

## Women’s Reproductive Health: Visual Media Workshops at Douglass Residential College

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### Abstract

Women's reproductive health care has been, especially in the last year, a very controversial topic highly debated among male politicians legislating women's bodies. The problem then becomes that women's voices on their reproductive bodies are ironically condoned. In response, for my Institute of Women's Leadership Scholar's Program Social Action Project, I developed and implemented a series of art workshops at various dorms at Douglass Residential College which explored young women's voices on their reproductive bodies through art.

### Author's Note

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## 1. Controversies: The Political Football That is Women’s Reproductive Health

Leading up to the 2012 Presidential election, women’s reproductive health became somewhat of a political football—the two main American political parties constantly kicked it to polar sides of the field. The debate, previously limited to the morality of abortions, began to encroach on the accessibility of oral contraceptives. In 2012 for instance, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Congress of the United States held a hearing, which debated the federal mandate that all employers must cover their female employees’ contraceptive costs. The Committee’s disapproval of the mandate was positioned as an issue of religious freedom, rather than reproductive rights. This framework was used to prevent Georgetown University law student, Sandra Fluke, from testifying at the congressional hearing.<sup>1</sup> The Committee Chairman “argued that his hearing was not about contraceptives and was not about women's reproductive rights” and thus, Flukes’ status as “merely ‘a college student’” meant that she did not have “the appropriate credentials” to testify. Seeing the irony in this statement, Representative Elijah Cummings noted, “As I sat there and listened to the Chairman try to explain his position, I looked out on that panel of

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<sup>1</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Lines Crossed: Separation of Church and State. Has the Obama Administration Trampled on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Conscience? 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., February, 16 2012.

men, and I could not help but wonder: What credentials did they have to talk about the importance of the pill to the lives of women.”<sup>2</sup>

To make matters worse, Rush Limbaugh attacked Sandra Fluke on his conservative talk radio show. He called her a “slut” and “prostitute” merely for attempting to testify at the congressional hearing.<sup>3</sup> The resulting media firestorm eventually catapulted Sandra Fluke to feminist stardom while also exposing the sexist rhetoric fueling conservative reservations against birth control.<sup>4</sup> Months later, another media controversy manifested when Congressman Todd Akin stated on public television that “It seems to be, first of all, from what I understand from doctors, it’s really rare. If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut the whole thing down.”<sup>5</sup> This statement highlighted a fundamental problem within the modern reproductive debate. Many male politicians were claiming an authority over the legislation of women’s reproductive freedom, without understanding the female body.<sup>6</sup>

The implied message behind all of these incidents is that women’s reproductive health care is an accessory rather than a necessity and a human right. The greater irony is that despite the fact that access to women’s reproductive health care greatly determines the quality of women’s lives, this issue is primarily argued among male politicians. Jessica Valenti, in her book *The Purity Myth*, argues that defining morality based on sexual purity and not medical science serves as impetus for legislation such as prohibiting or limiting birth control coverage, which regulates women’s sexuality.<sup>7</sup> She writes:

The point of the purity myth is not only to valorize women who are ‘virgins,’ but also to prop up the idea of the perfect woman as a blank slate, as powerless, and in need of direction. Women who want to control their lives, especially their sexuality, don’t adhere to the purity model. ‘Pure’ women aren’t just virgins—they’re women...who trust legislators over their own instincts, who don’t question the notion that men should be in charge.<sup>8</sup>

Rush Limbaugh’s sexist criticism of Sandra Fluke is a testament to the prevalence of the purity myth. As evidenced in the Fluke incident, the purity myth justifies the ignorance of female voices in critical debates about women’s reproductive health care.

