I always say, the movement for reproductive justice found me. As I was completing my last book, I was struggling with an array of emotions about the research, mainly sadness and anger at neoliberal immigration policies, as I grappled with making sense of Latinxs’ daily experiences with migration and poverty that often had such painful outcomes. Out of nowhere I received an email inviting me to a presentation on comprehensive sex ed to be presented by adolescent Latinxs, a man and a woman, using the reproductive justice approach in Fresno, California. This meant that these young people probably came from farmworker backgrounds since Fresno is in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley, where the largest employers are in agribusiness and so many of the workers are migrants. I was intrigued by the reproductive justice approach that involved young men and gratified that these young people were actively trying to change conditions related to their well-being. I resolved to look into the reproductive justice movement, and eventually my interests blossomed into a full-scale research project. I was drawn to researching this movement in part because the participants use an approach based in intersectionality, which I have used in my own research and teaching.

As I conducted research on this movement, so many memories of my own experiences being a young parent came bubbling up. I was the first generation in my Mexican American family to attend university and grew up in poverty, the oldest of twelve children. I knew firsthand the shame directed at women of color with “too many” children. I worked and gained scholarships to support myself since my working-class parents could not afford to contribute to my education. As one of a few students of color in 1974, graduate school felt alienating, which was exacerbated when I became pregnant during my second year of classes. Questions were raised about whether I could keep my fellowship, and I was told the faculty debated this idea during a department meeting.
My adviser assured me afterward that the faculty decided I could. He chuckled, “We practically affirmed motherhood and apple pie!” ignoring that male students who were parents did not have their commitment to their careers questioned. Months later a mentor told me about another debate that took place behind closed doors during deliberations for a prestigious national fellowship, in which some faculty suggested that my pregnancy raised questions about my commitment to academia. Her intervention assured that the deliberations were based on merit, so I landed that fellowship, which allowed me to remain in school and finish my dissertation. When I got my first academic position in 1983, it was unusual at the time to be a woman professor with two children. I experienced the discomfort imposed by those who think women of color get pregnant “too early.” The reticence I felt about being a young parent is part of what reproductive justice advocates call reproductive oppression, and parenting continues to be seen as a woman’s issue in academia.¹ I see myself as an ally to those who are working on reproductive justice and introduced myself as such when I met and conducted interviews or focus groups with participants in this social movement.

I completed this book after thirty-four years as a professor at the University of California in Santa Cruz. During my tenure at UCSC, I had taught a course in the Feminist Studies Department about women of color and was familiar with Cherríe Moraga’s provocative statement, “The idea of Third World feminism has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real live women.”² UCSC supports interdisciplinary work as well as collaboration between faculty and graduate students through research clusters. In 1991, Angela Davis, my colleague in Feminist Studies, organized a research cluster called “Women of Color in Collaboration and Conflict” that sponsored talks by invited guests and members as well as other activities such as writing groups, the Women of Color Film Festival, and hosting an INCITE! conference called “The Color of Violence: Violence against Women of Color” in 2000. The cluster was active as late as 2017. The notion that we should problematize collaboration by women of color was foundational to the cluster and shaped my approach to this research project on women of color in the movement for reproductive justice. Initially I was sympathetic to the movement’s goals but skeptical about collaboration by women of color. However, in the end I was impressed by the ways
in which reproductive justice activists mindfully negotiate across their many differences as they work with sister organizations and with others.

I had not planned to write about self-care or spirituality when I designed this project; but in the course of conducting research these issues came up repeatedly, so I had to come to terms with them. I was raised Catholic and have loving memories of attending weekly Mass with my grandmother when I was a child, even though she would discipline me for fidgeting by pinching my arm. My mother and grandmother were devoted Catholics; we participated in all the Days of Obligation and sacraments, and they even gave money to the church regularly despite our poverty. Over time I drifted away from the church due to its perpetration of various forms of violence during the conquest and thereafter, its rigid stance on contraception and abortion, and ongoing social problems related to abuse of minors and women. Yet I often joked that I was a “recovering Catholic” since, in honor of my relatives’ devotion, I would attend religious ceremonies without question when visiting my grandmother and I was shaped by Catholic tenets related to being a good person, contributing community service, and working toward social justice. I came to identify with Elisa Facio’s concept “cultural Catholicism,” in which participants take part in Mexican religious expressions out of respect for family members while maintaining a critique of the Catholic Church’s shortcomings even as it continues to shape their subjectivity. This concept helped me to see how many activists negotiate spirituality in relation to their respective religious traditions even if they are not practicing religion directly.

This book explores the often overlooked story in which women of color supported women’s access to health information, expressed in the landmark publication *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, and more generally the women’s health movement that pushed for greater access to culturally sensitive health care. The social movement for reproductive justice takes health advocacy further by pushing for women’s human right to access health care with dignity and to express their full selves, including their spiritual beliefs, as well as policies that address social inequalities.