

IN THE STREETS MAY 16, 2022 ISSUE

DEVASTATED BY THE ABORTION NEWS? TRY PRIMAL SCREAMING

Hours after news broke of the draft decision that would overturn Roe v. Wade, New Yorkers gathered to protest, commiserate, and shout at placards of the faces of the six conservative Supreme Court Justices.



By Michael Schulman

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Last Tuesday afternoon, less than twenty-four hours after a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion indicated that the fight to protect Roe v. Wade would soon suffer an epochal defeat, New Yorkers began showing up at Foley Square, in lower Manhattan. “CHANNEL YOUR RAGE INTO ACTION,” an announcement shared on social media read. “WEAR GREEN.” The threat to Roe had been a slow build, but the suddenness of the leak meant that the protest was marked by improvisation. People wore green bandannas, hoodies—whatever was in their closets—and carried signs bearing Sharpie’d slogans, ranging from the succinct (“RAGE”) to the specific (“I SURVIVED AN ILLEGAL ABORTION in Birmingham Ala. in 1969 #NeverAgain”). Helicopters buzzed overhead.



“It’s scary that something we relied on for fifty years can be taken away,” a law student named Savannah, who held a drawing of a coat hanger, said. Although demonstrators knew that the fall of Roe was unlikely to impinge on abortion rights in New York State, that was little comfort.

“I’ll probably be fine, but this type of stuff always hurts people who don’t have access to health care,” a woman named Morgan said, holding a sign made from a box her mother had sent her containing natural deodorants.

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But the reality of reproductive rights wasn’t just hypothetical; it was personal and cross-generational. In a group of four thirtysomething women, one had had an abortion and another had accompanied a friend to a clinic. Daniele, in a green turtleneck, had texted friends who play in a band with her (“twee-inflected feminist K Records-y pop”), hoping, since the Supreme Court’s opinion was still a draft, that “if we really scare the shit out of them they’ll change their minds.” Her bandmate Tasha, who wore a green beret borrowed from Daniele and works at an art museum, had invited a co-worker and left work early: “Our boss was very supportive. She said, ‘Bring everyone.’ ”

Nearby, a man named Jonathan Walker wore a pink pussyhat, from the 2017 Women’s March. “My wife couldn’t be here. I’m wearing her hat,” he said. Both are actors; his wife was doing a Zoom reading of a Charles Busch play. Walker’s grandmother volunteered for the birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger a hundred years ago, and when he was a teen-ager, in the seventies, his mother had an abortion. “She was fifty-three years old. It was unviable,” he said. “I hope this doesn’t sound weird, but I thought it was really cool: Wow, my mom is having an abortion!” That morning, he had called his mother, who is ninety-seven. “She was just completely undone when she heard the news about the leaked draft. She said, ‘You go to that rally for me.’ ”

Two women in their sixties, Sue and Lori, wore matching green sweaters and fanny packs. Sue, a retired pediatrician, held up a sign shaped like a shield. “My kids were really into cosplay, so this is really Link, from ‘The Legend of Zelda,’ underneath,” she said. She had an abortion in her twenties, when she was a “nerdy medical student” in Pittsburgh. “I was grateful that I was seen by clinicians who didn’t judge me, didn’t slut-shame me. And that I was able to get this taken care of and kept on my road and followed my dream.” After med school, she worked for the C.D.C. and now has

three children. She said, “I can’t believe that we have to do this—”

“—again,” the friends said in unison.

A group called Abortion Access Front had set up a “Primal Scream Station,” with placards of the six conservative Justices’ faces. An employee named Molly was dressed in a sequined vulva costume. “This is my summer vulva outfit,” she said. “Unfortunately, we have to do so much protesting that I have a winter vulva outfit as well.” She yelled, “Step right up! Be a primal screamer! Flip ‘em off!” Some women counted down from three and screamed long and loud. Wobbling, Molly said, “That made me want to have a cigarette—Jesus Christ!”

Sue, the retired pediatrician, partook. As she and Lori left the square, she said, “We exercised our right to scream.” ♦

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