Or I would have to go on the internet and you know look it up to find out, "Oh they were actually referencing like a political prisoner who grew up on the East Coast" or they were actually referencing a certain movement or an artist organizer from, you know, there. So I just that was the other pieces kind of like for people to learn about this organically um versus I don't even know what how I would say versus what but I hope that answers your questions.

Danny McLean: It does. Yeah absolutely absolutely. Wow, there's so much. Okay- so you know I probably should have done this at the top but I didn't. Well first, I want to say for everyone who's watching we're gonna have time for a Q&A at the end. So if you haven't already ,please go ahead and you can put any questions that you have for these folks in the chat in YouTube. And I encourage you to do that because we have such incredible, you know, these resources here. So please take advantage of the fact that they're with us tonight and put your questions in the chat.

You know I should have probably done this at the top but I didn't, but I wonder if any of you have anything you want to say about reproductive justice as a framework? Because, you know, we use that phrase in the kind of promoting of this event. Everything that we're doing, like everything that you all are sharing about your work, very much falls within, I would say, within the framework of reproductive justice- the



way of thinking about these issues. And I wonder if anybody wants to speak about what we mean when we use that phrase, how that's different from talking about say reproductive health or reproductive rights? Does anybody want to share that frame in case it's new to anybody at home?

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: I don't mind offering something, yeah.

Danny McLean: Yeah sure please.

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: Was it something that Ryan Nicole actually said in the interview I did with her which was that—and something I've learned about— just what reproductive justice means and why we use that term (over the last year I've learned more about it) is just using a different lens to talk about it. Many issues that fall within reproductive justice but fundamentally the understanding like Coco is saying that access to bodily autonomy looks really different depending on what individual peoples' lived experiences are.

And so reproductive justice and my understanding is all about recognizing that this goes way beyond just one topic or one issue. It goes way beyond politics but it actually speaks to a way of being in the world and a way of organizing communities and organizing our lives around everyone having like a fundamental human right to be in their bodies the way that they want to be in them. And to raise their families or not. Or just make determinations for their lives in accordance with what is healthy and abundant and liberated.

Danny McLean: Yeah I think that's really helpful. Thank you Nina. I mean, you know, I'm a journalist and I've been covering reproductive justice organizing for about a decade. And the way that I was taught is very much in line with some of the ideas that you were sharing Nina. You know reproductive justice is a framework that was created in 1994 by a group of primarily Black women who were concerned. At that point, it was the Clinton Administration and it was like the first healthcare, you know the first kind of major— probably not the first, but what happened in the 90s, that push for healthcare reform. [They] were very concerned about the way that healthcare was being talked about and many of them had just come back from the U.N conference.



A U.N conference about women's rights and human rights and wanted to start talking about these issues in, as Nina pointed out, a human rights framework. Which is something that we're really resistant to in the United States, right? We want to talk about things in terms of civil and political rights but not social and economic rights, right? We never want to talk about the fact that people have the right to clean water, the right to housing, the right to education, and so the reproductive justice framework really advanced the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, and the right to parent the children that we do have in safe and dignified and healthy communities.

And that's where that whole community piece comes in—that we're not just talking about individual rights, we're talking about our right to live well in our families, in our communities. I think it's important to always touch that because I see the phrase being used a lot these days without a lot of like rigorous kind of, you know, talking about what it really means so— and also I mean, the work that you guys doing just exemplifies what it means, right? I think that that's really important.

I have one more question for you and then I think uh it's gonna be time to go to the the Q & A but let's see...so I wonder if each of you would share—you know, you all are these communicators who are doing this media making and storytelling in various ways, I wonder if each of you could share anybody that you're following or finding inspiration from? Other storytellers who are in the reproductive justice space who you're really paying attention to these days? And let's see, whoever wants to start can just go ahead and jump in. I see Nina nodding. Do you have some ideas?

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: I was just nodding just because I love that question and also to me it's just everyone who I got to meet through the making of this video and yeah I mean Erica Hart came to mind as a Black feminist thinker that has offered a lot of helpful reframings around sex education and and reproductive health and justice. I also—Saviano Rodriguez is an artist who I love who does a lot of printmaking and media for like— visual media for protests and things like that.

