

Bans off our Bodies: Categorizing and Analyzing Reproductive Justice Street Art Across the United States (June 2022 to June 2023)

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June 24, 2022, marked the official overturn of the constitutional right to abortion in the decision of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. In doing so, the Supreme Court cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, which had formerly upheld that pregnancy termination was a personal choice and that states should not enact laws that present an undue burden to abortion-seeking gestating persons, became immaterial. Although a Supreme Court draft opinion had been leaked the month prior to the *Dobbs* decision, people throughout the country remained in disbelief that a once privately made decision now fell into the hands of legislative bodies who could now dictate individual states’ abortion laws.¹

1 NPR Staff. (2023, June 23). New abortion laws changed their lives. 8 very personal stories. NPR.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/06/23/1183878942/abortion-bans-personal-stories->

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Just two days after the decision was announced, I was in the car heading west into Minneapolis, Minnesota on I-94 when graffiti reading “Abort the Court” caught my eye on the side of the interstate. This graffiti piece or “burner,” a term used by graffiti writers to describe a work so bright, large, and vivid that it “burns” off the wall, included bold white lettering and a red splotchy backslash. What stood out to me when I spotted this was not only the rapid creation of this highly visible piece, fully rendered just two days after the Supreme Court’s decision, but also its ability to respond quickly, publicly, and militantly to the Supreme Court following the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. In the days that followed, I noticed colleagues and peers share their own pictures of the same piece on social media to voice their support for reproductive rights and denounce this decision against bodily autonomy. Intrigued by the way that this graffiti piece was shared and created, I began to consider what other forms of street art would accompany this post-Roe movement. Furthermore, I became determined to categorize these acts of protest as a testament to their significance and as a documentation effort to protect these ephemeral works.

[dobbs-anniversary](#) and Chavez, R. (2022, June 25). The “air is thick with disbelief and grief” at a Louisiana Clinic as abortion ends. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/after-roe-ruling-a-louisiana-abortion-clinic-looks-to-whats-next>

In the year following the Dobbs decision, reproductive choice messaging in the form of sanctioned and unsanctioned street art has appeared across the United States. In addition to street arts annotations on the physical landscape of the United States, a year later, abortion is completely banned in thirteen states (Baden & Driver, 2023). A variety of other gestational limits, attacks on medication abortion, and subsequent restrictions on gender-affirming care have followed. Unfortunately, the struggle for equitable abortion access is nothing new, as financial and legal obstacles have been present for decades: disproportionately impacting BIPOC and low-income families. This struggle is illustrated by a series of public protests, lawsuits, and militant street art and graffiti messages.² In this paper, I refer to the political movement that advocates for bodily autonomy as the Reproductive Justice movement. Reproductive Justice is an intentionally chosen framework, as opposed to “pro-choice” or “reproductive rights,” to encapsulate a more intersectional type of feminism and way of thinking about bodily autonomy. The term, coined in 1994 by the Collective SisterSong, was derived in part as a response to a women’s rights movement that

² McCammon, J. (2023, April 3). Judges’ dueling decisions put access to a key abortion drug in jeopardy nationwide. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/07/1159220452/abortion-pill-drug-mifepristone-judge-texas-amarillo> and Honderich, H. (2022, July 9). Roe V Wade: Thousands march to White House for abortion rights. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-62109971>

predominately catered to middle- and upper-class white women (Reproductive Justice). Reproductive Justice hinges on the pillars that childbearing bodies have the right not to have a child, the right to have a child, and the right to parent children in a safe and healthy environment (Ross & Solinger, 2017). As consistent with Reproductive Justice authors Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, I also recognize the ways in which inclusive language is necessary when discussing pregnancy and childbearing. Not all people who can become pregnant and have children identify as women, and some women are unable to or do not get pregnant and give birth. I use “women” and other language such as “pregnant people” interchangeably, except when discussing past legislation that has specifically targeted women-identifying persons. In doing so, I do not intend to erase or mitigate the lived experiences of womanhood, nor the ways in which the female body has been oppressed and brutalized historically.

Contemporary scholarship recognizes the importance of a society’s visual culture as it relates to social movements. Graffiti and street art play a crucial role in empowering a collective, which is often made up of marginalized or excluded identities. It also serves as a catalyst to release imagination, highlight struggle, and display narratives (Avramidis & Tsilimpounidi, 2017; Zaimakis et al., 2021; Lennon, 2022). In situations where individuals feel the need to

express themselves, blank walls exist as canvases for political critiques, statements, and images.