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<sup>2</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Democratic Steering and Policy Committee Hearing on Women’s Health Opening Statement, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., February 23, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Goldman, “Rush Limbaugh Is Really Sorry That He Had to Apologize,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2012, <http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/rush-limbaugh-is-really-sorry-that-he-had-to-apologize/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Lori Moore, “Rep. Todd Akin: The Statement and the Reaction,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/us/politics/rep-todd-akin-legitimate-rape-statement-and-reaction.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Valenti, *The Purity Myth: How America’s Obsession with Purity is Hurting Young Women*, (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2009), 143.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Needless to say, more women's voices need to be heard to counteract this vertical oppression by mostly white, middle-aged, heterosexual, male politicians.<sup>9</sup> As a Canadian citizen, my engagement with American politics is limited to encouraging American citizens to think critically about the discourse surrounding women's reproductive health care. Part of the issue is spreading the message and elucidating the connection between a woman's reproductive health care and a woman's quality of life. As a second year scholar in the Institute of Women's Leadership Scholar's program at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, I received a five hundred dollar seed grant to develop a social action project (SAP) to instill social change on an issue that I am passionate about. The SAP is a required component of the program to inspire scholars to practice the theories learned about women's leadership. The contemporary events during this past election season partially motivated my focus on both raising awareness among young college women on the threats to their reproductive freedom as well as disseminating their personal stories reflecting their opinions about reproductive health care. Optimistically I sought to "change the world" in that I wanted to convert the negative discourse around women's reproductive health care into a more positive and beneficial one. This connected to the SAP goal of inspiring young women to pursue social justice with a strong gendered lens.

My final project was a series of art workshops geared towards the young women at Douglass Residential College, with the mission of spreading the message that women's reproductive health care should not be politically polarized. In these workshops, the attendees watched relevant media (i.e. TED-talk or satirical YouTube videos) and then created artwork using the media as inspiration. In addition, I used public interactive public art displays to advertise and encourage anonymous conversations about reproductive bodies. The end goal is to make the workshops into a reproducible and sustainable project, which can be implemented in communities outside of Douglass to raise awareness on the importance of women's reproductive health care.

My project merges both art and the long tradition of feminist art-inspired activism. Judith Brodsky and Ferris Olin, co-directors of the Rutgers University Institute for Women and Art, analyze the early 1970s feminist art movement in the article "Stepping Out of the Beaten Path: Reassessing the Feminist art movement," and acknowledge some of the innovative and social justice oriented agendas in the movement's artwork. Brosky and Ferris perfectly summarize the era's accomplishments: "Infusing art with new content inspired by feminism—content that is inclusive, investigative, and democratic, the feminist art movement pioneered post-modern artistic praxis."<sup>10</sup> Feminist art was socially innovative because it explored, highlighted, and questioned existing structures of oppression.

For the layman, art is not an obvious form of activism because it can be abstract and its potency in communicating is often taken for granted. In the words of artist Mallika Sarabhai, "[a]rt can go through where other things can't. You can't have barriers, because it breaks through your

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term vertical oppression here as a reference to the male reinforcement, both legislatively and socially, of women's inferior social status by men.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Brodsky and Ferris Olin, "Stepping Out of the Beaten Path: Reassessing the Feminist Art Movement," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33, no. 2 (2008): 340.

prejudices, breaks through...those [prejudices]...And in a world where attitudes are so difficult to change, we need a language that reaches through.”<sup>11</sup> Art is a more honest and less judgmental method to discuss difficult issues because it is non-confrontational and encourages abstract thinking. I used art to provide a safe space for young women who may share the belief that we live in a post-gender society (read: all the feminist battles have been won and are now irrelevant and redundant) to actively think about the consequences of the anti-women’s reproductive health care rhetoric so prominent in the American political landscape. My hope was that they would see how federal and state legislatures directly affect their lives.

## 2. Methodology

Developing the workshop curriculum was the most difficult aspect of my project, because I sought to provide both educational, artistic exploration and entertainment to women who might not have a feminist conscience. By feminist conscience, I mean having a strong critical lens which analyzes oppression and power politics, particularly from a gender perspective. The workshops were advertised through posting interactive art poster displays on which dorm residents could anonymously write. These series consisted of two workshops, focused on the issues surrounding women’s reproductive health care on either the international or domestic stage. These conceptions of domestic and international stages were used to make participants understand access to women’s reproductive health care as a transnational issue. Both workshops entailed participants viewing a brief satirical video clip or a TEDTalk and then responding to a written prompt with a visual art representation.

