



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

*Your
Voice for Choice*

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

POB 2663, Station Main, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3W3 • info@arcc-cdac.ca • www.arcc-cdac.ca

Position Paper #72

Analyzing the Genocide Awareness Project

And use of Graphic Imagery by Anti-choice Groups

Background

The Genocide Awareness Project (“GAP”) is a movable anti-choice display that has been temporarily installed on multiple university campuses in North America since 1997. The display is produced and managed by the U.S.-based Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR). It uses graphic images of aborted fetuses that are designed to generate shock and revulsion in order to convince women and transgender people from having abortions.

GAP displays began in Canada in 1999 with a showing of large graphic posters at UBC under the auspices of the campus group Lifeline. The group was headed by Stephanie Gray who went on to found the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR) in 2001.¹ Since that time, GAP displays have appeared on at least a dozen campuses across Canada, often on a regular basis.

A typical GAP display in the U.S. consists of 6' x 14' billboards set up in a large circle. Each billboard is a panel of two or three pictures. For example, one billboard reads: “The changing face of choice” and the first panel shows the bodies of Holocaust victims and the Nazi swastika with the caption “Religious Choice.” The second panel shows a lynched black man with the caption “Racial Choice,” and the third panel shows an aborted fetus with the caption “Reproductive Choice”. One billboard directly compares Planned Parenthood to Nazis. The fetus in these photos is always depicted as autonomous, with the pregnant woman erased.

In Canada, GAP displays have generally used smaller signs. Both CBR and CCBR have also shown GAP displays off campus in the public domain.¹

The GAP's True Agenda

GAP purports to be an educational forum, but the display is not meant to foster debate; rather, it's designed to shock, horrify, and brainwash through a twisted psychological game. GAP exploits the real oppression of many different peoples for its own agenda, which is a paternalistic desire to restrict women's access to abortion. Comparing other peoples' suffering to the life-saving

blissing of legal abortion is an insult to the real victims of genocide, including at least 22,000 women who die every year from unsafe abortion. It's also an insult to women, since equating abortion with genocide puts women on the same moral level as Nazis, the KKK, and other groups that commit atrocities and genocide.

The CBR/CCBR's ultimate objective with GAP is to exploit public ambivalence about abortion by focusing on the fetus, thereby pitting fetuses against women so that public opinion will be shifted against women and their rights. The CCBR/CBR is essentially arguing for the revocation of women's rights to prevent "genocide" against the "unborn."

Carol Williams states in her paper on the GAP being "propaganda for fetal rights":²

"Those who take up the adversarial torch to limit women's reproductive autonomy reinforce and distribute socially conservative attitudes about women's rights. By franchising the GAP, local student and community 'pro-life' clubs harness themselves to the CCBR/CBR's political and moral provocations to stir revenge and to insensitively tarnish women's behaviour as too 'liberal,' thoughtlessly capricious, or ethically irresponsible. CBR/CCBR's GAP campaign, organized in concert with student and community associates, exhibit ignorance of important structural factors of class, circumstance, age, ability, or culture that bring women to make life-changing decisions about reproductive health."

Or as put more bluntly by Joyce Arthur of ARCC, when she was with BC's Pro-Choice Action Network:³

"Don't let these anti-abortion demonstrators fool you with their spin on ethics and genocide. To them, women's suffering is simply invisible, their lives expendable, and their rights inconsequential."

Harms of Showing Graphic Images in Public

CBR/CCBR's GAP campaigns are designed to shock with their gruesome and inaccurate imagery. But no-one deserves to have these images thrust upon them for any purpose.

Showing graphics photos of alleged aborted fetuses in public creates significant harms to communities:⁴

- In every city in which they appear, the graphics cause a community disturbance or nuisance. Police and city field numerous complaints from the public, children are distraught, and the issue often creates a controversy in the press.
- The privacy rights of parents to instruct and raise their children as they see fit, and in a safe manner, are being co-opted by the tactics of anti-abortion groups without permission or warning.
- The graphics create an unacceptable invasion of privacy into peoples' lives because it is difficult or impossible to avoid the pictures. This is especially the case when postcards are

delivered to homes without permission from residents. Citizens have a common-law right to peaceful enjoyment of their homes.