Inspired by how street art appeared quickly and powerfully across the United States in response to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, my research aims to categorize and analyze graffiti and street art pertaining to the Reproductive Justice movement from the time of *Roe v. Wade*'s reversal, June of 2022, until June of 2023. In this paper, I argue that Reproductive Justice street art falls into four main categories: didactic abortion resources stickers, Crisis Pregnancy Center tags, billboards of exchange, and "abort" messages. Through documentation and analysis, my research works to preserve the voices and visual art of this movement and is increasingly relevant to the study of street art as protest.

Methods

My research methodology brings together both qualitative and quantitative modes of analysis. In conducting a qualitative analysis of street art categorization, my research methodology develops from the scholarship of Dr. Ann Marie Graf in her dissertation, *Facets of Graffiti Art and Street Art Documentation Online: A Domain and Content Analysis*. In her dissertation, Graf argues that the documentation of street art and its online dissemination requires several forms of knowledge organization, or KO (Graf, 2018). Knowledge Organization as a concept is commonly applied in a

Library and Information Science context of bibliographic systems and information classification. As a discipline, KO is about the semantic relations between ideas and how they can be classified in a way that allows for effective retrieval (Graf, 2018). It goes beyond the heuristics, or mental shortcuts, for ordering knowledge and encompasses interdisciplinary comprehension of knowledge at the meta level (Hjørland, 2002). To identify the scope of a KO analysis, a domain is used to set limitations and define data and a community of data users (Graf, 2018). The raw knowledge, or the compiled images of street art in my research, once identified, described, categorized, and communicated, provides knowledge about the foundations of the domain, and assists in its future evaluations. The process of naming a category of images can make online retrieval of these images easier. For example, a simple search for “Reproductive Justice street art” yields only a few relevant Google results. My hope is that my research will preserve the ways in which street art appeared in conjunction with this movement for a lack of organized online documentation and retrieval.

The domain of my research surrounds a gathered and crowd-sourced image gallery of over 100 reproductive justice-themed works produced between June 2022 and June 2023. The criteria for collecting the images in my domain were that 1) the images must be dated between June 2022 and June 2023, 2) they must have some sort of messaging that is consistent

with the pillars of the Reproductive Justice framework, 3) they must be located within the United States, and 4) they must be on a surface that is in public and/or traditionally associated with street art and graffiti. I gathered the bulk of the images from the well-known Instagram and Tumblr account Radical Graffiti, @radicalgraffiti. The Instagram account itself has posted over 13,500 images in its lifespan and has over 222,000 followers, making the account one of the most popular places to find political graffiti on the internet. However, due to the account's "radical" nature, there is some selection bias involved that most likely led me to view more militant and combative examples of street art. The remainder of the images were either taken by myself or sent to me directly from friends and colleagues.

Examples of graffiti that are not included in my gallery but are included in categorization and content analysis include stickers from well-known Reproductive Justice advocacy groups, a sanctioned Reproductive Justice billboard project, and graffiti that appeared on Crisis Pregnancy Centers in association with the pro-choice group, Jane's Revenge. My reasoning for this is that these three groups represent outliers, compared to the gallery that I have grouped, which can be easily categorized together. There are also factors such as organizational affiliations and monetary restrictions that prevent the public from participating in these categories. Qualitative research has taken shape in the

form of ethnography and content analysis. Ethnography, or in this case, the use of interviews, seeks to engage others with my research while gathering insight into ideas or topics that extend beyond visual analysis or materials such as books and journal articles. Ethnographic research in the realm of street art and graffiti is recognized as one of the key tools to improve research in this area to situate the context of urban art in a space (Ross, 2016). In conducting interviews, I selected individuals who were either abortion rights activists/providers and/or artists who have done Reproductive Justice street art since the Dobbs decision. Choosing a wide variety of interviewees allowed me to become acquainted with the context of a post-Roe v. Wade artistic scene, the concept of street art as protest, and the challenges of restricted abortion access. To supplement my research, I also have studied narratives including podcast episodes, documentaries, and poetry. Engaging with materials such as these have allowed for fulfillment of missing accounts such as abortion patients, doctors, and additional BIPOC and Queer voices.³

3 Podcast episodes include “Abolition is Gender Equity with Charlene Carruthers” from abolition is for everybody, “The Womb” from Truth be Told with Tonya Mosely, An “Exciting Time for Abortion Law!” from Unladylike. Documentaries include The Abortion Divide (Frontline), Reversing Roe (Netflix), and The Janes (HBO). Narratives include: The Essential June Jordan and Bodies on the Line by Lauren Rankin.

