

**Writing about Abortion in Juniper Spring: How and Why Producers Crafted a Fictional
Story around a Pressing Social Issue**

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Introduction

Abortion is an intensely private healthcare issue that has long been on the mainstage of American politics. The United Nations considers access to abortion a human right (Human Rights Watch, 2022), yet access to safe, legal abortion has been and continues to be in jeopardy in many U.S. states and many countries around the world. *Roe v. Wade* was a landmark case passed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 that determined abortion to be a constitutional right and that the decision to terminate a pregnancy belongs to the individual, not to the government (Center for Reproductive Rights, n.d., *Roe v. Wade*) Since the passing of *Roe v. Wade*, efforts have continuously been made to undermine the ruling. The Hyde Amendment, passed in 1976, blocked federal funding for abortion (Salganicoff & Sobel, 2021). A number of states successfully passed abortion bans after as few as six weeks of gestation, and even more implemented obstacles such as long waiting periods, mandatory counseling, and third party authorization requirements. In June of 2022, the decision of the supreme court case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* overturned the *Roe v. Wade* decision, ending the constitutional right to abortion and leaving abortion laws up to individual states. Today, there are twelve states where abortion is banned and a criminal offense and only twenty-one states where the right to abortion is protected. Currently, efforts are being made to restore the right to abortion access, and the future of abortion policy is uncertain.

Our short film, *Juniper Spring*, takes place in a fictional society where abortion is completely illegal and even seeking one carries dire consequences. Through our script, we built an extremist society in which there is no regard for the bodily autonomy of those who can become pregnant. Our intention was to create an image of a society that could result if the current trajectory of abortion restrictions, specifically in the United States, were to continue. The

script is a direct response to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, and the film illustrates both the grim reality of a society that illegalizes and severely punishes abortion and the continued fight for autonomy and liberation even in the most extreme circumstances, and the hope that perseveres.

Analysis

Building the Script

Our project began with a script called *Women on Waves*. It was a fictional story involving a real organization with the same name that provides abortions and other reproductive health services to women in countries where abortion is restricted by performing them on international waters. The protagonist, 24-year-old Amara, lives in the Dominican Republic, where abortion is illegal. She unexpectedly becomes pregnant and is desperate to have an abortion, so she seeks the help of Women on Waves. She is discouraged by her best friend, Camila, who worries for her safety and reputation. Amara works for a news organization, and in order to protect herself she tells her boss that she is going undercover to report on Women on Waves from the inside. On the boat, Amara meets several other women, all seeking abortions for their own reasons. Rebecca Gomperts, the real-life founder of Women on Waves, leads the voyage and provides the women with Misoprostol, which safely ends their pregnancies.

Our revision of the script turned into almost a complete overhaul. The original story took place in the modern day and explored the consequences of current abortion restrictions and the efforts people with unwanted pregnancies may go to to bypass them. However, the moment in time that we were developing this project called for something more. *Roe v. Wade* had been overturned just two months earlier, and abortion rights in the United States were opened up to intense restrictions and outright bans. Abortion restrictions existed even before the overturn, already with dangerous consequences. A study in Texas revealed that the state's abortion laws

“altered medical care, resulting in delays for 28 pregnant patients who experienced increased maternal morbidity” (Kaplan, pg. 5, 2020). Not only is the lack of abortion access an infringement on bodily autonomy, it even led to increased chances of death when necessary medical treatment was limited. Our script became a response to the overturning of Roe, and a warning about the future of abortion rights and the consequences of restriction.

We kept two of the characters— Amara and Camila. However, the setting of the story changed completely. Amara now lived in a society where abortion, in every stage, every form, and for every reason, was illegal. Not only that, but undercover agents called the Watchers stalked people suspected of seeking abortions, and those caught end up facing dire consequences. We changed Women on Waves to the Juniper Collective, a fictional, underground organization run by agents called Junipers. We kept the fact that the people seeking abortions are brought out to international waters, but we made the organization much more secretive and under a much bigger threat from the powers governing *Juniper Spring*’s society. The Juniper that helps Amara is called Cypress, who is loosely based on Rebecca’s character in *Women on Waves*. The dangers present in the society we created in *Juniper Spring* in response to the real-life removal of abortion protections and the threat of increasing restrictions are communicated through Cypress’ actions and dialogue. Cypress kills the Watcher who follows Amara in her most morally questionable moment in the film. On the surface, it may seem that Cypress and the Juniper Collective are no better than the oppressive society, if she is protecting one woman’s ability to end a potential life by killing someone who is already alive. However, the simple fact that he is attempting to keep Amara from getting an abortion is not the reason that Cypress kills the Watcher. She kills him because if he captures them, they will face unimaginable consequences and their lives may hang in the balance. In her office, Cypress shows Amara the files of people

the Collective has helped in the past. Amara notices a pile with an “X” on it, and Cypress despondently tells her that they are the ones that the Watchers got to, implying that they are now facing dire consequences or are even dead.