It was important to emphasize that these workshops were a safe space where they were free to express themselves without judgment and at the same time respect the opinions of their fellow participants. Nonetheless, I prohibited abortion from the discussion. Although this may seem counterintuitive to my activist goal, I sought to avoid stalemate arguments. These arguments could be intractable since many of these artists were freshman who may emulate their parents’ beliefs and have not yet engaged in critical thinking to develop their own viewpoints and opinions on this highly-charged issue. I wanted the participants to go through this process through art to encourage them to openly and honestly explore these issues, without fear of confrontation and much cognitive dissonance. I choose art as an avenue for these women and men to explore the issues of contraception and female sexuality, in order to encourage each of them to introspect in an honest and judgment-free setting. The abstract nature of art is an avenue for this project as these women and men did not need to explain their art.

I conducted the series of workshops and an additional standalone workshop in three very different all-women’s dorms. The first dorm consisted of freshmen engineering students while the second consisted of mostly upperclassmen humanities majors. The standalone workshop, a replica of the first workshop in the original series, was done in a general housing freshmen dorm. For each workshop there was an average attendance of around 5 to 10 participants (there were a total of five

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<sup>11</sup> Mallika Sarabhai. “Dance to Change the World,” TED video, 16:52, filmed November 2009, posted November 2009, [http://www.ted.com/talks/mallika\\_sarabhai.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/mallika_sarabhai.html).

workshops), of which only three are men. The group was very racially diverse, especially in the engineering living and learning community.

### 3. Influences

My influences in creating this workshop can be attributed specifically to three different art-oriented projects. The first one was the “Before I Die” project by Candy Chang, in which the artist displayed a large black chalkboard with the phrase “Before I die...” in a New Orleans vacant lot.<sup>12</sup> The public was encouraged to share their responses to this prompt. This project encouraged a very public yet anonymous discourse that weighted the topic of death. I drew from this project to generate intrigue for my workshops. In my public art displays, I asked residents to complete the phrase “My body is....” by leaving approximately 20 lines blank. The curious and diverse array of responses ranged from the humorous “a mere vehicle for my massive intellect” to more tongue and cheek responses that are borderline inappropriate for an academic paper. As expected, the public display boards did catch the attention of the dorm residents as the blank lines filled up in the span of three weeks.

My second influence was the art oriented activism of Women on Waves, a pro-reproductive freedom non-governmental organization. Its global boat campaign involves providing women’s reproductive health services to women who live in countries where there are no services due to their illegality.<sup>13</sup> Women on Waves takes these women twelve kilometers into international waters to rebuke the restrictive laws of their countries. Designed by a Dutch artist, Women on Waves called the boat an art project to have the freedom to not follow many Dutch boat regulations. Several artists created art projects documenting the experiences of the women who used the boat clinic’s services. One art display is called “I had an Abortion,” which was a collection of white shirts, each with a hole on it to represent an abortion.<sup>14</sup> This artwork was made in order to try to normalize the notion of having an abortion. It is very captivating how Women on Waves puts a story behind an abortion statistic to humanize the abortion debate and make the case for women’s reproductive freedom.

The final major art oriented project influenced the workshops themselves. It was a case study done on a series of art workshops that catered to the needs of Canadian Aboriginal women who were victims of gender violence. In this case study, a series of art therapy workshops called “Journey Woman” were created for women of Aboriginal and Metis background with a strong decolonizing framework.<sup>15</sup> The main purpose of the art therapy was to see how the Aboriginal women “heal from violence or the impact of violence.”<sup>15</sup> The major project of these art workshops

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<sup>12</sup> Candy Chang, “Before I die I want to...,” TED video, 6:20, filmed July 2012, posted November 2012, [http://www.ted.com/talks/candy\\_chang\\_before\\_i\\_die\\_i\\_want\\_to.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/candy_chang_before_i_die_i_want_to.html).

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Lu, and Felice Yuen, "Journey Women: Art Therapy in a Decolonizing Framework of Practice," *The Arts and Psychotherapy*, 39, no. 2 (2012): 192.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 314.

<sup>15</sup> Lucy Lu, and Felice Yuen, "Journey Women: Art Therapy in a Decolonizing Framework of Practice," *The Arts and Psychotherapy*, 39, no. 2 (2012): 192.

is creating a body-map. This is similar to one of my art prompts as I asked my workshop attendees to abstractly visualize their reproductive bodies.