Finally, I used content analysis as a method of research. As a tool, content analysis is used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts. This can be used to quantify and analyze the determined presence, meanings, and relationships between visual images (Content Analysis, 2023). While content analysis can be used either as a qualitative or quantitative form of research, I have used it in a quantitative way. Through quantifying factors like surfaces street art appears on, styles, symbols, and what states street art is located in, I have been able to draw meaningful conclusions and categorizations.

Results

Didactic Abortion Resource Stickers

Didactic resources to promote abortion access have been around for decades and have been used by advocacy groups including the Chicago-based group, The Jane Collective. The Jane Collective, which was most active from 1969 to 1973, provided abortion care to pregnant persons via an underground network. Besides word of mouth, one effective measure of advertising their services came from placing ads in local papers and bulletins. The discrete ads included messages such as “Pregnant? Need Help? Call Jane” and “Pregnant? Don’t Want to Be? Call Jane” (Lessin & Pildes, 2022). The same sort of messaging appears in public spaces today, with the most popular medium being stickers. Stickers are used by some of the most

popular abortion resource groups including Plan C, INeedAnA, and NARAL Pro-Choice America. These stickers are characterized by their straightforward and mundane appearances that usually includes a few colors, a QR code that links to a pro-choice organization's website, a question, and sometimes an organizational logo, as seen in Figure 1. These simple, yet powerful stickers cater to activist groups, including college students, as a creative and efficient way to disseminate abortion resources (Fichten, 2022). Didactic resource stickers can be seen in a variety of places, such as on the backs of street signs, in restrooms, and anywhere else that can serve as a facet for publicly seen messages. Stickers are quick and inexpensive to produce and distribute, making them the most popular form of Reproductive Justice street art (Awcock, 2021).

Figure 1



Left: INeedAnA.Com, Need an Abortion? (2022) retrieved: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Tzg9dbgtV1JuSowyBnuBI-OPAV97ginv>. Right: Plan C, Need to be un-pregnant? (n.d.) retrieved from: <https://www.plancpills.org/stickers>

Plan C, a public health campaign that shares information and access to the abortion pills mifepristone and misoprostol, is credited for the creation of QR code stickers that provide abortion access resources. Since the launch of Plan C's stickers in 2021 to August 2022, the organization states that over half a million QR code stickers have been distributed by the organization (Fichten, 2022). Plan C will ship stickers to anyone using a "pay what you can" model. Besides ordering stickers online through the organization, Plan C also makes its stickers available for free download for individuals to print their own stickers at home, making the number of stickers greater than those who order or receive them through the organization.

INeedAnA.com, a platform that provides personalized resources for abortion seekers in the US, has a similar free download option for their stickers. In August of 2022, it was estimated that they had distributed over 2,000 packets containing about 24 QR code stickers per pack, excluding those that were downloaded and printed directly from their website (Fichten, 2022). Other organizations, like NARAL Pro-Choice America, also use QR stickers to advertise their services. However, payment is necessary when ordering them online, potentially limiting the number of them that appear in public spaces.⁴

⁴ According to the NARAL Pro-Choice America's website, it costs \$12 for one of their sticker packs. The pack includes two QR code stickers. The rest have logos and quotes.

Crisis Pregnancy Center Tags

On May 8, 2022, six days after the Dobbs decision was leaked, the autonomously organized self-defense network Jane's Revenge created its first blog post. The group's first post, or "First Communiqué," reads as a manifesto and demands the closing of anti-choice establishments and fake clinics within the next thirty days. On May 30, 2022, Jane's Revenge put out a much more militant post than the first with a request to carry anger into the world and express it physically. The post is signed, "To those who work to oppress us: If abortion isn't safe, you aren't either. We are everywhere" (NIGHT OF RAGE 2022). Since this post, the group has been linked to over 24 instances of tags on anti-abortion women's health facilities or Crisis Pregnancy Centers.