I think I really gravitate towards folks who are using artistic skills to support social justice movements in general and particularly with gender and reproductive justice. The ability to share things that are so vulnerable but that are so fundamental to the human experience. Because other folks have stated this is a community issue. Art is something that brings communities together in such a powerful way. And so I just love artists who are offering work and creation that really empowers communities,



organizes communities, organizes resistance work, and really fuses art and activism in that way.

Danny McLean: Thank you.

Jesse Levandov: I can hop in. Somebody that has been an ongoing source of inspiration and who kind of like speaks to gender justice as a whole has been Alok Vaid-Menon, who is a writer and performer. An activist and a filmmaker who comes to mind who creates– I mean a film in particular that I thought was incredibly powerful that also didn't speak specifically to reproductive justice and gender justice, but very much through like the emotional lives and experiences of the characters certainly did, in my opinion, was a film called Nettles by Raven Jackson. That was incredibly powerful. And then also one more person would be kind of the voice of Adaku Utah, who is definitely an ongoing source of inspiration and who works with the organization [National Network of Abortion Funds].

Danny McLean: Thank you.

Coco Peila: This is so lovely. I am taking notes actually and yeah it's interesting because I can't really think of anyone, you know, that I'm looking to right now and that's why I'm so excited to like, take down these names and just like sit with and digest the art that these folks are creating.

I think because I'm steeped a lot in like the artist community and creating art and collaborating and producing artistic projects a lot of what I'm, who I'm looking to are like who are the organizations that are figuring like creative ways to talk about reproductive justice? And particularly like that bring people who feel– or have been pitted against each other– who feel different or have them pitted against each other together.

So the the two organizations that I've been like kind of keeping tabs on, actually have really loved looking at: Movement for Black Lives their framework around the intersection between reproductive justice and climate justice and just making those connections and then also [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights]. They've been releasing a lot of statements and just courageously and boldly supporting and amplifying feminist activists and artists globally.



Danny McLean: Thank you Coco. We have a question from—a couple questions from the audience. This one is from Amora. Amora says, “Hi, what are the top three things you would recommend to those of us who feel unable to do anything?” So I mean, I like that question because it taps into something that was mentioned earlier which is like this feeling of “I don't know enough to do anything” or just a feeling of like “I know a lot and I'm completely overwhelmed” right? What are some recommendations you might offer?

Jesse Levandov: I may be a place to start. Something that— I mean it's I think relevant to this conversation and that we're talking about like these issues in the context of community and community care and something that has always been the most healing and the most inspiring and the most impactful and powerful and transformative for me is just sharing stories and space and kind of just presence and deep listening with people who I love, people who I'm in community with, in relationship to, and like relational organizing is so like underrated as a form of organizing.

And so just like spending time even if it's with one person and just processing what's coming up for you in any given moment. It's a lot to hold and I can totally relate to the notion of just feeling immobilized or stuck or—just because it can be so much and so triggering, overwhelming and we're all carrying so much. So yeah, just sharing space and even if you're not sharing but just spending time listening I think can be so healing, for me personally.

Danny McLean: That's real medicine for me. Thank you for saying that. I've never—like processing as organizing? Relational organizing? I needed that frame! That's— thank you for that because there's a lot of processing to be done these days. I have a lot going on. Any other— anyone else have anything they want to share as for Amora who's asking what can be done?

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: Well the first thing that came to my mind was go stream and listen to “I am Jane Rowe” the song. I think it's a running joke with me and Coco that I—that song is number one on my Spotify repeat. Like that is my hype song right now and it's such a powerful amazing song. Especially if you like hip-hop music and it's— I think what I learned from Coco and Ryan and Aima and the communities that I got to



spend time in by witnessing them, is that this work doesn't have to be sad and it doesn't have to be serious.

Like it is a serious issue. It is a life or death issue but rising up together and speaking out and organizing together is such a joy. Can be such a joyful thing and it can be music and it can be dancing and art and talking to the people you love and it can be— it can take so many forms that can be healing like Jesse just said. That— just that that song, it's just a really amazing song. It makes me want to go out and be part of the movement. And so I think that engaging with the things that inspire us and the things that put us into like a fired up mode and give us that strength just from that well of just passion and energy, like we can all be part of that.