- When the imagery is shown on city streets, hapless pedestrians and drivers may pass by without warning, or drivers may be caught in traffic and cannot escape for several minutes. Free speech rights do not extend to forcing oneself on a captive audience, which must have the equal freedom to avoid the message without undue inconvenience or restriction of movement.

Recent Instances of GAP and New Strategies

The GAP is still being used as a method to spread misinformation and hatred towards women. In Canada in 2011, members of the CCBR were arrested at the Calgary airport for trespassing to display their signs. They were acquitted in 2013 based on freedom of expression, but the airport secured a court injunction against the protests in 2014. The airport argued that they are a private entity not subject to the Charter, and even if they are, the protesters were harassing people, obstructing traffic, creating safety risks, and preventing the airport from fulfilling its mandate.⁵

Over the years, the CCBR has largely switched to other tactics. These include displays of graphic signage on city streets or venues like the Calgary Stampede, hanging graphic banners from highway overpasses, driving big-box trucks with billboard-size graphic photos on the side, and delivering graphic flyers to residences.⁴ These tactics generally include only pictures of aborted fetuses, not genocide victims. The CCBR has also placed (less graphic) bus ads in Peterborough Ontario in 2017 and attempted to do so in several other cities but were either refused or were stopped by the courts.⁶

Another group called “Show the Truth” has engaged in similar tactics, mostly displaying graphic signage in Ontario towns and cities,⁷ but also some delivery of flyers to homes.

In 2013, the CCBR hand-delivered 250,000 graphic postcards to every constituent in several ridings where the Member of Parliament had recently voted against an anti-abortion motion.⁸ The postcards featured a picture of the MP next to an aborted fetus. In late 2015, CCBR did a similar flyer campaign targeting then-Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau. Despite this attack, Trudeau stated: “I am perfectly comfortable with Canadians knowing that the Liberal Party is unequivocal in its defense of women’s rights. We are the party of the Charter. We are the party that stands up for people’s rights”.⁹

In the summer of 2017 in Toronto, CCBR took to the streets to accost people with giant gory placards and place flyers in residential mailboxes.¹⁰ They did a similar flyer campaign in Surrey BC, Saskatoon, and Calgary.

Responses to the CCBR

CCBR is now pushing the limits to what the public will take. In response to CCBR’s actions in Toronto in 2017, several city councillors and a Toronto area MPP began pushing for a provincial injunction to stop CCBR from showing such graphic images. They are also reviewing the possibility of a city bylaw to restrict the images.¹¹

In the U.S. in May 2016, CBR were demonstrating at the University of North Carolina. But as one student describes in his blog,¹² almost immediately after the CBR setup, numerous responses sprang up, including pro-choice events, Facebook groups, maps to avoid GAP displays, and a twitter account, #KeepUNCSafe, to counteract CBR's misinformation. Similarly, in October 2017 CBR accosted Evergreen State College with their displays, but were met with faculty and staff volunteers who alerted students to the display, provided information on counter-protest guidelines, and informed students of routes around campus that would allow them to avoid having to look at the graphic images. Students protested the displays with pro-choice signs and set up donations to Planned Parenthood.¹³

Similar kinds of pro-choice responses have occurred in Canada on many occasions, including in Toronto in 2017.^{Error! Bookmark not defined., 14}

The images are considered to be advocacy "advertising" by Ad Standards¹⁵ and complaints can be submitted because graphic images of aborted fetuses shown in public have already been found to violate the *Canadian Code of Advertising Standards* on the basis of offending public standards of decency.¹⁶

As CBR/CCBR wish to garner a reaction with their roadside gore, actively ignoring the GAP and not engaging with their people is the best initial approach. Active peaceful protests can also show the groups that GAP is not acceptable.¹⁷

If you or your family has been victimized by being forced to view graphic imagery of aborted fetuses, please complain to your city council and to police, describing what happened and the resulting harms, and email a copy of your complaints to ARCC (info@arcc-cdac.ca). Even if the city or police don't respond or refuse to act, more complaints mean more pressure, and it builds a case for future regulation.