#### 4. Critical Analysis of the Artwork

*Workshop 1 Prompt: Draw a metaphorical tree chronologically outlining all your life goals.*

“Life Trees” is a visual and chronological representation of the participants’ life goals which map what they hope to achieve for the rest of their lives. There were some interesting similarities among the pieces of artwork that may seem ordinary and disinteresting on a cursory glance. Many of the women had specifically stated that they would like to be mothers at some point in their lives. Even more interesting was the fact that many even specifically mentioned how many children they would like to have. In addition, they had a vague sense of what time of their lives they would like to achieve this. By simply asking the women to plan and visualize their long-term goals, I was able to get the artists to think about reproduction on a personal level. According to the chronological order of their goals, most mentioned that, if they did start a family, they would do so after they established their careers. This visually shows that, for many women, reproduction occupies a specific stage in their lives. The most obvious message was that many women have a plan for reproduction, because whether they partake in it or when they do it greatly determines how they interact with the world in terms of their careers and other goals.

The media screened in the first workshop particularly illustrated this idea. The first video was a Mechai Viravaidya (a veteran in population development) TEDTalk entitled “How Mr. Condom Made Thailand a Better Place.”<sup>16</sup> Viravaidya is a former Thai politician and ardent reproductive justice activist. In this talk, Viravaidya explains how certain reproductive health policies such as family planning, greatly helped to increase the quality of life of the people of Thailand. A primary message of the lecture is the importance of giving women reproductive health freedom. He presented the policies that were implemented in Thailand to increase the quality of life (via population control), reduce poverty and reduce the number of HIV infections.<sup>17</sup> Harnessing the influence of religious authority (Viravaidya had Buddhist monks bless forms of contraception), Viravaidya’s policies greatly changed cultural attitudes towards sex by engaging the public, regardless of age, to understand and practice reproductive health.<sup>18</sup>

The second video built on the argument that access to reproductive information and care determines the quality of life that a woman will be able to achieve. The Girl Effect’s YouTube video entitled “The girl effect: The clock is ticking” visually illustrates that when young girls are uneducated, married, and forced to bare children at a young age, they are unable to support their

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<sup>16</sup> Mechai Viravaidya. “How Mr. Condom made Thailand a better place,” TED video, 13:51, filmed September 2010, posted September 2010,

[http://www.ted.com/talks/mechai\\_viravaidya\\_how\\_mr\\_condom\\_made\\_thailand\\_a\\_better\\_place.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/mechai_viravaidya_how_mr_condom_made_thailand_a_better_place.html).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

families and themselves via safe and financially secure means.<sup>19</sup> Although it did oversimplify many issues, the short video's use of chronology to visually describe the cause and effect consequences of an uneducated girl-child serves as inspiration for the prompt for this workshop. After watching both of these videos, the participants expressed their gratefulness in their having access to contraception and family planning. Meanwhile, some noted that the United States could do better. One participant wrote that "it would be so hard to imagine to have such a pro-sex education here in the U.S." Regardless, watching the videos did initiate the artists to directly connect their bodies to the national reproductive health care debate. Though most freshman women did not perceive themselves as feminists, their artwork spoke very feminist-inspired messages that reproductive choice is a necessity and not an accessory.

*Workshop 2 Prompt: Draw your reproductive body as a metaphorical landscape.*

In the second workshop, I asked the women to create artwork that abstractly represented their thoughts about their reproductive bodies. This prompt inspired the participants to produce some of the most thought-provoking art pieces. Focusing on contemporary events in the United States, this workshop began with watching satirical political humor clip from The Colbert Report.<sup>20</sup> This clip depicts Colbert satirizing Akin's lack of knowledge about women's body. Colbert does this by providing a lesson of his own about how he thinks a woman's reproductive body works. Colbert's comical, ridiculous and near mythical information about a woman's vagina emphasizes Akin's equally ludicrous and unscientific comments.

Interestingly enough, the Todd Akin Colbert satire led many participants to interpret this exercise as drawing their vagina using various well thought out symbols or metaphorical landscapes, such as cities. The freshmen students' artworks varied from industrial landscapes to abstract glitter explosions. An urban representation and yet scientifically accurate representation of the vagina is seen in the work "City." In this work, the artist uses city symbols including two rival banks as metaphors for her ovaries, representing that one "bank" releases every month. Not all landscapes were industrial, however. Works such as "Winter Wonderland" depict the reproductive body as a traditional landscape. The author comments on her work that "[T]he moon represents intelligence, which is present in the town "Engineering" that is portrayed by the shining red glitter. The snow angels are the givers of the snowballs. There is a tool booth at the entrance, so, if you can't pay the toll, you're prohibited from entering." The toll booth analogy exemplifies a common theme of having control over one's vagina. There were two other works in particular which shared this theme of sexual control. The artist of "Treasure Box" describes that "this is a vagina treasure box with glitter glue sparkly jewels with a lock that can be opened by the only one." The second piece, the satirical and humorously blunt "Baby Making Machine," has a similar artist comment of "this is a baby making vending machine which is jammed so it only allows one coin at a time." It is

