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**Queer Childbirth in America: Reimagining Judy Chicago's Birth Project through
Arts-Based Research**

In 1981, feminist artist Judy Chicago asked: how do women feel about all aspects of birth? In the resulting Birth Project (1980-85), Chicago conducted a survey and collaborated with needleworkers to create a series of artworks that sought to represent a universal experience of childbirth. In the years since, gender and queer theorists have deeply challenged the biological essentialism underpinning conceptions of birth and family formation. Moreover, through a combination of social and technological change, increasing numbers of LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. are having children. This prompts a revision of Chicago's important question: how do queer people feel about all aspects of birth? To answer this question, we use Chicago's methods as a model to explore the childbirth experiences of LGBTQ+ people in America. Our project interrogates the underlying theoretical framework and methodological approach of the original Birth Project, providing not only an intersectional feminist and queer critique of its archives, but also charting a radical feminist model for collaborative arts-based research. For this presentation, we compare and contrast responses to three critical questions from Chicago's original Birth Project survey to our own data collection with contemporary queer families to explore changing the decision-making structures and justifications for why people decide to have children. In the original data that informed the Birth Project, participants explicitly tied their decisions to have children to essentialist beliefs about motherhood. In contrast, we find that queer people recount a series of intentional decisions about family building that are decoupled from cultural tropes about biology and reproduction. Through this comparative analysis, we argue that despite the deep uncertainty and inequalities in the process of queer family formation, queer people articulate a retrospective agency in their choices to have children that transforms their understanding of their role as a parent beyond cultural tropes of motherhood. In a post-Roe era, this work sheds light on LGBTQ+ experiences, draws new attention to the relationship between feminist art and culture, and proposes intersectional methods for collaborative, arts-based research practice.

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