In the world of street art, "tagging" is usually what first comes to mind when graffiti is mentioned. Graffiti tagging, or a "tag," is the term used by those familiar with the graffiti subculture to describe a name, symbol, or word that is painted, sprayed, or written in a repetitive manner on property not belonging to the individual that paints it (Lewis, 2023). Tagging can often appear illegible or messy, and because much of it is done illegally, it is usually considered vandalism (Austin, 2010). There have also been incidents of arson. However, these incidents appear to have taken place at night when staff members were not there, a tendency of anarchist groups that prioritize attacks on private property rather

than people (Sherman, 2022). While Jane's Revenge has been credited for events happening all over the country, there is one thing that ties them all together: tagging on the walls.

Tagging appears on the destinations of attack, which most frequently happens to be on Crisis Pregnancy Centers. Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) are notorious for representing themselves as reproductive health care clinics when they frequently spread medical disinformation and misrepresent abortion care. There are over 4,000 of these centers in the United States, and according to data from The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "71% of CPCs use deceptive means. By using deception, delay tactics, and disinformation, CPC staff undermine the tenets of informed consent and patient autonomy and impede access to comprehensive ethical care" (The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2022; Crisis Pregnancy Centers). According to my interview with the Executive Director of a clinic that provides sexual, reproductive, and abortion services, these CPCs present a large concern, especially the one located right by their office:

[CPCs] are an anti-abortion religious organization. You know, there are tons of CPCs, they outnumber abortion clinics in [the state they work in] like 11 to one or something like that. They use all the same tactics that CPCs use to mislead people and misconstrue their services. They don't tell patients that they're calling the wrong place, or that they arrived at

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the wrong place. They don't tell patients that they don't provide abortions. They provide medical misinformation about abortion and the risks of abortion and shame people about their consideration of having an abortion...So that's what tactics they use.

Their name used to be really similar to ours. We used to be called Women's Health Center, and they're Women's Care Center. They're kitty-corner from us. They very intentionally did that. We had already been here for over 20 or 30 years by the time that they were built.⁵

It is evident that tagging is an essential tactic that allows Jane's Revenge to accomplish its agenda. With many rogue efforts by their organization, the one thing that makes their work traceable is their repetitive use of slogans. They most frequently read, "If abortions aren't safe, then you aren't either," "Jane was here," and "Jane's Revenge." While there is no direct call for the use of tagging, the group refers to it in one of their posts writing: "Everyone with the urge to paint, to burn, to cut, to jam: now is the time. Go forth and manifest the things you wish to see. Stay safe, and practice your cursive" (NIGHT OF RAGE 2022). As seen in Figures 2 and 3, most of their messaging is in cursive.

⁵ This interview was conducted via Zoom on July 13th, 2023. To respect the privacy of the individual, I have decided not to include their name as abortion providers have historically been targeted in acts of violence.

Figures 2 & 3



Left: Messaging on CPC, Longmont, Co, 2022, Photo Source: <https://janesrevenge.noblogs.org/2022/06/> **Right:** Messaging on CPC, Asheville, NC, 2022, Photo Source: <https://janesrevenge.noblogs.org/2022/06/>

Billboards of Exchange

Besides being a way for brands to gain exposure or an efficient way to draw travelers to new tourist destinations, billboards are used to raise awareness for political campaigns, spread information, and highlight social issues, including abortion. A pro-life group, ProLife Across AMERICA, launched its first billboard campaign in 1990 and has since referred to themselves as “The Billboard People.” In 2022 alone, they placed 12,000 billboards in 46 states (*Our Mission*). Every billboard includes the organization’s 1-800 hotline number meant to direct callers to a nearby Crisis Pregnancy Center, a pro-life message, and a photo of a baby. With tens of thousands of billboards created by this

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organization alone, there is no intent to slow production in the future.