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<sup>19</sup> "The girl effect: The clock is ticking," YouTube video, 3:05, posted by "girleffect," November 12, 2010, <http://youtu.be/1e8xgF0JtVg>.

<sup>20</sup> "Todd Akin's Abortion Gaffe," Colbert Report clip, 6:35, posted August 28, 2012, <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/418400/august-28-2012/todd-akin-s-abortion-gaffe>.

interesting to note that these freshmen clearly defined control over their reproductive bodies in terms of monogamous relationships. Regardless of the context, these young women communicated in their art their shared belief that they should have authority over their bodies. It is a very feminist inspired message, which is particularly intriguing given that these women did not identify with the feminist identity.

There are nuanced differences between the themes in the freshmen artwork and those in the upperclassmen artwork. Although upperclassmen may have explicitly shared the majority of freshmen's very monogamous concept of bodily control, the older students were less likely to view their bodies as something solely for the private and romantic spheres. Describing "Castle," the artist portrays her vagina as a stronghold, a place of strength which she, like Queen Elizabeth I, has control. Meanwhile, paralleling the recurring theme of the freshman, the castle gates only open for a prince in this work. Her representation implies a particular brand of self-agency that does not limit her to considering reproduction just in terms of romance, especially when referring to the last Tudor Queen who had a very public and political image. Similarly, the artist of "Home Sweet Home" explains that her reproductive body is a very private place, which she does not discuss openly with the public. Especially given the welcoming phrase "home sweet home," this artist assures viewers that she enjoys her reproductive body. She does not position it within a romantic, heterosexual and monogamous framework. Another such positive example is titled "Highway," in which the artist drew her reproductive body as a car-filled highway in the iconic v-shape. The artist explains, "[M]y vagina is a highway of opportunity with multiple passageways and a biological clock, all leading to my happy place." Again, unlike the freshman participants, the upperclassmen did not always place their artwork in a strictly romantic context.

Moreover, all of the upperclassmen women demonstrated a stronger and often deliberate feminist conscience than their younger peers. That a significant majority of them are humanities students may partially explain this finding. One Douglass College upperclassman embraced feminism and her studies of women and gender in "Vagina: The Musical." This artist commented that she portrayed her reproductive body as a musical, one of her favorite things. This contrasts with the first-years' more private viewpoint consistent in their works. In this case in particular, the upperclassmen artist represents not being afraid to talk about reproduction or her reproductive body. Feminism's and women and gender studies' influences are clear in the artwork.

Nonetheless, not all of the participants' representations expressed completely positive feelings about their bodies. The "Flower with Thorns" piece, in particular, expressed the upperclassmen artist's view that her "vagina is both wonderful and painful too." Another piece that expressed this duality was the freshmen piece "Ying and Yang". Generally, it was more common for the older students to embrace the safe space through openly sharing more negative viewpoints.

Overall, all these pieces expressed a wide range of opinions that these women have towards their reproductive bodies, however, all these works have various shades of feminism intertwined in them. It was interesting to compare artwork of women with a feminist foundation to those of artists who are just beginning to be exposed to it.



## 5. Reflections on Leadership

As this social action project is ongoing, I can only use case studies to anticipate the influence of the artwork created in my workshop. Throughout the semester implementing this project, I learned the classic lessons of patience, perseverance and creativity, especially in convincing people to participate.

Despite collaborating with the school administration, persuading potential participants to engage in this project was incredibly difficult. My first challenge in undertaking this project was to convince others that my program is interesting. I gained access to the dormitories after advertising my project to the Peer Academic Leaders (PAL), students who lead mentoring and event planning in the residence halls. I stated that my program would count towards their requirement of planning two programs per semester to motivate the PALs to grant me access. Furthermore, to encourage the residents to come, I had allocated some of my budget for a reasonably large raffle prize. When all else failed, loudly advertising in the hallways was my failsafe approach. The most obvious manifestation of my leadership was serving as the master of ceremonies for these workshops in addition to negotiating their execution. Together, the preparation for this project required lessons learned in taking initiative and persistence.