-
- ¹ Pro-choice Action Network. *Exposing the Genocide Awareness Project*. 2000. <http://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org/articles/gap.shtml>
 - ² Williams, Carol. *Campus Campaigns against Reproductive Autonomy: The Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform Campus Genocide Awareness Project as Propaganda for Fetal Rights*. 2015? <http://activehistory.ca/papers/paper-18/>
 - ³ Arthur, Joyce. It's Not Abortion That's Offensive: It's So-called "Pro-life" People. *The Ubyyssey*. Sept 17, 1999. <http://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org/articles/gap.shtml#ubyssey>
 - ⁴ Arthur, Joyce. *Take action against aborted fetus images in public!* Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. July 25, 2017. <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/take-action-against-aborted-fetus-images.pdf>
 - ⁵ Burton, Sarah. The Debate over the Charter's Reach Continues: A Question Regarding Free Expression at Airports. *ABlawg.ca*. October 17, 2014. <https://ablawg.ca/2014/10/17/october-17-2014-the-debate-over-the-charters-reach-continues-a-question-regarding-free-expression-at-airports/>
 - ⁶ Arthur, Joyce. *Failures by City of Peterborough Led to Anti-Choice Ads on Buses*. Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. March 27, 2017. <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/Failures-by-City-Peterborough-led-to-anti-choice-ads.pdf>
 - ⁷ Lea, David. Pro-life group shows graphic anti-abortion imagery at Oakville intersection. *Oakville Beaver*. Aug 12, 2015. <https://www.insidehalton.com/news-story/5794891-pro-life-group-shows-graphic-anti-abortion-imagery-at-oakville-intersection/>
 - ⁸ Arthur, Joyce. Why fetus porn doesn't help the anti-choice cause. *Rabble.ca*. July 5, 2013. <http://rabble.ca/columnists/2013/07/why-fetus-porn-doesnt-help-anti-choice-cause>
 - ⁹ Zilio, Michelle. Trudeau defends abortion position after graphic flyers target Liberal leader. *CTV News.ca*. May 13, 2015. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/trudeau-defends-abortion-position-after-graphic-flyers-target-liberal-leader-1.2371906>
 - ¹⁰ Lavoie, Joanna. Graphic anti-abortion flyers upset east Toronto residents. *East York Mirror*. Aug 8, 2017. <https://www.toronto.com/community-story/7489841-graphic-anti-abortion-flyers-upset-east-toronto-residents/>
 - ¹¹ Nanowski, Natalie. Toronto politicians push for ban on graphic anti-abortion signs. *CBC News*. Aug 25, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/abortion-prochoice-prolife-protest-toronto-1.4261747>
 - ¹² Sowders, Tom. Abortion in America: The 'Genocide Awareness Project'. *Campus Y*. May 10, 2016. <https://campusy.unc.edu/abortion-in-america-the-genocide-awareness-project/>
 - ¹³ Manchester, Chloe Marina. "The Genocide Awareness Project" Comes to Evergreen. *Cooper Point Journal*. Oct 30, 2017. <http://www.cooperpointjournal.com/2017/10/30/the-genocide-awareness-project-comes-to-evergreen/>
 - ¹⁴ Amin, Faiza. Counter-protesters target controversial anti-abortion demonstrators at Ryerson. *Toronto City News.ca*. Jul 27, 2017. <http://toronto.citynews.ca/2017/07/27/counter-protesters-target-controversial-anti-abortion-demonstrators-at-ryerson/>
 - ¹⁵ Ad Standards. <http://www.adstandards.com/en/>
 - ¹⁶ Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. *Submitting Complaints Against Anti-Choice Ads*. 2018. <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/submitting-ad-complaints.html>
 - ¹⁷ Cawthorne, Jane, and Joyce Arthur. *Tips for Responding to the Abortion Crapavan*. Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. June 9, 2012. <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/crapavan-protests.html>