Pro-choice billboards in response to these well-established pro-life billboards are nothing new.⁶ However, the *Vote for Abortion Rights* billboard exhibition in the fall of 2022 was created during a critical time. As part of the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, individual states were given control over abortion access legislation. The 2022 midterm elections provided an opportunity for voters to select representatives for many key offices nationwide who would then be able to champion pro-choice abortion legislation. As such, this project was meant to encourage voters to have reproductive rights issues in mind while voting. This specific billboard project was created by the Brooklyn, NY non-profit organization, SaveArtSpace which is dedicated to creating an urban gallery experience addressing intersectional themes and fostering a progressive message of social change (*Transforming Advertisements into Public Art for Local Communities!*). According to their website (<https://www.saveartspace.org/home>), they have installed the artworks of 550+ artists in over 1,000 advertising spaces. *Vote for Abortion Rights* was done in collaboration with artist and Reproductive Justice

⁶ Other examples include <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/grassroots-campaign-reproductive-rights-takes-aim-at-anti-choice-billboards> and <https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2018/09/24/we-want-to-flip-the-narrative-religious-groups-bring-pro-choice-billboards-to-oklahoma/>

advocate Michele Pred and was on display in 14 cities across 12 states nationwide starting October 17, 2022. The gallery featured works of artists Bud Snow, Holly Ballard Martz, Laney Baby, Lena Wolff & Hope Meng, Michele Pred, Shireen Liane, Viva Ruiz, Wildcat Ebony Brown, and Yvette Molina. In my research, I had the opportunity to speak with five of these artists directly about what role they see street art playing in the Reproductive Justice movement and learn a bit more about their involvement in this project.⁷

Michele Pred, the curator of this billboard project and a conceptual artist, uses art to address themes such as the economic and political struggle for women's rights and the politics of post-9/11 security. According to Pred, using billboards was an intentional choice for the SaveArtSpace: Vote for Abortion Rights exhibition, as it is both an accessible medium and can address a large audience. As such, making the commitment to put Reproductive Justice ideas and messaging in states where people didn't necessarily agree was crucial.

Besides location, imagery was an important factor for this project. Pred stated:

[Something] that's essential for me, and just in the abortion movement in general, is that there's no sort of

⁷ Special thanks to interviewees Holly Ballard Martz, Lena Wolff, Hope Meng, Michele Pred, and Yvette Molina for their wisdom, time, and contributions to the Reproductive Justice movement.

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*negative messaging. There are no bloody coat hangers. You know, no references to back-alley abortions. The key is just having more of a positive [message]. Especially in those areas where people probably are anti [abortion]. So, for them to hopefully look at these, think differently, enjoy the art, and kind of flip the script— Wildcat Ebony Brown, you know, *Abortion is Life* (Figure 4). It's such a different approach, and I just loved it. It's very organic and floral. It's just completely shifting the messaging to stop people in their tracks... I've never curated a billboard exhibition before. I've done my own billboards and been on other projects. But, like I said, having other voices and other visions were really essential to me. (Michele Pred, personal communication, August 9, 2023).*

Figure 4



Wildcat Ebony Brown, *Abortion is Life*, 2022, Photo Source: <https://www.saveartspace.org/abortionrights>

Other artworks in the billboard exhibition include *Bans Off Our Bodies*, *Thank God for Abortion*, and *Abortion is Health Care*. In choosing positive messaging, this exhibition was able to engage with those who do not see eye-to-eye about reproductive

health issues. For example, a pro-life website published an article titled, “New Billboards Claim Killing Babies in Abortions is Health Care.” While the title of the article is partisan on abortion, what is surprising about the article is how the author engages with the billboard project. In the article, the author vividly describes the signs, includes photos, credits all the artists that were involved, and even has a quote from Pred’s interview with the news source, *The Guardian*. The author then acknowledges how important the upcoming midterms are for the dictation of abortion laws. In this way, Pred was correct about how positive messaging can lead to more positive interactions from those on the other side of the aisle. However, not all pro-choice messaging on billboards is as positive when it comes to graffiti tags on pro-life billboards.

Tagging on billboards is nothing new. In the graffiti subculture, one is praised more highly for tagging a harder-to-reach spot, or a more visible spot (Bloch, 2019). Usually, a billboard is both, making them easy enough targets for graffiti. As an act of protest, pro-life billboards have been vandalized all over the country. The original billboards are most commonly the work of ProLife Across AMERICA. These graffiti responses include militant and powerful messages as well as iconography. For example, in the image on the left (Figure 5), all ProLife Across AMERICA’s information has been painted over and instead reads, “I could get an abortion,” along with

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“Keep it legal,” “Keep it Safe,” and “My Body My Choice.” The graffiti also includes coat hangers that are crossed out, a reference to mitigating back-alley abortions.