Danny McLean: Thank you. I'm just gonna put this question out there. I know we only have a few more minutes and I want to be respectful of time but Hava Liebowitz asked, “How do you commit to centering gender justice in your art practices? How do you sustain that commitment and what connections and ways of making art sustain that commitment?” Yeah if anybody wants to respond to that.

Jesse Levandov: Can you repeat the question one more time?

Danny McLean: Sure so there are a few questions: “How do you commit to centering gender justice in your art practices? How do you sustain that commitment and what connections and ways of making art sustain that commitment?”

Coco Peila: Like, I have a couple of thoughts. I think that that is like, you know, such a good question and inquiry. I think we can both like look at the answers that Jesse and Nina gave about, you know, how to engage and wrap our minds around this, especially if we feel like we don't know where to start. I think one of the things, like when we feel we have— this is going to sound a little new-agey— but when we feel stuck or blocked around creating art or even just we know we have something to say but we can't access our voices. Generally it's connected to some place where we've experienced oppression or we've you know experienced harm which is basically the same thing.

So I would say, you know, an artistic tool is journaling or freestyling or you know making a— like any way to basically give yourself permission to not be perfect but just to like create and release including having safe spaces to heal and address how we've



experienced gender in negative or harmful ways. Because once we—I feel like once we get a chance to cry or to reflect upon harmful things but in a way that actually helps us release and heal those answers start coming to us. And especially when we're talking about those community moments that Jesse and Nina talked about, what you know when we're sitting— I mean even just to sit with those questions with loved ones or safe community members and ask those questions and listen to what other people say will trigger you know your own mind and your own process around it.

So that's like— those are a couple of the thoughts about how to get to that and then you know again reflecting about and getting to ask yourself, you know, 'What is my experience of and how?' whatever you think about gender justice or however you— your own perspective on it. Just asking yourself, like, what your experience has been or what gender justice looks like for you. And then I think just the main thing is like giving yourself permission to just try a bunch of different things out in your artistic practice without it having to be perfect or without preconceived standards of what, you know, what it should be so I'll stop there because I know other folks have contributions.

Danny McLean: Thank you.

Nina Reyes-Rosenberg: To me, I think the idea of justice is so intimately tied to freedom and art— the recurring theme in my own art practice has just been that being free in my art and practicing art in all kinds of forms, that's where I'm able to access like a true sense of freedom. And so to me like, again, it's like the narratives that we would have in a world where everyone is liberated fully are the narratives that I want to embrace both as an artist and as a consumer. And so that's— to me that's how I center it I guess, consciously and subconsciously.

Wow to me, like yeah, the narratives that, like, don't hold back and and celebrate things that are authentic and empathetic and human and our core to who we are and and how we want to be and how we want to live. How I center that justice and freedom and the struggle for justice and freedom in my work.

Danny McLean: Beautiful. I think I don't want to cut Jesse off. If Jesse has something to offer and if not—I'm not seeing you take yourself off mute and I'm not gonna push you to do that if you're not chomping at the bit to say anything but it's 8:02 and I want to be respectful of time. And this has been such an— this has been so lovely and I've learned a



lot from each of you and I'm sure our audience, people who are watching and listening and participating elsewhere feel the same I hope. I really want to thank each of you for the work that you're doing and for your contributions to this conversation and I also want to thank Allied Media Projects for hosting this opportunity to learn from each other and to learn more about the movements, right, and different ways to engage. So I think with that I turn it back to Brenda.

Brenda Hernandez: Yes hello thank you, Danny. And I have to repeat it one more time for myself and for everyone, give yourself permission, remember to be present, and listen and love your people. I'd like to thank our guests Jesse Levandov and Nina Reyes from MALA Forever and Coco Peila and of course our moderator Danny McLean. It's been wonderful. A warm hug. A special shout out to our incredible ASL interpreters Angelique and Andrea and the team supporting us behind the scenes today. This event was recorded and will be available on AMP's Youtube page forever. If you'd like to continue the conversation, please join us at the AMP Seeds Cafe right after this. We'd love to hear your thoughts on today's event. Please go to bit.ly/seeds2022feedback so we can hear from you. Up next in the fall series, we have Community Rooted Development on October 13th and Sound and Resistance on October 27th. That's it. Gracias, good night.