The film is intentionally set in the future. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, abortion rights in the U.S. had taken a massive leap backward, and we felt that our script could address the possible future of abortion policy should it follow the restrictive trajectory it is presently on. Through the presence of the Watchers, total bans on abortion, and severe punishments for abortion seekers, we created an oppressive landscape that shows the grave consequences that could result from continuing to intensify abortion restrictions and consequences after the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. However, *Juniper Spring* is less of a prediction as it is a warning. There is not currently a total ban on all abortion across the United States and hope remains that abortion rights could be restored, or at least that the places that uphold the rights and access to abortion will continue to do so. However, if the issue of abortion access continues its current trajectory, and abortion bans continue to become stricter and more widespread, a landscape similar to that in *Juniper Spring* may result.

Real-Life Results of Abortion Bans Represented in the Film

The continuation of abortion despite every possible restriction is an important aspect of the *Juniper Spring* landscape. As historically proven, restricting access to abortion does not stop people from finding ways to have them. Even though Amara was risking her life by seeking an abortion, she sought and received one anyway, along with the other people who had gone to the *Juniper Collective* in the past and those who would continue to do so. According to the article “Effects and Proposed Countermeasures of Abortion Bans and Restrictions on People with Uteruses and Society”, “pregnant individuals who feel trapped in their pregnancy could try

potentially dangerous alternatives to end their pregnancy” (Disi et al., 2022, pg. 3). Part of this article examines the findings of the Turnaway Study, a research project on women who sought and were denied abortions. The study found that “roughly 21% of women in the United States will participate in unsafe abortions” (Disi et al., 2022, pg. 3). Not every illegal abortion is unsafe, but unsafe abortions are the result of the lack of access to safe, legal abortions. Seeking an illegal abortion poses a risk to the pregnant person’s life, but many who have unwanted pregnancies are too desperate for this risk to keep them from pursuing one. Though Amara is able to get a safe abortion, she still risks her life doing so. By portraying this risk and its ineffectiveness in stopping Amara, we are showing that if bans on abortion are to continue and expand, this will not stop abortions from happening.

The Use of Extremism

One of the most striking ways that *Juniper Spring* depicts the results of a backwards trajectory of rights is through the rhetoric used by the Watcher. During the scene in which he confronts Amara, he tells her, “If a man gives you a child, it is your duty to nurture that life. That is your purpose on this planet.” His view, which is implied to be the views of all the Watchers and the governing bodies of this society, involves the dehumanization of women in that they do not have a purpose outside of reproduction. These views would likely be considered extreme even in places with strong abortion restrictions. In many cases, the arguments against abortion focus on the preservation of a potential life. In the U.S., for example, several states have or have tried to introduce “Heartbeat Bills” to restrict how late into pregnancy an abortion can occur. As Evans & Narasimhan (2020) explain, this legislation frames the “heartbeat” of a fetus as “an indicator of life and therefore personhood” (Evans & Narasimhan, 2020, p. 215). They note that this idea is based on an inaccurate claim that fetal heartbeat is a strong indicator of a viable

pregnancy. The arguments explored in the article, including that fetuses are “living” beings and therefore “a class of persons entitled to protection under the law”³ and that there should be an expansion of fetal rights, are completely focused on the fetus and do not involve any regard for the pregnant person (Evans & Narasimhan, 2020, p. 219). This does inherently put the rights of the fetus above the rights of the pregnant person, especially in cases where a pregnancy is dangerous or even life-threatening for that person. However, plainly stating that reproducing is that person’s only purpose generally is not rhetoric that is used or accepted, even by conservatives. Our decision to give the Watcher such extreme views was purposeful. Not only did we want to raise the stakes for Amara, we also needed to properly communicate how restricted abortion is in *Juniper Spring*’s society and why. The Watcher plainly stated what is at the core of anti-abortion arguments that real legislation is based on: the idea that the rights of women are inferior to those of a fetus, and that preserving a potential life is more important than caring for the life and wellbeing of the pregnant person.

Conclusion

Juniper Spring is a response to growing abortion restrictions specifically in the United States following the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. When tasked with producing a script that told a story about the impact of abortion restrictions, we made the decision to heighten the stakes and take these restrictions to an extreme in order to build a society we felt could reflect a possible reality if abortion restrictions continue to expand. We created the character of the Watcher to encapsulate this society’s extreme views which threaten the characters and all of the people in this society. We had our protagonist, Amara, risk her life to pursue an abortion to show that this practice has historically continued and will continue no matter the circumstances. We created Cypress to represent the continuation of the fight for bodily autonomy. At the end of the film,

Amara and Cypress gaze out into the sunrise, following Amara's safe and successful abortion and her decision to join the Juniper Collective in order to help other pregnant people who found themselves in the same position that she did to show the hope that lies ahead.

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