The billboard on the right (Figure 6) is quite plain compared to the image on the left, but the message “We will not be silenced. Protect Womens Rights” is still very powerful. I call this category Billboards of Exchange due to the responsive nature of sanctioned pro-choice billboards and unsanctioned graffiti to pro-life billboards.

Figures 5 & 6



Left: Tagged Billboard, Barkhamstead, CT, 2023. Photo Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CpDWiRCSQWZ/> Right: Tagged Billboard, Syracuse, NY 2022. Photo Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/ChN5N4kvvQB/>

“Abort” Messages

As previously mentioned, the first instance of Reproductive Justice street art that I had seen after the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* was an “Abort the Court” burner on the side of the interstate (Figure 7). Interestingly, this was not an isolated incident. The

same words were sprayed on the side of interstates in Maine, Kentucky, and Wisconsin. They are similar in appearance with bold lettering and a splotchy blood-appearing backslash.

Figure 7



It is not clear who first coined the term “Abort the Court,” however, it was one of the first Reproductive Justice messages to be disseminated by street art after the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. “Abort” messaging is not exclusive to interstates. They appear on surfaces such as electrical boxes, street posts, stickers, and unsanctioned walls as well. While “Abort the Court” is a play on words as “abort” rhymes with “court,” and the Supreme Court overturned the right to abortion, there are many other instances of “abort” messaging in Reproductive Justice street art. Alternative wording includes “Abort the State,” “Abort Politicians,” and “Abort your Senator.”

Discussion

Through the intertwining of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the categories of didactic abortion resource stickers, Crisis Pregnancy Center tags, billboards of exchange, and “abort” messages were extrapolated. These categories, reflective of a need to disseminate information, protest, and empower individuals post-Roe, are significant as their recognition and documentation will help to preserve these ephemeral creations and their contribution to the Reproductive Justice movement. Furthermore, this research provides crucial knowledge about the foundations of this domain and assists in its future evaluations, as it is the first scholarly paper written on this topic.

Besides determining these four categories, I was also able to make some assumptions on the correlation between the number of Reproductive Justice street art messages, and the restriction level of abortion laws in each state. Based on my gathered and crowd-sourced image gallery, there was a significant positive relationship between states with the most protected abortion laws and the number of Reproductive Justice street art works.⁸ One reason for this may be that the states themselves simply have

⁸ Using regression analysis, I was presented with the formula $r(23) = 0.416$ $p < .05$. As previously mentioned, although my gallery of gathered and crowd sourced images had about 90 images total, I removed the images I had found on Instagram pages other than Radical Graffiti so as not to skew my analysis.

more political street art, another is that street artists in these states feel more inclined to advocate for the continued protection of abortion rights.

However, I must acknowledge that as a limitation of my research, I did not have the time nor resources available to adequately photograph, document, and collect all instances of Reproductive Justice street art across the United States. Further research is required to draw more definitive conclusions.

Ethnography was also a method of data collection in which I was able to situate Reproductive Justice street art in context through interviews with artists who are creating this art. Through thoughtfully conducted interviews, I was able to identify three major themes to respond to the question of “Why street art?” Identifying the themes of street art as a rapid response, confrontational in nature, and the dual role street artists play as activists, can be used not only when examining Reproductive Justice street art, but street art as a whole.

Street art is a highly effective way to quickly respond to a societal crisis. Instead of taking time to attempt to have it displayed in a gallery or museum, or even having it be promoted on social media, one can simply use a can of spray paint, stickers, or another street art medium to take their message to the streets to have it shown to anyone that passes by. This sentiment was shared by Bay-area projection artist, Alan Marling who described their contribution to the

street art of the Reproductive Justice by way of projection.⁹ They state:

What happened was that there'd be an issue which was urgent, something very pressing that day, and I would look online often following hashtags and see what images I felt spoke to that moment and presented themselves well to projection. [With] projection, you want an image to be very recognizable and readable in about a second, because when people glance up and see an image [and] they don't get it, they'll probably keep walking. Or, if there's some context missing, it won't work. So, it needs to be very legible, which is why sometimes just simple words are very effective. So, for instance ... Jessica Sabogal's projection is, "If Abortion Isn't Safe, and Neither Are You" (see Figure 8) ... I just said [to Jessica], "I'll be projecting your image tonight at 7 PM." ... Usually, the strength of projection is speaking to the moment, and that's often projecting something which has been drawn by an artist that week or that month and then immediately projecting it. (Alan Marling, personal communication, July 20, 2023).

