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## U.S. anti-abortion ideology on the move: Mobile crisis pregnancy centers as unruly, unmappable, and ungovernable

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### Abstract

Crisis pregnancy centers—anti-abortion non-profits that masquerade as abortion clinics—are increasingly using mobile units to expand their geographical and political reach. In this article, the first to consider mobile crisis pregnancy centers, we examine the methodological, epistemological, and political challenges that mobile units raise for scholars and activists alike. The mobile nature of on-the-go crisis pregnancy centers makes them difficult to both map and regulate. Taking these challenges as a starting point, we reflect on what we learned from our failure to map mobile crisis pregnancy centers. We first outline how mobile crisis pregnancy centers—the epitome of the wild, ungovernable, and unruly—call into question the glorification of these concepts in feminist and queer studies. We also suggest that mobile crisis pregnancy centers trouble the possibility of thinking feminist and political geography separately, as well as the positive affects associated with mobility in discussions of reproductive mobilities. We close with a qualitative analysis of mobile crisis pregnancy centers' online presence, examining the particular concerns that their mobility raises in terms of race, class, and place.

### Section snippets

#### Crisis pregnancy centers, regulation, and the wild

The geographic prevalence of crisis pregnancy centers in the U.S. means that most Americans have encountered these centers or their advertisements, particularly those for free pregnancy tests. It is also likely that many do not register that these advertisements are for religiously motivated, fake clinics established by anti-abortion activists, with essentially no governmental or medical oversight. That is intentional. Deception is central to their strategy. Critics have illustrated the many...

#### Crisis pregnancy centers on the move: a BRIEF overview

Mobile crisis pregnancy centers are developed and distributed in the U.S. by two primary anti-abortion Evangelical organizations, Save the Storks' "Stork Bus" division and Image Clear Ultrasound's "Fleet for Little Feet," although independent mobile units disconnected from these franchises are also in operation. ICU was founded in 2003 and, today, has 42 mobile units in 22 states. Save the Storks, founded in 2012, has 48 mobile units and five in production across 25 states. In addition, a...

#### Deception: obscuring religious foundations, posing as medical clinics, distributing misinformation

Scholars have illustrated crisis pregnancy centers' deceptive practices, noting that they: obscure their religious foundations (Borrero et al., 2018); appear as if they are medical clinics when they are not (Chen, 2013, Thomsen, 2020); and distribute inaccurate information, particularly regarding abortion (Bryant et al., 2014). In what follows, we demonstrate that mobile crisis pregnancy centers use each of these tactics, as well.

Brick-and-mortar crisis pregnancy centers are typically supported ...

## The effects: place, race, class

While the anti-abortion movement's utilization of mobile crisis pregnancy centers is a relatively new development, it reflects their longer history of using location strategically. Reproductive justice activists have long bemoaned crisis pregnancy centers' chasing of abortion clinics, noting that the intentional opening of crisis pregnancy centers near abortion clinics as a way to confuse, and thus intercept, those seeking abortions constitutes deception. The documentary *12th and Delaware*, for...

## Moving forward

In the three years since John Oliver's exposé went viral and the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision supporting crisis pregnancy centers, concerns regarding abortion access have become even more elevated, due, in part, to the appointment of another anti-abortion Justice to the Supreme Court and also the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the pressures of the pandemic, coupled with changing laws and reproductive technologies, have created new opportunities for abortion justice....

## Declaration of competing interest

There are no conflicts of interest...

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