In terms of women's leadership, leading the workshops was a very transformative experience. I had perceived the young freshman students to be indifferent to the issues of women's reproductive rights, remembering my own experiences as a first-year student. Despite my fear that my project would be met with indifference under the misconception that we live in a "post-feminist" society, the participants expressed through their stunning artwork that they are aware and, through this nonverbal medium, they conveyed vocal opinions about their bodies. Also, in a witty fashion, these women expressed opinions that I myself have been trying to verbalize over the past year. Specifically, why exactly did I get so angry and motivated to do a project like this? Why did I feel so enraged when Todd Akin spoke his misinformed information about our bodies? Their artwork aesthetically explained my anger at the discourses around women's bodies and their reproductive capabilities.

As for the participants, they went through a similar transformative experience—explicitly indicated in their artwork and in evaluation surveys—because the art prompts provided an opportunity to introspect about their opinions on their own reproductive bodies. In the artwork, particularly in the second workshop, these women visually articulated their beliefs that their bodies are not something that an ignorant bureaucrat should legislate. "[I]here is a toll booth at the entrance, so, if you can't pay the toll, you're prohibited from entering" is a representative reflection on the reproductive landscapes produced. Their landscapes expressed their opinions that they alone should have ownership over their bodies. In addition, their life goal trees made similar personal visual arguments for the necessity of reproductive health care, which especially protects their reproductive freedoms. Seeing their arrival at this conclusion through their artwork was liberating, because it indicated that they took the message from the workshops to heart. These results make me optimistic that we can turn around the indifference towards women's reproductive health care

through similar educational workshops. I had stated before that my intention is to make this a sustainable and portable project that other individuals can implement in other communities to convey the importance of reproductive health care.

The leadership I initiated in this project had a cooperative nature in addition to a transformative nature. My hope was that learning some aspects of the issues surrounding women's reproductive health in my workshops would inspire young women to conduct their own activism. Though I have not done a formal post-workshop evaluation to assess the long-term effects of my program, initial evaluation surveys indicate that the participants learned about many interesting issues surrounding women's reproductive health care on both a national and global scale. Before any activism can begin, one must think critically about an issue. In participating in these workshops and creating art together, these women began critically thinking about what legislating women's bodies mean and what might be some of its dark implications. The next step is to formulate a workshop kit—much like Candy Chang did with her “Before I Die” boards—to share these visual experimentation workshops with other communities. Allowing others to implement this project in their own environments will especially strengthen the collaborative nature of this endeavor.

The project successfully captures the voices of women and their bodies in a time when women's voices are not necessarily acknowledged, as the experience of Sandra Fluke suggests. Participants' stories were told using an art and storytelling approach I adopted from *Women on Waves*, whose artists documented women's abortion and other healthcare-related stories during their many European naval campaigns.<sup>21</sup> Telling women's stories is a powerful way for laypersons who are disinterested towards these issues to appreciate the profound effects of women's reproductive health care laws upon real people. Putting a story behind a law is a persuasive method to spread activism. The artwork produced in these workshops represents young women's intimate and honest opinions. Laws prohibiting or limiting any conversation on female sexuality because of the mentality correlating female sexuality with morality may have affected the participants. One must recall that the reason that Sandra Fluke was initially denied from testifying for birth control coverage was that she was deemed unqualified for the job. There is a serious dearth of women's experiences in these debates to the point that their perspectives can be viewed as irrelevant. I like to think that this project is my way of countering this trend.

The project overall, taught me that activism comes in many flavors and often the most successful are the most creative ones. On a personal level, this project has refocused my career interests on addressing health inequalities, especially based on gender. It takes patience, times, perseverance, and open-mindedness to come up with a successful method of activism, especially if it involves art. However, because art expresses personal stories along with other powerful messages, it can be used as powerful tool to change attitudes. Art can literally change the world.

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<sup>21</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Twelve Miles: Boundaries Of The New Art/Activism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33, no. 2 (2008): 315.

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