⁹ Regarding the legality of projection art, Alan Marling states: "Projection activism is a beautiful form of activism that allows the creation of art that speaks the moment. Sometimes the very hour. I would often load images in response to the news of the day, and then shine it on walls, creating a near instant mural of light. Now it is a lawful form of street art. I am drawing with photons which are fundamentally impermanent. They are also unregulated except insofar as they qualify as a nuisance, which projection activism would never do."

Figure 8



Art by Jessica Sabogal & Projected by Alan Marling, If Abortion Ain't Safe Then Neither Are You, 2022, Photo Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CffwzaKLyOh/>

In these ways, Alan has made it clear that street art is a highly effective way to spread messages. They also mention how readability is an important trait in their projections. With many walking or driving by quickly, there needs to be something that can grab passerby's attention. In this respect artist Holly Ballard Martz, part of the *Vote for Abortion Rights* exhibit, agreed stating:

The work that I do that I consider more fine art that's in galleries or has been shown in museums, although I do incorporate some text in it, tends to be a little bit more nuanced because you can spend time with it, right? But, if it's out in the world, you want people to get it. Especially a billboard. If you're driving past really fast, it has got to be really graphic

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and simple. You need to get that message across to people quickly. One of my installations that has been shown multiple times in a few different museums and other places is called Dangers of Nostalgia in Wallpaper Form. That is something that you need to spend time with, because when you first walk up to it, people think, “Oh, it's just this beautiful pattern. Oh, what a really pretty wallpaper!” Right? And then it reveals itself where either they see the reproductive system first, or they see it's a coat hanger first. There's an evolution of recognition of what is right. It takes time to understand what this piece is. You don't have that time when you're out in the public sphere. (Holly Ballard Martz, personal communication, July 14, 2023).

When it comes to who can put political messages on the streets, it appears that artists may be our best bet as opposed to corporations or political leaders. It was quite common for interviewees to be practicing artists who worked mainly in mediums other than street art, but who felt so inspired by their connections to Reproductive Justice issues that they felt called to put their messages out to the public. The more I conversed with these artists, the more I realized that most of them felt their goal as an artist and an activist were intrinsically connected. Washington, D.C. based artist, Trap Bob spoke with me about her experience creating free downloadable images on reproductive health topics. She said:

I think art is the best way to communicate and to reach people. I truly believe that it will save the

world. My work is activism, not by choice, but because I speak through my work...It was a great opportunity to relieve myself of the kind of stress I was feeling from, you know, women's rights being threatened, and so many things happening in that moment, and also being able to again communicate a really important message in a way that is simple and you know, digestible for people...I really love that they (the organization Amplifier) was providing free artwork to people that they could print out. So, that way my art could support movements in places that I couldn't be... [People would use them] as phone wallpapers and had their own posters that they were giving out at the marches, and it was so cool to see my work in all these different cities...Art doesn't tell people what to do, it inspires [them]. It creates hope in people. Specifically, for me when I'm creating art for advocacy, or for any type of large-scale communication like that, I don't want to ever create a reminder of our problems. I always want to create hope and inspire, because I think the only way for us to deal with it and to end injustice is to move forward and to have hope for a better future...being a woman, being a Black woman...it doesn't become a choice. It's like, if I don't speak then who will? (Trap Bob, personal communication, August 2, 2023).

Michele Pred shared further sentiments about being called as an artist to activism, saying, “making political artwork is what I've been doing my whole career. It's in my blood. It's in my DNA to do the work. It's really important for me. It's what I feel like is my job here on the planet.” (Michele Pred, personal communication, August 9, 2023).

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In all, coupled with the goals of activism and confrontation Reproductive Justice street art contributes to the movement in four main categories of didactic abortion resources stickers, crisis pregnancy center tags, billboards of exchange, “abort” messages, and empowering calls to action to respond quickly to crisis. Reproductive Justice street art is also most likely to appear in states that most heavily protect abortion rights.

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